



A Media Literacy Manual
Bringing Hip Hop into the Classroom

Produced By:
Youth Action Network



2005

Everyone knows it, or has at least heard about it. We – young people, artists and audiences, Society In General – have got problems...

(violence) (misogyny) (sex and AIDS) (exploitation) (disrespect) (racism) (poverty)

... And some of us are putting the blame on Hip Hop. Others rush to defend it, while others are just sick of hearing about the whole thing.

("Where *is* the love?") ("Culture of violence") ("Rampant materialism: get rich or die trying") ("P.I.M.P.: Who's bagging whom?") ("Corporate America hijack Hip Hop.") ("Bitches ain't shit but hoes and tricks.") ("Dangerous values.") ("Black females valued by no one.") ("That nigga ain't talkin' 'bout me.") ("Rapper 50 Cent's Gay Problem") ("Hip Hop hates women.") ("Women love sexist Hip Hop.") ("Hip Hop sells out.") ("Hip Hop is what sells.") ("Harping on this stuff is f*cking boring.")

But whatever the nature of the problem is, no matter how people disagree about the causes, the effects, and the blame, two things are clear and impossible to ignore.

One: Hip Hop is here, it's hot, and it's churning up issues too big to ignore. Issues we all have a stake in. Issues that are affecting our relations to each other and our communities.

Two: Something needs to be done.

This project is about how to do it.

It's about addressing the big issues, asking hard questions and looking hard for answers.

It's about looking at the hundreds of thousands of messages being fed to us everyday –

(images) (beats) (slogans) (lyrics) (ads) (articles)

– and feeding the media some messages of our own. It's about moving from passive audience to active participant and performer – much like the first Hip Hop artists scratching out beats and waking up crowds, expressing themselves and unleashing a global phenomenon. It's about making connections between the past and the present, between corporations and the 'hood, and between relationships and bling.

That's what this project is about. It tells a story – the story of how Hip Hop grew from South Bronx park jams inspired by Jamaican sound clashes to a force so unstoppable even the United Nations sat up, took notice, and declared it an "Official World Culture" in 2001. It puts tools in your hands that will help you write this best-selling story's next chapter – and it's about time. As one frustrated Hip Hop fan commented online: "where is the discourse on gender, patriarchy, sexism, etc? Step up dammit!"

So step up. Speak out. **Keep it real.**

Acknowledgements

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The Youth Action Network (YAN) is a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering youth to take action on social justice and environmental issues. As a fully independent, youth-run organization, YAN is committed to ensuring that young people play an integral role in their communities.

YAN's Resource Action Centre (RAC) is a practical database for youth to learn how to take action, with guides on fundraising and starting projects. Information on environment, government, social justice, human rights, international affairs, and many other issues is also available. RAC can be accessed by phone, fax, email or mail.

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SECTION I: Introductory Material

1. Hip Hop in the Classroom

Keep It Real is a manual for teachers and students who want to bring issues of Hip Hop, commodification and gender into the classroom.

It is a program in media literacy that aims to involve students in their own education and in the world in which they are consumers, activists, and artists. It aims to address different aspects of the Hip Hop lifestyle, from clothes to values to music to spoken word to graffiti, from a variety of perspectives. It helps students link visible, everyday aspects of Hip Hop culture to bigger issues in history, health, human rights, language, and sociology. It connects ideas in music videos to current events in the news.

Its activities and suggestions are designed for student-teacher/facilitator partnerships and purposely open-ended to trigger discussion and debate. They can be adapted and integrated into a high school curriculum, training session or workshop.

2. How Students Weighed In

When students in focus groups across the city heard about this project, they responded with cautious enthusiasm.

Of course they liked Hip Hop. Sure, they were interested in the issues surrounding the Hip Hop lifestyle, from lyrics to images on MuchMusic and MTV to biographical details of artists' lives. Yes, they would like to see Hip Hop ideas and issues discussed in school... but **only if it was done right**.

There were certain things they did not, absolutely did not, want to see:

- A teacher 'giving a lesson' on Hip Hop.
Lectures, chalkboards and note taking were for math homework and French verbs. Hip Hop needed something more dynamic, rebellious, suited to controversy. Hip Hop turns people on. Traditional classroom techniques would turn students off.
- Step-by-step instructions.
Everyone had something to say about Hip Hop, or a particular area of interest. Students wanted to shape what they learned and discussed. "Let them have a say in what they're doing," advised a student. "Then they'll actually be interested and want to do it." No one wanted to be told what to do, especially with Hip Hop, which was seen as young people's home turf.
- Paper and pencil.
One student rolled her eyes talking about her media course in high school. "We spent weeks on old political cartoons," she complained. Other students added their thoughts: "Use more modern techniques. Something different." Students wanted to study Hip Hop in their language: visuals, music videos, lyrics, music.
- 'Preaching'

Students were sick of hearing how Hip Hop was ‘bad.’ One student pointed out how Hip Hop got a bad rap – “What about James Bond? Guns and girls. But no one complains” – while another protested: “there are so many artists out there who write about real things... you just don’t hear them (on the radio).” Students said perspective was important: could it be fair and balanced and still be critical?

But despite concerns, there was a general consensus that the issues – violence, misogyny, racism, poverty, ‘the system,’ ‘the message’ – were important and needed to be explored in a more in-depth way than offhand remarks in the hallway or hoots and snickers around a television set playing the latest fleshy music video.

All the young people in Keep It Real’s focus groups had their own opinions on Hip Hop. They agreed without exception that integrating Hip Hop discussions into school courses would be helpful, interesting, and very welcome. Some students even suggested that bringing Hip Hop into the classroom in a creative, unconventional way was the key to making ordinarily unresponsive students sit up and take notice (if not notes).

It was engaging. It was relevant. **It should be done.**

This manual is a guide to how it *could* be done.

It is a collection of articles, outlines for participatory activities, seeds for discussion and commentary, shaped by the input, suggestions and warnings of dozens of students, a handful of teachers, and many, many Hip Hop fans who made sure this project stayed on course, did its job right, and, most of all, *kept it real*. So here it is. Take it and run with it. Be daring and outspoken. The history of Hip Hop is full of people who challenged the way things were and changed it forever. This project is just another beat on this ever-changing, always rocking track.

3. *Keep It Real: Philosophy*

This manual is called ‘Keep it Real.’ It’s a phrase used ubiquitously in the Hip Hop world to bring itself back to its roots. It reminds an artist to **stay true** to himself or herself and the music, to **never forget where he or she is coming from**. It has also been used as a call for more **“message in the music.”** As Hip Hop commentator EricaAnn Gamblin pointed out,

Money and the power is how it's rapped about today. How about respect, responsibility and peace instead? ... Artists seem to have forgot about the music itself. They concentrate on image, money and bottom dollar lines. Coast Wars, mic-checkin', battle of the emcees are all things that create good press. But, in the end I want good music. ... If you can't feel the artist in his music, it's a waste of breath. ... Keep it about the music and most of all... Keep it real.

Similarly, this media project is about ‘telling it the way it is,’ challenging what is mutely accepted, asking probing questions and revealing the other side of the story. The material included in this manual and related discussion questions will allow students to articulate their opinions, explore the work of ‘underground’ artists, and re-examine their own attitudes to the lyrics, images and values paraded in front of them daily by mainstream Hip Hop.

At the heart of the Keep It Real project is **critical thinking and creative communication**. We live in an increasingly mediated world, full of images and bombarded with messages, most of which tell us to buy. Buy a certain product, buy a certain brand, buy into a certain kind of

lifestyle and all its associated values, aspirations and attitudes. More than ever, students need the skills to navigate the maze of received ideas and, even more importantly, reflect on, examine, and communicate ideas of their own.

Keep It Real draws on students' own experiential knowledge and allows them to express themselves in innovative and experimental ways with culture jamming techniques.

4. Outcomes of the Project

Keep It Real's overall goal is to teach students to stop 'catching' information and start pitching, **sharing their experiential knowledge** and ideas **in new and creative ways** that **educate and engage**.

Students will:

- Identify the issue, point, reasons and assumptions in an argument (of newspaper editorials, articles, fellow students)
- Gain an understanding of Hip Hop as a cultural phenomenon and the historic forces that shaped it as a gendered and racial vehicle for expression.
- Emerge media literate, developing tools that enable them to decode messages sent by the media, instead of being manipulated by them.
- Culture jam received messages, replacing manufactured images with authentic ideas and stories. Students will learn that all media messages are constructed, and in turn, construct messages that are their own. In this way, students will become active, not passive; citizens, not just consumers.)
- Share their knowledge and express themselves through various media, including film, music, spoken word, written pieces and interactive workshops.

5. Methodology

Keep It Real is intended as a creative, engaging and youth-driven Hip Hop and media project. In order for it to work this way, it requires a creative, engaging and youth-driven classroom method, leaving space for students to take initiative in their education and ownership over the issues being examined.

Instead of acting as a lecturer or instructor, the teacher could assume the role of facilitator and mentor, guiding but not dictating the direction of class discussions, assignments and activities, while students shape their classroom experience with their own questions, ideas, and detailed knowledge of Hip Hop.

Class interactions could unfold in the following ways:

- Teacher-led discussions followed by independent assignments, presentations:
The teacher introduces a topic in Hip Hop, such as offensive terms and whether or not they should be censored (and how). He or she runs a brief lesson with background materials and examples from music videos and articles. At the end of the class, he or she

assigns a paper to be written (for example, a draft 'smut policy' for MuchMusic, or a radio station), or a role-playing debate, with students acting as different artists, fans, parental groups, and studio executives.

- Series of teacher-mediated/facilitated discussions or debates
Each class focuses on a different aspect of Hip Hop, whether it's the relationship of the bling-bling mentality on poverty and crime, or the compliance of women in their degradation in Hip Hop lyrics, or the place of corporations in mainstream Hip Hop's ultra-consumerist messages. Students prepare for the discussion on the issue (the class decides in advance) with reports and articles to help them debate.
- In-class seminars led by students with assigned follow-up readings or papers
Students choose a Hip Hop issue that interests them and conduct independent research into its many facets. Each week, one class is devoted to a student-led seminar on the topic of their independent study; teachers mentor the students in their research and lesson plan. Following the seminar, the teacher gives the class an assignment that the student presenter has helped design.
- Student-led, teacher-mentored workshops for younger students (junior high, etc)
Following the idea that teaching is the best way to learn, students will work in groups to design workshops for younger peers. As with the in-class seminars, the teacher's primary role is as an advisor, with whom the students bounce ideas, decide the direction of research, and hone presentation skills. The class provides feedback and helps the student presenters design the workshop (in this way, they hear about each other's work and the issues being explored). The workshop participants, peer-evaluations and class feedback help gauge the groups' progress.

This manual's activities and discussions can most easily be integrated into courses on English, Art, Music, History: social studies or media courses. However, teachers and students can, with a little creativity, incorporate aspects of the Keep It Real program into economics, guidance, business, and law.

For instance, a business class could start with the part of section IV entitled "the Beats and the Bling." It would delve into the lucrative global goldmine that is the Hip Hop industry. The class could study marketing strategies and techniques such as segmentation, targeting and positioning, and apply Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to the popularity of the Hip Hop lifestyle (and all its trimmings) among certain segments of the population. Assignments and projects could include calculating the cost of the Hip Hop lifestyle (students could generate income statements and balance sheets for a year in the life of a favourite artist), coming up with a marketing plan to promote a local, non-mainstream or socially responsible new Hip Hop artist (thus combining business skills with culture jamming), calculating a Hip Hop artist's break-even cost for the label, or spoofing product placements in music videos.

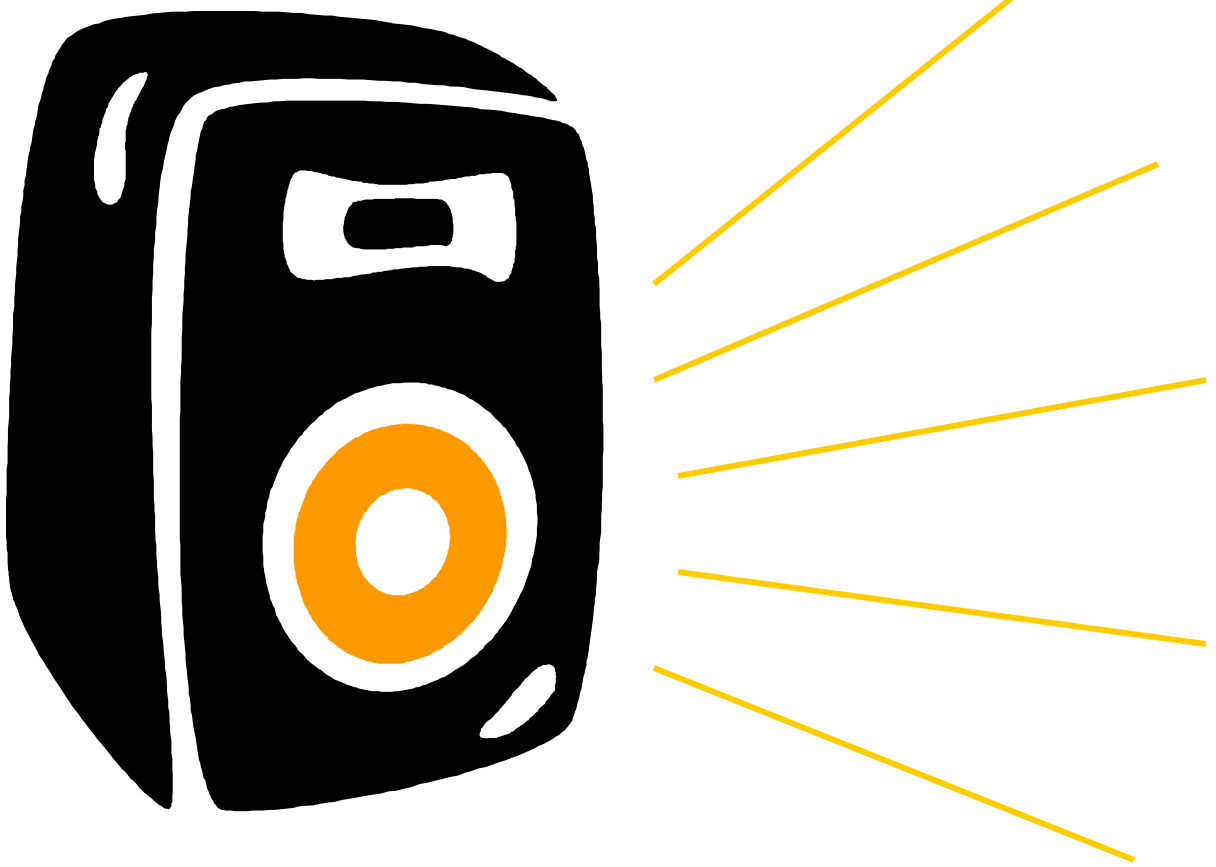
6. Facilitating a Workshop

Facilitation is guiding the group discussion in a meeting or workshop so that you accomplish what you set out to do and everyone feels safe and comfortable
You're not *telling* your group the answers, but you're *drawing out* the knowledge and ideas they already have.
You help them realize what they already know; you help them learn from themselves.

Guiding the group process:

- Anti-oppression: watch who is speaking and who is not, who is taking over the discussion and who feels comfortable and uncomfortable.
 - Don't let people monopolize the discussion!
 - Rephrase what people say to make sure everyone understands, sum up what is being discussed
 - Keep track of the discussion on a flipchart or blackboard
 - Ask participants to further explain their ideas. Examples are good.
 - Create an environment where people feel safe speaking out; make it clear that:
 - There are no right and wrong answers
 - Everyone's opinion has equal weight
 - All participants' feedback will be respected by the group
 - Thank people for comments and questions. Encourage people to take risks.
 - If no one says anything:
 - Re-phrase the question
 - Ask people if they understand the question, and if not, why not.
 - You can also say that you will go around the room and ask each person to raise one point in response to the issue or question, or ask people to put their thoughts in writing and drop them in a hat
 - If people are negative or there is uncomfortable tension strangling discussion:
 - Stay calm
 - Acknowledge the tension and ask people what they think about it and what should be done to diffuse the situation
- for more information on facilitation and effective communication see Fire It Up!, YAN's toolkit for youth action.

Information



background
information

Section II: Background Information

1. Getting the Party Started

For young people in Toronto, across Canada and around the world, Hip Hop is ubiquitous: on TV, in magazines, on their bodies, piping into their ears and coming out of their mouths. As a culture, Hip Hop packs a punch: the modern urban pulse beats under its fingers. It holds fashion trends, language, magazines and movies in its grip. Professor S. Craig Watkins of the University of Texas has a riddle that says it all:

I was born in the Bronx. I'm only about 20 years old. I've been known to cause controversy. I make billions of dollars a year, and I'm very, very popular. What am I? The answer is Hip Hop culture. Thirty years ago the phrase "Hip Hop" did not exist, and today it's an all-encompassing lifestyle that almost defies definition.

But define it is what this project does. After all, before we can delve deeper into Hip Hop culture and issues, we have to know what exactly we're delving into. Let's ask ourselves: what is Hip Hop and where does it feature in our lives?

2. The Opener

Here are different ways to tackle the introductory discussion:

- Group brainstorming on a flipchart:

Go around the room and list the words, issues, and images people associate with Hip Hop. Tack them up all around the classroom and sort them under headings, either as one large group or in smaller breakout teams. Of the big 'headline' issues, have the class pick one, two or three (depending on how much time is available in the curriculum) that they'd like to delve into and discuss in class

Another idea is to take the group brainstorm and make it into a mind-map. Start with 'Hip Hop' in the middle, and branch out from there, connecting related ideas.

Brainstorming can also be done individually, with participants writing down everything that comes to mind when they hear someone say "Hip Hop," or all the ways they've encountered or interacted with Hip Hop in their everyday lives in the last week or so. Tally up terms and ideas: which images and activities do people have in common?

- Show and Tell with Style

Everyone bring in a Hip Hop artist's picture or lyrics that they like or have heard. People listen and share, and then list associated issues and Hip Hop words (can make a collage).

- Fill in the Gaps

Ahead of time, give students a vocabulary exercise: a worksheet with Hip Hop terms, names, and dates. Have them research who and what they are, their context and relation to Hip Hop culture. Students can work in groups, with each group responsible for terms that come up in a part of the lesson.

<http://www.rapdict.org/> may be useful.

- Hip Hop Media Watch

Catch and bring in clippings of Hip hop in the news and discuss associated issues. A brainstorming of issues and implications, similar to that in the first two activities, might look like this on the blackboard:

- (Role of 'art:.' commodification of art, responsibility of artist, censorship of cuss words and 'smut' on the airways (ex. Janet Jackson's breast)
- the pornification of society: sexuality, prudery, good taste, sexual liberation
 - o sex without love (commodification of gender, sex as a transaction)
 - o empowerment? Degradation? Neither?

or

- Race, racial tensions, stereotypes, targets, self-targeting/labeling (is that okay? Is 'nigga' okay if a black person says it?)
- Poverty, career-choices (limited options? Why?), financial independence, bling, get rich or die trying
- Crime)

Another Hip Hop media watch exercise would be a class collage of Hip Hop portrayals and representations in newspapers and magazines. Cut out all pictures of Hip hop artists and all headlines or mentions of the culture. Discuss what kind of image the media is projecting about Hip hop, why, and whether or not it is accurate.

- The Question Box

Have the group generate questions about things they'd like to learn in Hip Hop.

This can also be done in smaller breakout groups, each with their own question box/basket/etc. The team then sorts through the questions to find one that they'd like to answer and present to the class.

Questions that may come up include:

What IS Hip hop ('real' vs. manufactured – 'keepin' it real' – what does that mean?)

What's Hip hop about? (sex? Race? Violence? Money? Politics? Anger?)

Where did it come from? (history, origins, evolution)

The language of Hip hop: offensive? (why so popular then?) Effects?

The message of Hip hop: what kind of lifestyle, values, etc. are the songs asking us to buy into? To what extent do we buy into them?

What roles does Hip hop play in our lives?

What does it mean to dance/sing/enjoy Hip hop? (self destructive? Degrading?)

Can we perform Hip hop without playing into the abusive/abused stereotype? Can we enjoy Hip hop and still be respectful, respected?

What's the difference between violence and misogyny in Hip hop, movies, and video games? Is there a difference? Are they harmful or 'just pretend' (i.e. a form of release, fantasy, legitimate way to take out frustration, doesn't equal to action?)

Re-imagining Hip hop: can it be respectful or 'socially constructive' and still be 'cool'?

What would it sound like? What would it look like?

Does 'good' Hip hop sell? Why or why not?

Pop vs. Hip hop: is the industry 'selling out'?

Is Hip hop 'art'? Is it 'literature'?

'Pornification:.' Why do women enjoy misogynistic music and playing into the role of the

slut/ho? Does Hip hop encourage women to explore their sexuality, or does it objectify and degrade them because of it? Can a feminist enjoy Hip hop? What would feminist Hip hop sound like? Is Hip hop empowering?

You can also sort the questions as a group. This will give you an idea of what to cover.

What is Hip hop?

- What is the difference between rap and Hip hop? What role do the four elements of Hip hop culture (graffiti, DJing, breakdancing, MCing) play? What is their relationship to each other?
- How have the different components of Hip hop changed with its rocketing popularity and commercialization?
- What does it mean to 'represent' and 'keep it real'?
- What roles did race and nationality play in Hip hop's conception and spread around the globe?
- Is Hip Hop a cultural revolution? Why or why not? How do we know?
- What's with the wack spelling?

Roots/Routes: Where did it come from and where is it going?

- How do artists from different racial groups (ex. the white rapper) and around the world interact with and change Hip hop?
- Where are the musical memory, historical consciousness and social construction of reality ('keepin' it real') in Hip hop music-making?
- How has Hip hop developed in its rise to prominence in the United States and around the world?
- What was Hip Hop like before the hype? How and why has it changed? Is this a good thing?

Gender and Commodification: What does the Hip hop lifestyle mean?

- How can we understand Hip hop as a gendered and racial musical art form and commodity?
- What is the musical role (as opposed the visual one) of girls and women in Hip hop groups, music videos, and the industry in general?
- To what extent is misogyny and intolerance a part of Hip hop culture? How much does this have to do with the predominance of male artists, particularly rappers?
- How have corporations and the recording industry affected Hip hop's original message? In turn, what affect has the commodified music had on artists and audiences?

3. *What's the Buzz About?*

Have a discussion about what Hip Hop is about: sex? Money? Anger? Poverty? Race? Violence? You can have debates, with participants finding evidence for and defending each position using Hip Hop lyrics, interviews with artists, etc.

www.About.com: "A popular subculture, originally created by inner-city teenagers but now prevalent in the suburbs, that emphasizes rap music, breakdancing, graffiti and a loose, baggy style of clothing."

www.thefreedictionary.com:

Noun 1. hip-hop - an urban youth culture associated with rap music and the fashions of African-American residents of the inner city

youth culture - young adults (a generational unit) considered as a cultural class or subculture

2.



hip-hop - genre of African-American music of the 1980s and 1990s in which rhyming lyrics are chanted to a musical accompaniment; several forms of rap have emerged

rap music, rap

African-American music, black music - music created by African-American musicians; early forms were songs that had a melodic line and a strong rhythmic beat with repeated choruses

popular music, popular music genre - any genre of music having wide appeal (but usually only for a short time)

www.wordiq.com:

Hip hop is a cultural movement that began amongst urban (primarily, but not entirely, African American) youth in New York and has since spread around the world. The four main elements of hip-hop are MCing, DJing, graffiti art, and breakdancing. Some consider beatboxing a fifth element of hip hop. The term has since come to be a synonym for rap music to mainstream audiences. The two are not, however, interchangeable - rapping (MCing) is the vocal expression of lyrics in sync to a rhythm beneath it.

Davey D:

What Is Hip hop?

Hip hop is an art form that includes deejaying [cuttin' & scartchin'] emceeing/rappin', breakdancing and graffiti art. These art forms as we know them today originated in the South Bronx section of New York City around the mid 1970s. Hip hop has thrived within the subculture of Black and Puerto Rican communities in New York and is now just recently beginning to enjoy widespread exposure. From a sociological perspective, Hip hop has been one of the main contributing factors that helped curtail gang violence due to the fact that many adults found it preferable to channel their anger and aggressions into these art forms which eventually became the ultimate expression of one's self

As Professor S. Craig Watkins might say:

It's the fashions worn by free-thinking young black males in downtown Houston, L.A. or Indianapolis. It's the music of 50 Cent and the pioneering sounds of the Sugar Hill Gang and Grandmaster Flash. It's Afrika Bambaataa and the legacy of street-surviving kids in the Bronx in the early 1970s, before the hype. It's spoken word and New York City subway graffiti and films like Menace II Society and Boyz N' the Hood that shine an unsparing light on the collision of urban ghetto life and black youth. It's African American activists, artists and business moguls like Russell Simmons who want to mobilize the Hip Hop generation into a political force to be reckoned with. It's a walk and attitude and youthful, often rebellious, voice that resonates with high school students in Kansas as well as club-goers in Tokyo.

To its passionate adherents, both young and old, it's an avenue for expression that didn't exist before and a feeling that cannot be verbalized in anything near conventional terms.



Delving Deeper: Hip Hop 101

Keep It Real
Youth Action Network

-Modify and customize content for audience



At the Beginning of (Hip Hop) Time: the Rhyme

- Rap's roots in African culture: oral tradition of griots, community's history-keeper
- In African American community: tradition of verbal jousting, rhymes
- Examples of rhymes:
 - Signifying
 - Testifying
 - Shining of the Titanic
 - School yard rhymes
 - Prison 'jail house' rhymes
 - Double Dutch jump rope



Jamming Roots

- 1960's: rise of Jamaican style, dub.
- Dub: isolate high-energy rhythms of percussion breaks (great for dancing)
- DJs started speaking in sync with these instrumental/percussion breaks
- One young Jamaican DJ, Kool Herc, brought it to NY where it became Hip Hop
- Back in Jamaica, it became dancehall and reggae



Kool Herc's Bright Idea

- o Early 70's: young DJ moves from Kingston, Jamaica, to the Bronx, New York,
- o DJing Jamaican style: say improvised rhymes over reggae records.
- o In NY: reggae's not popular. At his gigs at block parties, Herc speaks over instrumental beats of rock, disco and funk songs
- o Herc extends the beat section by playing records over and over again, with audio mixer



Kool Herc and the Herculoids party like it's 1975

- o What's hot in the 70's: DJs shouting out friends at parties, getting a response from the crowd.
- o What's even hotter: rhyiming with the beat (not yet rap; emceeing.)
 - Ex. From Davey D: 'Davey D is in the house/An' he'll turn it out without a doubt.'
- o The first emcee team is born: Kool Herc spinning beats while his friends Coke La Rock and Clark Kent man the mic



Where the Party At?

- o Early break dance crews challenged each other to dance-offs.... Block parties centered around them
- o Many b-boy groups like Bambataa's Universal Zulu Nation: former gang members
- o Big on the scene: emcees rapping over break beats at jams; rise in popularity to become the sole vocal feature at parties



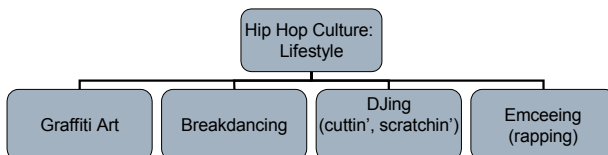
Hip Hop hits the Big Time

- With the early 80's come the first rap records, by Fat Back Band's *King Tem III* and Sugar Hill Gang's *Rapper Delight*
- The recording industry was a way for Hip Hop artists to share their material worldwide. It also presented a ticket out of the ghetto and into a luxury sports car

Break it Down: Elements of Hip Hop

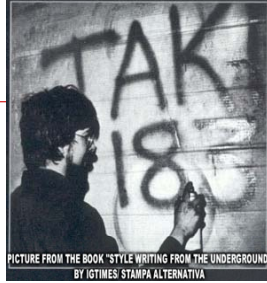
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Hip Hop Culture: Break it Down



Graffiti Art

- ❑ Edgy urban art with spray paint on buildings, etc.: all about originality!
 - ❑ Was around since the 50's, but really flourished in the 70's:
 - Super Kool's bright idea: replace spray paint can's dispersion cap with one from oven cleaner for modern-day effect
 - Lee Quinone: political-minded mural art, ex. call to end the arms race
-



Breakdancing

Acrobatic, edgy dance style full of headspins, hand weaves, handstands
Roots: African martial art form capoeira, imported by slaves to Brazil
In NY: b-boying, taken to the streets by Zulu Nation and the B-Boys
In California, about the same time: style called Pop-Locking, involving strutting, moonwalking, waving, robotic movements

Rapping (originally Emceeing)

Speaking over beats: MC = Mic Controller, or Master of Ceremonies
Evolved from Jamaican art form called 'toasting'
Big influences: jailhouse slang and rhymes by James Brown, The Last Poets and Gil Scott Heron, and activist H.Rap Brown

Deejaying (DJing)

- ❑ 'cuttin' and scratchin' a record
 - ❑ Invented by Grand Master Flash and Grand Wizard Theodore at Bronx parties
-

Old School Rap (Emceeing)

70's: rappers are main feature of block parties. They flow at the mic for hours on end at these jams

Rhymes were prewritten and rehearsed. Big no-no: reading off the paper

At the beginning: shout-outs, chants

Evolved into complex rhymes, with choruses, ex. 'To the beat, y'all', as space breakers for rapper to catch his breath/ideas


Goal: rock the house.



Rap: The Big Picture

Keep It Real

Youth Action Network



Zoom out!

- Rap historian Davey D reminds us:

“Throughout history, music originating from America's Black communities has always had an accompanying subculture reflective of the political, social and economic conditions of the time. Rap is no different.”



Why Rap?

- Free expression; outlet to let off steam, and tell it how it is
- Room for personal style: develop your own sound – fast, laid-back, tough, comedic
- Open to everyone: doesn't need lots of money or special training to hone rhymes
- Challenges and creativity: loose structure of beats and rhymes, yours to reinvent
- Street cred: rock the house, be the man (urban street hero)
- Making it big: escape from inner city (illusion?)

Jamming: how it's done

- Be seen, be heard!
- B-boys (and now, B-girls) take turns showing off their skills to the crowd
- Majority of partygoers hang out and listen to the emcee → rapper
- Props to the rapper who can stay on his feet, reel everyone in and hold them spellbound with his quick rhymes, agility and clever wordplay

Hip Hop on Air

- Hip Hop hit the radio waves in the 70's
- Before that, Black radio functioned as the African American community's griot, preserving culture and traditions through storytelling – Community unity through radio
- Radio gave the Black community information in a way they could relate to

People were talkin'...

- Martin Luther King in 1967: Black radio DJs were vital to keeping the Civil Rights movement alive
- Minister Farrakhan in 1980, at the Jack the Rapper convention: Radio was changing from the community's griot to something else. DJs needed to be aware of the impact they had with what they let on air

...until they started rappin'

- Nelson George in his book "The Death of Rhythm and Blues:" Black radio started to turn away from the community and cater to an older, more affluent white audience with European pop
- Young blacks could not connect to the Europeanized disco music – bland, soulless
- Hip Hop: a reaction, response, to what was on the radio

The Evolution of Rap

- Began simply: over the beats, emcees introduced themselves, shouted out to audience members, and improvised over simple four-count beat
- Rapping becomes more complex, with subtle humour, wordplay, and the incorporation of sexual themes.
- Between the 1980s and 1990s, Hip Hop becomes mainstream... what does this mean?

The Rise of Gangsta Rap: Is this what's wrong with Hip Hop?

Keep It Real
Youth Action Network

Hip Hop at the Top

- 1974, 1975: Hip Hop evolves on the streets of New York
 - Interest grows, popularity skyrockets until in 1980, Kurtis Blow releases rap's first album on a major record label
 - Until the very late 1980s, hip hop is dominated by the East Coast: mostly New York, but also Philadelphia and New Jersey
-

The Birth of Gangsta Rap

- Based on violence and misogyny of the gangster lifestyle
 - Came about when Hip Hop moved west in the 1980s, with Los Angeles's Ice-T's gritty, aggressive recordings (ex. Six'n da Mornin')
 - As the 80's progress, anti-apartheid movements, the cocaine trade, the arms trade, gang violence and police brutality destabilize poor neighbourhoods
-

The New Voice of Hip Hop

- Gangsta Rap takes root and becomes the face of Hip Hop
- Portrays the ideals of violence, spurred on by drug usage, and a completely unconcerned attitude to the world: life on the streets, the importance of power and the superficial presence of too much money.
- the messages came through to youth as a glamorously dangerous lifestyle, full of drugs, violence and sexism
- Especially popular after Los Angeles riots of 1991

“Straight outta Compton”

- Compton: city in Los Angeles County,
- notorious for poverty and gang violence
- Local Gangsta rap group, N.W.A. releases the first blockbuster hip hop album, “Straight Outta Compton,” 1989
- Album not only publicizes ‘life in the ‘hood/ghetto,’ but establishes West Coast hip hop, rivaling old Hip Hop capital, New York
- Group sparks hip hop’s first major controversy with “Fuck Tha Police;” prompts FBI to send letter denouncing the gangstas’ attitude to law enforcement



West Side: Death Row Records

- Dr. Dre leaves N.W.A. to establish Death Row Records with his release *The Chronic* in 1992; further solidifies West Coast’s gangsta rap dominance
- Label is led by Suge Knight, and is home to The label, which once was home to Snoop Doggy Dogg and Tupac Shakur as well
- 1995: Tupac Shakur releases *Me Against the World*, about the struggles of life on the streets

East Side: Bad Boy Records

- The East Coast responds with an even grittier, vicious gangsta rap
 - The Wu-Tang Clan: Enter the Wu-Tang, 1993
 - Notorious B.I.G.: Ready to Die, 1994
 - Nas: Illmatic, 1994
 - Busta Rhymes: The Coming, 1996
- Puff Daddy's Bad Boy Records (spokesperson Notorious B.I.G.) takes back the chart dominance
- Stakes are higher as hip hop popularity continues to explode and spill into the mainstream; East Coast-West Coast rivalry escalates as money pours in

Death and Glamour

- Reality of gangsta lifestyle catches up with Tupak Shakur (perhaps the greatest West Coast rapper of all time) and Biggie Smalls (Notorious B.I.G.) are killed in drive-by shootings: still unresolved
- Suge Knight becomes the gossip of the industry with his manic, violent ways: obsessed with mafia movies, has ties with street gang The Bloods
- Meanwhile, rap stars show up in blockbuster movies and get platinum awards; rule the entertainment scene

Free Reign?

- Suge Knight reportedly forces rivals to drink urine, dangles Vanilla Ice off balcony; is eventually imprisoned
- Snoop Doggy Dogg, rising to superstardom, has run-in with the law, but is acquitted for murder
- Dr. Dre and other acts sink company; lawsuits and bankruptcy
- Bad Boy Records weakens under Puff Daddy

Role Models?

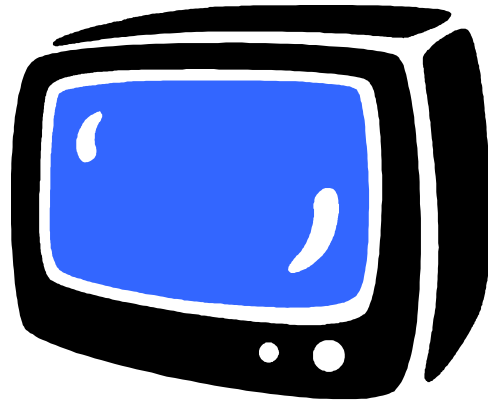
- 1999: Jay-Z stabs head of Unlimited Records
- Busta Rhymes: convicted for possession of marijuana and firearms
- O.D.B. in jail
- Puff Daddy involved in night-club shooting in 2000

Controversy

- Condemned for espousing materialism, homophobia, racism, misogyny, and violence
- Gangsta rappers defend themselves by saying they are keeping it real, telling the truth about inner-city life, gangs and ghettos
 - Ja Rule claims that rapping about sex violence and drugs is the only thing to rap about because that's all that happens in the world today anyway.

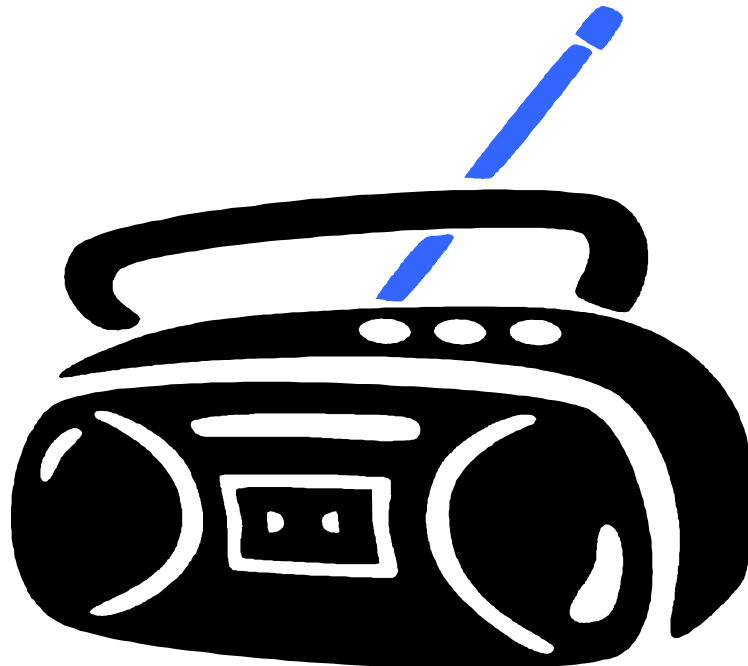
Perspective: Why is this Popular?

- This genre is hugely popular. Even when Gangsta rappers have tried to introduce a new stance, such as Dr. Dre did in 1997, their record sales have dropped dramatically. Dr Dre's album, "Dr. Dre presents the aftermath" sold only 2 million copies that year as opposed to his usual 4 to 5 million copies
- Audience for Gangsta Rap is widely known to be white, suburban; some commentators criticize it as being like minstrel shows or blackface performances, caricaturing the 'uncivilized black' for the entertainment of white audiences



SECTION 000

Media and
Critical
thinking skills



Section III: Media and Critical Thinking Skills

1. *The Media: Everywhere, All the Time, in Your Face*

We're surrounded by media: everywhere we turn, newspapers, radios, magazines, billboards, films, and TV shows and commercials beam our world back at us. Ours is a mediated world, constantly broadcasting messages, trying to influence how we see ourselves, how we live, and what we buy. It's easy to get lost in a sea of messages and images from the media. Media literacy is about navigating through these messages, and transmitting a few of your own.

In Toronto, most students grow up with a sophisticated and instinctive understanding of the ads that target them from an early age (studies show that the average young person receives 200 000 messages from commercials, radio, billboard, magazine and flyer advertisements each week). They approach ads with a healthy degree of skepticism, caution, or ridicule. As students become increasingly savvy consumers and decreasingly cooperative target markets, advertisements are losing their grip on minds and wallets.

In the meantime, Hip Hop has become a pillar of urban youth culture, in Toronto and beyond. Music videos on MTV and Much Music, articles in fashion and music magazines and radio singles played on heavy rotation all contain messages that insinuate themselves into youth's lifestyle choices, from relationships to career aspirations, perceptions of others, and consumer trends. These messages are accused of being offensive, hateful and shallow, and defended for being popular, artistic, or accurate reflections of a racist, sexist or oppressive society.

If we want to discuss hip hop issues, we need to understand media, markets, and messages. "Control the flow of information, or it will control you."

2. *Excerpt from "A Plea for Media Literacy in Our Nation's Schools"*

Pulitzer prize-winner David Shaw of the *Los Angeles Times*:

We are, all of us, awash in media. Television. Movies. The Internet. Billboards. Newspapers. Magazines. Radio. Newsletters. Individually and collectively, we spend more time with more media than ever before — an average of 10.5 hours a day, about 25% of that time using two media simultaneously, according to a recent study of "Middletown, USA" by the University of South Carolina.

Children in particular have become media-obsessed. Another recent study, this one by the Kaiser Family Foundation, found that 68% of kids 2 and younger spend an average of two hours a day in front of a screen, either television or computer. Children under 6 spend as much time in front of a screen as they do playing outside — and three times as much as they spend reading or being read to.

Those numbers don't decline as the children grow older. Douglas Rushkoff, a professor of media culture at New York University, has coined the term "screen-agers" to convey the depth of this inundation.

Moreover, yet another study — the 2003 Roper Youth Report — shows that kids ages 8 to 17 have 10% more say now than they did a year ago in their families' media purchases: magazines, newspapers, music, DVDs.

Young people use the media primarily for entertainment and recreation, not for information and education. But news is ubiquitous — headlines, snippets, bulletins, crawls — and the very fact that young people spend so much time with media that have the potential to inform

and educate gives our schools an enormous opportunity (and obligation) to teach new and increasingly valuable skills.

The opportunity goes beyond just helping children make sense of the news, of course. On the Internet in particular, a single click takes them into worlds at once forbidden and fascinating, sites with hidden (and not-so-hidden) agendas and pop-up commercial messages that don't even require a click.

Consider today's column a plea for media literacy classes in our nation's schools.

We live in increasingly complex times, and unless we teach our children how to read about, watch, interpret, understand and analyze the day's events, we risk raising a generation of civic illiterates, political ignoramuses and uncritical consumers, vulnerable not only to crackpot ideas, faulty reasoning and putative despots but fraudulent sales pitches and misleading advertising claims.

Teaching media literacy is, in a sense, teaching critical thinking, and it should "start early, with simple activities in preschool, and continue through high school," says Tessa Jolls, president and CEO of the Santa Monica-based Center for Media Literacy, which provides guidance and curricula for school districts interested in taking on this most challenging task.

"The Internet caused a sea change in what kids need and how teachers should teach and in what parents want for their kids," says Elizabeth Thoman, who founded the center four years ago. "The Internet has changed our understanding of how kids are learning, in every sense of that term, and now instead of parents worrying about their kids watching too many commercials on Saturday morning cartoons, there is this much larger issue of all the images and messages that come pouring in over the Internet."

Education transformation

Thoman, Jolls and their center draw their inspiration, in part, from the writings of the late David Berlo, a noted communications scholar and the former president of Illinois State University. Berlo believed that the transformation of our culture from an Industrial Age to an Information Age required a similar transformation in education.

"Most of what we have called formal education has been intended to imprint on the human mind all of the information that we might need for a lifetime," he wrote in 1975. But the simultaneous explosion in information and technology mean that "for the first time in history," it is no longer either possible or necessary to store all available information within the human brain, and Berlo argued that education must adjust accordingly.

"Education needs to be geared toward the *handling* of data rather than the *accumulation* of data," he wrote. "Humankind needs to be taught how to *process* information." \

Kids today are confronted with "every conceivable content," Jolls says. "I want them to have the tools and skills to make good decisions for themselves on the media messages they see.

"For teenagers, that might start with learning to evaluate commercial messages so they can buy a car intelligently. But with the right instruction, that could ultimately lead to applying moral criteria in looking at violence or pornography, learning what's healthy and moral as well as what's practical and useful."

Jolls is not suggesting that educators abandon the 3 Rs in favor of some New Age gobbledygook or religious teaching — only that media literacy be incorporated in the teaching of existing subjects.

She and Thoman and their staff of six have developed the *MediaLit Kit(tm)*, a detailed curriculum for doing just that. The essence of their approach is what they call the "five key questions" students should learn to ask about every media message they see:

- "Who created the message?"
- "What techniques are used to attract my attention?"
- "What lifestyles, values and points of view are presented in or omitted from the message?"
- "Why was this message sent?"
- "How might different people understand the message differently from me?"

"If we could teach kids to routinely apply those questions to every message that comes at them," Thoman says, "they would be much more sophisticated and understanding — and empowered, because they would then be able to make distinctions and judgments about their lives and the world around them."

3. *MediaLit.Org: Media Literacy Foundations*

A concise definition of media literacy:

“Media literacy is a 21st century approach to education.

It provides a framework to access, analyze, evaluate and create messages in a variety of forms – from print to video to the Internet. Media Literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society, as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy.

The Inquiry Process:

- ‘Free your Mind’/‘Express your View’
- analysis/production
- deconstruction/construction
- ‘reading’/‘writing’
- viewing/representing

5 Core Precepts:

- All media messages are constructed.
- Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.
- Different people experience the same message differently.
- Media have embedded values and points of view.
- Media messages are constructed to gain profit and/or power.

5 Key Questions:

1. Who created this message?
2. What techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How might different people understand this message differently from me?
4. What lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented in or omitted from this message?
5. Why was this message sent?

4 Process Skills:

- Access
- Analyze
- Evaluate
- Create/Communicate

The Empowerment Spiral

- Awareness
- Analysis
- Reflection
- Action

More Questions: Analyze:

- Codes and Conventions
- Messages and Values
- Producers and Consumers

4. Plan of Attack

Arguments may sound very impressive, load you up on statistics, or lose you in complicated twists of plot. But that doesn't mean they're right. Other times, you may know something's fishy but you can't quite put a finger on it. For instance, what about a long rant about how women like Hip Hop and therefore it isn't degrading? When faced with an argument that seems airtight but makes you suspicious, how can you break it down? This simple plan of attack is useful anytime someone is trying to convince, persuade, debate, refute...anytime!

The first two steps will help you understand what's going on (reading comprehension), and the last two will open up issues you may want to question and scrutinize.

- 1.) Skim for the general idea. What is the issue? Sexism? Poverty? Homophobia?
- 2.) Every argument is made for a reason. What's the point of the article, the speech, or the rant? What does the author want you to think, do, or believe after hearing his or her two cents (or two dollars, as it may be)?
- 3.) How does the author arrive at his or her conclusion? What supports, evidence or examples does the author use to 'prove' he or she is right?

It may help to outline the general structure of the argument, so you can see the flow of information clearly. Get a hardcopy of the argument and mark it up! Break the passage down into paragraphs, and try to summarize each in a sentence. Describe what's going on in the whole passage: is the author describing a problem and then offering a solution? Is he describing a phenomenon and then giving examples of how it applies? Is she explaining a theory and pointing out its flaws?

- 4.) What assumptions has the author made? If you want to really attack the argument, this is what to go for: assumptions can be the weak points, where the author makes a leap of logic or states something that just isn't right, true, or fair.
- 5.) What is the author forgetting? Has he or she overlooked a solution, forgot about a key player or ignored an important issue? How does this change the situation or affect her credibility?

5. Dalton Higgins' Guide to Detecting Bias

At one time or other we all complain about "bias in the news." The fact is, despite the journalistic ideal of "objectivity," every news story is influenced by the attitudes and background of its interviewers, writers, photographers, and editors.

Not all bias is deliberate. But you can become a more aware news reader or viewer by watching for the following journalistic techniques that allow bias to "creep in" to the news.

1. Bias through selection and omission

An editor can express a bias by choosing to use or not to use a specific news item. Within a given story, some details can be ignored, and others included, to give readers or viewers a different opinion about the events reported. If, during a speech, a few people boo, the reaction can be described as "remarks greeted by jeers" or they can be ignored as "a handful of dissidents."

Bias through omission is difficult to detect. Only by comparing news reports from a wide variety of outlets can this form of bias be observed.

2. Bias through placement

Readers of papers judge first page stories to be more significant than those buried in the back. Where a story is placed, therefore, influences what a reader or viewer thinks about its importance.

3. Bias by headline

Headlines are the most-read part of a paper. They can summarize as well as present carefully hidden bias and prejudices. They can convey excitement where little exists. They can express approval or condemnation.

4. Bias by photos, captions and camera angles

Some pictures flatter a person, others make the person look unpleasant. A paper can choose photos to influence opinion about, for example a candidate for election. On television, the choice of which visual images to display is extremely important. The captions newspapers run below photos are also potential sources of bias.

5. Bias through use of names and titles

News media often use labels and titles to describe people, places, and events. A person can be called an "ex-con" or be referred to as someone who "served time twenty years ago for a minor offense." Whether a person is described as a "terrorist" or a "freedom fighter" is a clear indication of editorial bias.

6. Bias through statistics and crowd counts

To make a disaster seem more spectacular (and therefore worthy of reading about), numbers can be inflated. "A hundred injured in air crash" can be the same as "only minor injuries in air crash," reflecting the opinion of the person doing the counting.

7. Bias by source control

To detect bias, always consider where the news item "comes from." Is the information supplied by a reporter, an eyewitness, police or fire officials, executives, or elected or appointed government officials? Each may have a particular bias that is introduced into the story.

8. Word choice and tone

Showing the same kind of bias that appears in headlines, the use of positive or negative words or words with a particular connotation can strongly influence the reader or viewer.

9. Diversity

What communities are being covered, how are they being treated and by whose point of view?

Critical thinking skills apply everywhere in our lives – not just in class discussions, papers, and readings (like the articles and activities in Section IV). They are handy whether you're reading editorials in the newspaper, watching televised candidate debates during the elections, or preparing for school tests. To make sure these techniques are firmly in your arsenal, go through the editorial pages of a newspaper and dissect the big issues of the day. You'll be surprised how easy it is.

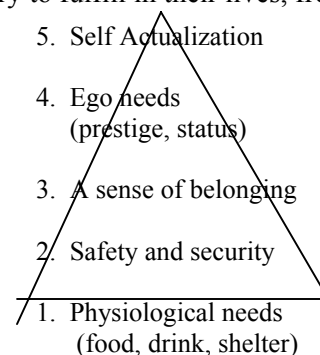
6. Marketing Messages: Beat them at their own Game!

It's no secret that the Hip Hop industry is profitable. It's a multibillion-dollar goldmine kept warm by Baby Phat (check), surrounded by scantily-clad women, and decorated with enough ice to blind a polar bear. Behind the thumping beats and the fly tunes, behind the commercial artist with the glossy new CD and the press conferences and the label are a bunch of executives in the recording industry, trying to figure out how to sell their product to you. What are they selling? Not just music, but a certain look, a certain mindset, an entire lifestyle.

Beat them at their own game! Here's a quick look into what business executives are thinking.

Why do people buy?

Maslow's hierarchy of needs. As devised by Abraham Maslow, this schema explains why people do what they do: why they buy what they buy and maybe what they'll want next. As its name indicates, it's a hierarchy, showing which needs humans try to fulfill in their lives, from the most basic needs to higher aspirations.



Marketing is about figuring out what the consumer wants and then finding a way to deliver products and services that will fulfill what the consumer 'needs' (needs to buy, that is), in a way that keeps them coming back for more. Advertising is one of many marketing tools.

Advertising is a paid form of non-personal promotion of a product (a good, a service, an idea, a lifestyle). It reached its pinnacle in the 1970's, the great heyday of glamorous advertising agencies and fancy commercials. Since then it has been on the decline, giving way to new vehicles of the consumer message: Internet and buzz marketing.

For all that it's categorized as music – an art form – the Hip Hop played on radio stations, showcased on MTV and MuchMusic, and splashed all over magazine covers, posters, t-shirts and websites is selling something. And it's easy to see why: people are buying like crazy. Today, all mainstream Hip Hop has something to tell and something to sell, whether it's indirect (ice around an artist's neck, belly-baring tops, a lifestyle of “having sex, not ...making love”) or direct plugging for a product (Nelly's Nikes and Parasucos, or Busta Rhymes's Courvoisier – see the section on the Commodification of Hip Hop).

What is the Hip Hop sound? How much does it cost?
What is the Hip Hop 'look?' How much does it cost?
What is the Hip Hop lifestyle? How much does it cost?

The Marketing Process

- What's the message we're trying to communicate?
- Who are we targeting our message at? (Who's the market?)
- What is the desired response?

How will the message be delivered?

- message appeal: rational vs. emotional
- rational: product oriented: problem solution, factual, demonstration, news
- emotional: consumer-oriented: play off fears, desires, insecurities, peer pressure
- sex, music/video, humour, animation, celebrity, fear

7. Your Message

Armed with an argument attack plan, a bias detection guide, and an understanding of marketing theory, you'll be able to 'read' media messages. You'll see through the glitz and glamour to the message, the techniques used to convey it, and why. The next step is 'writing' your own messages in response.

How can you get your word out? You can write letters to the editor, create your own newsletters, post on a website, or maybe get on TVO's Vox or CBC's Street Cents, or even just the booth at MuchMusic's Speaker's Corner. And then there's culture jamming – a way for young people to get heard in a way that's street-smart, hilarious, and impossible to ignore.

According to Kalle Lasn, author of Culture Jam and editor of the wickedly funny, cleverly edgy Adbusters, culture jamming is all about creative resistance. Resistance to what? To being treated as an empty-headed buying machine? To being told what to do and how to look? Exactly!

Culture jamming comes from a long tradition including political cartoons, Molière, and absurdist theatre. Political cartoons capture what's going on with the government or its elected officials in a punchy, caricatured way that gets the point across quickly and sticks in our heads. Molière made social commentary palatable to his rich, powerful patrons by making them laugh. Absurdist theatre used ridiculous situations, out-of-place characters and a lost, confused atmosphere to shock people into realizing what was meaningful in their lives (or, how meaningless their lives were). Whether spoofing advertisements or 'liberating' (i.e. hijacking, spray-painting or rearranging) billboards, Lasn's culture jammers alter the meanings of corporate messages to make

people laugh, but also get them to reflect on their lives and environment and whether this is the way they should be.

In a nutshell, culture jamming is all about being playful, creative, and analytical. It's about thinking critically about the flood of messages around you, and sending some messages back – about mindful, not mindless – waking up and engaging other people. It's about taking ownership of your life, and telling your story, keeping it real.

Culture Jam with:

- street theatre, dance performances and skits at school
- spoofs of commercials, ads, movies, and music videos
- puppetry and stiltwalking
- alternative music festivals, art exhibits and fashion shows
- alternative magazines like NOW, or 'zines that you create yourself and distribute widely
- dinner discussions
- Graf-art and mural-painting

SECTION 10

Laying
down
the
issues



Section IV: Laying Down the Issues

1. Hip Hop State of the Union: Is Hip Hop Keeping It Real?

METRO: THURSDAY AUGUST 26, 2004

DISC PROBES HIP-HOP

K-OS: JOYFUL REBELLION, VIRGIN/EMI. **1/2**

Knowing full well that most hip-hop is either all about the whine, women and bling bling or the stereotypical gun-toting toughness of inner-city life, T-dot rapper k-os is very concerned about the present state of hip-hop.

On this followup to his 2003 debut, *Exit*, k-os (real name Kevin Brereton) has penned an open letter of worry about hip-hop culture, pondering about rappers' obsessions with money and fame (Emcee Murdah), struggling with personal identity (*Dirty Water*, a collaboration with Montreal rocker Sam Roberts) and expressing disillusionment toward what goes on the radio (*Neutroniks*). On *B-Boy Stance*, he even plays hip-hop history teacher with old-school breakbeats, '80s drum machine and a Public Enemy loops to boot. More than beats, blips and sampled bits, k-os embraces a cultural mosaic of Police-style rock-reggae (*Crucial*, with its nod to Bob Marley's *I Shot The Sheriff*), dance-floor pop (*Man I sued to Be*, a biting diatribe on Michael Jackson), gospel-tinged folk (*Hallelujah*) and even jazz, scat style (*Crabucket*), complementing his raps with melancholic singing. And in the process, he succeeds in taking rap to a whole other accessible level.

ALTERNET: JUNE 20 2001

HIP HOP'S HISTORIC SUMMIT

PUT RAP STARS LIKE PUFF DADDY AND LL COOL J IN THE SAME ROOM WITH LEADERS LIKE LOUIS FARRAKHAN AND KWEISI MFUME, AND WHAT DO YOU GET? AN AGENDA FOR POLITICAL CLOUT AND CONSCIOUS HIP-HOP.

BY JEFF CHANG

It was, in some respects, just what you would expect from hip-hop.

Nothing started on time. The rappers weren't where they were supposed to be. Neither were their managers or the industry execs, off in some corner backslapping and exchanging cards. Volumes and volumes of words were spilled. And NYPD sweated everyone in sight.

In other respects, it was just what you wouldn't expect from hip-hop.

A high-level gathering, put together by Russell Simmons from Tuesday through Thursday last week, to discuss improving hip-hop and the world -- which drew massive media interest despite the fact that the media was barred from most of the important meetings.

A hip-hop conference in which not a single fight broke out, and some beefs even ended up on the mend. A lineup of speakers that more often had rappers silently rapt, rather than shooting the gift or heading for the bar. Sessions that actually resulted in tangible outcomes and real programs.

In short, the hip-hop summit lived up to its billing as an historic event.

"We've accomplished everything we wanted to accomplish," said a beaming Russell, "and more."

It was, in fact, the third hip-hop summit in eight months, a sure sign that hip-hop's elite are keen on pushing some of their wealth toward establishing political clout.

The first, convened by The Source last year at the Reverend Al Sharpton's National Action Network headquarters in Harlem, gathered community leaders, rappers and executives. By many accounts, the affair was better intentioned than organized, with many complaining that there were lots of answers proffered but little agreement about the problems.

Shortly afterward, Minister Conrad Muhammad, leader of A Movement for CHHANGE (Conscious Hip Hop Activism Necessary for Global Empowerment), called for another summit to discuss providing better images for young people, and supporting hip-hop leaders for political office. It was held in May as an ugly public beef developed between Minister Conrad and Russell. Russell called Minister Conrad a critic in the mold of a C. Delores Tucker or Bob Dole who did not have hip-hop's best interests at heart. Muhammad accused Russell of "contributing mightily to the degradation" his summit was trying to address.

Russell promised that his own summit would bring together hip-hop leaders with black politicians, civil rights activists, and intelligentsia to work out a specific agenda of action.

A long list of hip-hop celebrities showed up, whether officially invited or not, including pioneers like Afrika Bambaataa, Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash and DJ Hollywood; "golden age" heroes like Chuck D, Will Smith, Eric B, Queen Latifah, Naughty by Nature, Luther Campbell, and LL Cool J; and the nineties crowd, including Wyclef Jean, Deric "D-Dot" Angelettie, Keith Murray, Redman, Krayzie Bone (with daughter on arm), Talib Kweli, Dead Prez, Fat Joe, and Black Ice. They joined executives like Bad Boy's Sean "P-Diddy" Combs, So So Def's Jermaine Dupri, Def Jam's Kevin Liles, and University/Motown's Haqq Islam.

The summit also attracted Nation of Islam head, the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan, and a host of black congressional leaders, civil rights activists, and public intellectuals, including the NAACP's Kweisi Mfume, Rap The Vote's Mario Velasquez, and the SCLC's Martin Luther King III; Professors Cornel West, Michael Eric Dyson, and Manning Marable; Congressman Earl Hilliard and Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney. The summit was presided over by Minister Benjamin Muhammad.

(While many of the pioneers were not given invitations, they were escorted in by conference staff when they arrived on Wednesday. In one closed session, however, Zulu King and Rock Steady Crew member Fabel made the point from the floor: "If you're gonna call it a hip-hop summit, you need to be inclusive of graffiti writers and b-boys." Minister Ben Muhammad respectfully noted, "We would not be here if it were not for the Zulu Nation.")

Perhaps the lasting impact of the summit will be that it brought together generations and sectors of the black community -- some of which have, until recently, sparred viciously and in public -- to reason and build behind closed doors.

As the sessions commenced, twentysomething rappers and hip-hop activists often had unkind words for their elders. But the elders took the criticisms to heart, said they were there to listen. West admitted that his generation had somehow dropped the ball. Dyson demonstrated he was paying attention by quoting verses from Nas, Lauryn Hill, and Talib Kweli.

Kweli was impressed, "I see the dialogue happening and it's a beautiful thing."

A two-and-a-half hour speech on Wednesday by the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan, focusing on responsibility and reconciliation, set the tone for the conference.

During the speech, Farrakhan refused to rebuke the rappers, saying, "Society wants you to clean up the lyrics but the society doesn't want to clean itself up." He went on to point the finger at "gangsta government" as the real problem. "I'm not here to condemn you," he said.

Instead he gently nudged the artists toward their better selves, saying the speech he was giving that afternoon was perhaps the most important he had ever given. "One rap song," he said, "is worth a thousand of my speeches."

"The hip-hop generation is our best generation, not our worst," he thundered. "You are the most courageous generation, the strongest, the most fearless."

"The old guys didn't do so good. They didn't feed the flock," he said. "I believe that you can change the reality of American life and racism -- that you have the power to stop it."

"The people are feeding you now," he said. "What are you gonna do now to show your appreciation?"

So the dialogues happened, aided by a decision to close much of the convention to the media, a gag order that left some journalists fuming but gave a certain gravitas to the proceedings. On the first day, unscheduled speaker Tricia Rose, the NYU professor, justified the decision, "Before hip-hop became such a cultural force, we had much more cultural space to raise questions and critiques and to be in conversation, without every moment being magnified and picked up worldwide."

"Black culture is no longer separate from mainstream culture," says Rose. "That's why the dialogue has to happen in institutions that are not driven by profit."

And yet, the most newsworthy item was all about the bottom line. Almost to a person, from Simmons to Kweli, participants voiced grave concerns with the FCC's June 6 decision to fine a radio station for playing Eminem's "The Real Slim Shady." Senator Joe Lieberman's and Hillary Rodham Clinton's "Media and Marketing Accountability Act" also loomed large over the proceedings, although summit organizers denied it.

Mainstream media picked up on these lyrical content issues, as hip-hop leaders repeated the mantra, "We're keeping it real." But even as hip-hop seemed to be repeating its past, it was eliciting bizarre speculation about its future. Take this spacey discussion on CNN's "Take Five" talk-show:

MICHELLE COTTLE, CO-HOST: Jake, you're a big hip-hop fan. Are the sexist and violent lyrics just poetry aimed at the establishment?

JAKE TAPPER, CO-HOST: That's Mack 10, by the way, in case you're wondering what that video was. You know... I had a bunch of these people from the hip-hop summit, Russell Simmons from Def Jam Records and Chuck D and a few others.

And what amazed me -- yes, I like hip-hop. I am an adult, of course, purportedly, and a lot of this music is listened to by children and it is affecting these kids. I was amazed, none of these guys would accept any responsibility for the lyrics and for the message they were sending. It was really phenomenal.

JOHN DICKERSON, TIME MAGAZINE: Russell Simmons, in particular, since he makes money directly from all of this, and the others as well. One thing that's interesting, though, is you know a genre has made it when it starts navel-gazing. I mean, hip-hop is here to stay, and you know, there are a lot of other types of music that haven't done it. This is now a fundamental part of American culture.

CHRIS CALDWELL, WEEKLY STANDARD: Well, it might be a sign of demise, actually. What might be happening is what happened to the folk music movement in the '60s, where these things hang around until they get more and more pretentious and have these huge claims to want to reorder society, which is...

DICKERSON: Well, I disagree. There seems to be a whole raft of new hip-hop artists who are going to see this summit and want to do everything...against whatever they are talking about in these closed rooms.

FELIX SANCHEZ, "P.R. CONSULTANT": But the idea of the summit, which was to organize the hip-hop constituency to have a political action committee, et cetera -- I mean, when Cornel West from Harvard has his own hip-hop album about to come out to preach, basically, to young kids, I think that we're missing the boat about this genre of music. But at the same time...

CALDWELL: ... it's like taking the booze out of Irish ballads, or something like that.

On Tuesday, behind closed doors, RIAA head Hilary Rosen led hip-hop executives to, if not take the booze out of their ballads, at least blunt some Congressional criticism -- in particular Senator Lieberman and Senator Clinton's Media and Marketing Accountability Act in late April, a grandstanding piece of legislation that gives the Federal Trade Commission the ability to fine entertainment companies that deceptively market violent or sexual materials to children up to \$11,000 per day.

Since the introduction of the bill in April, the Beltway seemed girding for a fight with the hip-hop industry. The FTC began serving notice it was ready to begin pressuring record companies, criticizing it publicly for advertising which failed to disclose potentially obscene or violent content. Passions peaked the week before the conference with the FCC's Eminem fine. Even Congressman Bennie Thompson (D-Miss) warned the summit participants, "Washington can regulate you out of business if you do not have your act together."

The point was made: move now or face growing opposition. Some execs nervously whispered that radio promotion budgets (read: payola) and marketing budgets might be next. One rumor circulated that Russell would get Hillary Clinton to promise to sink the bill if the guidelines were adopted.

So the execs emerged with new voluntary guidelines -- which include expanding "Parental Advisory" and "Explicit Lyrics" stickering to all print, television and radio ads, internet sites and posters -- and a new party line. On Thursday, Suzan Jenkins, senior vice president of marketing at

RIAA, said, "The labels very much want to be able to provide a vehicle for parents to know what they are listening to."

But was it done under duress?

Def Jam's Kevin Liles said, "No, we were not forced to do anything. We want to make pro-active change before the government comes in and says, 'Hey, you have to do this.'" He added, "I want the consumer and the parent and the government to take some responsibility also, to know [that] when you go buy a tape, know what you're buying. You do your research. You don't just go buy a car."

Rosen said, "I do not expect Senator Lieberman to give up in his quest to silence this community. I think they try and make this be about marketing when we know it's about the lyrics, and I don't expect him to give up that."

Haqq Islam was even more direct, "I think Lieberman is crossing a line that he doesn't want to cross. He should wise up. I mean, it starts here but where does it end? At a Schwarzenegger movie?"

By Thursday, a new concern had emerged: rap profiling.

While Jay-Z was a no-show and Sean "P-Diddy" Combs' presence prompted heavy Fruit of Islam presence, James Prince, the CEO of Rap-A-Lot Records, walked quietly through the crowd, embodying one of the stranger incidents of profiling in recent years.

In December 2000, the Republican-dominated House Committee on Government Reform looked into reports that Congresswoman Maxine Waters urged Attorney General Janet Reno to drop a drug trafficking investigation against Prince. Waters wrote that Prince had been a target of "racial profiling" by rogue DEA officers, including illegal searches, surveillance, and racist harassment.

The DEA subsequently dropped the case and one of the officers was reprimanded. But Republicans pushed for the hearing, and continued to press for a reopening of the discredited investigation, even introducing lyrics from Rap-A-Lot artist Scarface into the record. Prince said, "They were trying to do their best to cover their ass as far as racial profiling is concerned."

He added, "I feel it's a conspiracy to destroy people like myself that try and uplift my community and help my people to dream again. It's a sad thing but it's real, man."

During the week at the summit, NYPD presence noticeably increased, with crews of officers filling the New York Hilton's driveway, and clogging the corners on 6th Avenue. They issued public nuisance tickets to bass-bumping promotional vans parked by the hotel and stared down summit participants entering the hotel.

The profiling peaked on Wednesday, the day that more than a thousand gathered to hear Minister Farrakhan speak. Says Liles, "Everyone was stopped, they were taking license plates and everything. They made my driver move 20 times. When we came out you saw the cameras flicking, you know what I mean? You never know what's going on."

But they couldn't overpower the vibes upstairs.

At the end of Tuesday, Chuck D had been convinced that, despite all the stardom in attendance, the summit would end up like any other, a lot of talk and not a lot of action. He was dismayed about having to help mediate the feud between Russell and Minister Conrad Muhammad. But as the Wednesday sessions began, he watched as the artists began to fire each other up.

In a closed door session, Fat Joe told the crowd, "I think us as artists need to interact more with the community. A lot of rappers seem to shy away from talking about political things. I think they're scared to really say what's going on."

Sister Souljah exhorted the attendees to fill their appropriate roles, and help get it all together. "If our shit was tight, Al Sharpton wouldn't be in jail," she said. "Nobody is playing their position."

After Minister Farrakhan's speech, Chuck D was as close to giddy as he could get. "I'm satisfied," he said. "All my questions are answered."

On Thursday, the fruits of the summit were on display. The public intellectuals announced the creation of university-based hip-hop think-tanks, with the first to be launched at Columbia. In response to one of Chuck D's recommendations, Def Jam offered an artist mentoring program, "The Hip-Hop House" -- part Motown, part "Fame" finishing school, the other part 21st century media and image training boot camp -- to be built in Harlem. A "strategic alliance" of the NAACP, SCLC, Nation of Islam, and Rap The Vote vowed to set up a hip-hop political action committee and a voter registration drive directed at the 2002 and 2004 elections.

Jeff Johnson, the 28-year-old national director of the NAACP's youth, college and young adult division, had opened the conference critical of his own organization for failing to engage hip-hop generation. He left feeling very optimistic: "A lot of people have been doing work in a vacuum, now they can do it collectively."

Sean Combs said, "The things I've seen in the last three days have touched me in such a positive way, and I think it gave a true representation to what hip-hop is and what hip-hop is about."

"What you're witnessing right now is history," he said.

One sideshow to the summit ended happily in a moment of Farrakhan-brokered reconciliation. Russell Simmons and Minister Conrad Muhammad's rift -- a war which blew up in the press that week -- seemed to be in the process of being quashed.

On Tuesday, Muhammad was barred from the summit. He had appeared on CNN to bitterly tell viewers that Russell had urged a boycott of his own summit in April. But by the next morning, Chuck D had got him in to see the proceedings.

At the podium, Minister Farrakhan began speaking about Russell and Minister Conrad's beef. "No leader should fight another," he warned. "Because when the leaders fight, the followers also fight." Farrakhan urged the two to quash their beef behind closed doors. "When you all agree, come on out and let the press see you," he said.

As he spoke a clamor erupted at the back of the room. "He's here!" said someone from within a crowd of journalists near the back door. Minister Conrad waved to his mentor. Russell, sitting onstage next to Minister Farrakhan, applauded and smiled. With shouts of "That's right!," the crowd applauded loudly.

After Farrakhan's speech, Minister Conrad and Russell embraced, and with cameras flashing, they smiled.

WEST-COAST HIP HOP SUMMIT:ONLINE SUMMIT FOLLOW-UP

BY IFÈ OSHUN

...Industry heavy hitters Michael Concepcion and Russell Simmons graced the Summit's panel which also featured Los Angeles radio personalities Steve Harvey and Big Boy along with hip-hop luminaries DJ Quick and D.O.C (from N.W.A.), among others. The keynote address, delivered by the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan, drove home the point that more kids pay attention to rappers than their own teachers and called on rap artists to take responsibility for their impact on the youth. Farrakhan's positive and uplifting message of "imagine changing the world for the better through lyrics" so affected DJ Quick that he wrote lyrics right there on the spot. The minister's speech also inspired a long and sincere handshake between hardcore members of two rival gangs and a moving speech from N.W.A.'s D.O.C. who after a severe accident, can barely talk and is lucky to be alive. Although this enlightened and uplifted We-Are-The-World-atmosphere prevailed, the absence of Dr. Dre and Suge Knight was painfully obvious.

(Too) long after the minister was escorted out and all the panel members (including Russell Simmons) had spoken, the CEO of Tha Row, Suge Knight, casually rolled in with what seemed like an army of red-outfitted cats, including Kuruft, Mack 10 and the Boo Ya Tribe. After being admonished by the Fruit of Islam (the Nation of Islam's security force) for trying to light a cigarette, Suge took his place at the podium and began calling for artists to join together and form a union. "In music, there's no union. There's no retirement. There's no pension," he said. "Everybody keeps saying keep it real. ...until there's union, [the major labels are] gonna stick together. If we don't own nothing and we don't have control and we don't support each other we're gonna be out." Unfortunately, this great idea was buried among insults Knight hurled at what seemed like everybody - from women to homosexuals to Janet Jackson to a still absent Dr. Dre to P Diddy. One insult was directed specifically to Tray Dee (Eastsidaz) who sat in the front row. Tray's response was "Whatever." After 15 minutes of this, tempers flared, folks started yelling back and many folks just straight jumped up and left, biting their tongues while Knight continued to speak. Suddenly this same Beverly Hills ballroom that housed many authentic Crips, Bloods and artists like Kuruft; Xzibit; Mack 10; Irv Gotti; the Outlawz; Queen Pen; Keith Murray; Ed Lover; the Fatcats; the Eastsidaz; M.O.T.; Michel'le and had just witnessed an intense display of unity regardless of religious, economic, cultural or personality differences now saw some of these same people pissed off, dumbstruck and unclear as to when the tide turned.

Regardless of the inescapable drama, positive results were obtained as outlined in the following:

Political Empowerment: Agreement was reached with representatives of Rap The Vote and the National Black Youth Vote Coalition to focus the energy and the talent of the hip-hop community on a massive voter's registration and education drive. In addition, the attendees to the Summit pledged support for the ongoing development of the Hip-Hop Political Action Committee and the increase efforts in lobbying members of Congress on issues important to the hip-hop community.

Hip-Hop Responds to Federal Regulatory Agencies: A unanimous vote was taken by the Summit participants to support the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network's efforts to assist spoken-word artist Sarah Jones in her lawsuit against the Federal Communications Commission. The FCC had issued a fine against KBOO-FM, a Portland, Oregon community radio station that played the

Sarah Jones song, "Your Revolution," a piece that uses references from male rap lyrics to denounce misogyny and the degradation of women in a lot of popular hip-hop songs.

Economic Empowerment: Suge Knight made a proposal for the creation of a hip-hop and R&B artist union which would be organized to insure health care, pension, retirement funds and other benefits for the artists. The measure was not voted on but widely discussed.

The Success of Parental Advisory Labeling: Suzan Jenkins, a national consultant for the Recording Industry Association of America, reported on the progress of the RIAA's Parental Advisory Labeling on the marketing of music with explicit content.

As a participant, what still rings most clearly in my mind is the minister's message:

- 1) Take responsibility for music and lyrics and use them for progressive social change.
- 2) Arouse the thinking of all young people around the world to be peacemakers and not to become pawns in unjust wars.
- 3) Adversity is the mother of creativity.

Issues:

- What is the state of hip-hop these days? Are you as concerned about its future as k-os?
- Do you see anything wrong with the subject-matter of mainstream hip-hop?
- What kind of hip-hop is accessible? Which hip-hop artists are keeping it real?

Activities:

1. Labels

k-os claims that hip-hop is mostly about "the whine, women and bling bling or the stereotypical gun-toting toughness of inner-city life." What's your impression? Organize all the hip-hop that has come out in the last few months, or all the hip-hop playing on top-40 radio or on MuchMusic under his categories, labeled "the whine," "women and bling bling" (should these be two separate categories?), "guns and inner-city life," and "other." What sort of material goes under the "other" label? How would you characterize it?

Which of k-os's labels seems to be most popular?

Also: take a look at labels in another sense. Take a look at the CDs or songs on your chart and do a little research about which labels they were released under. Does particular record labels specialize in any one flavour of hip-hop? Who are these artists? What are their influences? Are they keeping it real?

2. Make Hip-Hop Accessible

Is k-os culture-jamming when he references 'old-school' hip-hop on his CD to remind people of its roots and (for him) purpose? From what you know of k-os's *Joyful Rebellion*, does he make hip-hop and rap accessible?

Find ways for you to culture jam and make hip-hop accessible. Produce a piece of artwork, a board game, a storybook, a cookbook or fashion spread that tells the truth about some aspect of hip-hop that regular fans might not know. One group in Toronto, Culture Shock Canada,

communicates issues of gender, multiculturalism and sexuality through dance. This hot hip-hop dance troupe choreographs routines to express meaning and ask questions through images and movement. Below is an excerpt from some of their performance notes. Find out more at www.cultureshockdance.org/canada

Piece 1: “Stranger In My House”

This piece explores the dynamics of a relationship from two points of view: male and female. Pay close attention to the lyrics that the men and women say in each song (*songs included Missy Elliott's One Minute Man*). Notice the dynamics between the male and female dancers half way through the piece. Also, although the music gets fast and the choreography gets more intense, the choice of music is intentional – particularly since it's the resolution of the drama.

Piece 2: “Butta!”

This piece deals with men and women and sex. It raises questions about what it means to dance hip-hop, particularly for a woman. The male and female dancers battle for control in the piece and it is interesting to see who comes out on top. Watch for the energy level of the piece to increase by its end. Can a woman be sexy *and* take control of a relationship? What does that make her?

Piece 3: “World Mix”

Hip-hop has roots from all forms of dance: African and Caribbean to be particular. As the world struggles to keep peace: this number is a celebration of diversity. Through diversity comes understanding and less ignorance. Pay close attention to the Reggae pieces. Can Reggae be associated with popular culture without being homophobic and sexist? Listen *carefully* to the instrumentals for the last piece. Do you know where they come from? What is the point?

Piece 4: “Din Da Da”

A fun piece to watch, this is all about the roots of hip-hop dance – free-style movement and GENDER NEUTRAL. Reminiscent of the 80's dance style, it is good for the workshop on “Hip-Hop and Sexuality” to see what the choreography was like before Britney Spears.

ENCORE: What sexual messages are connected with Michael Jackson?

2. Where's the Love: Gender and Objectification

GLOBE AND MAIL: FRIDAY APRIL 16, 2004

POUTING PINUPS PUSH WOMEN OFF THE SCREEN

THE GIRL NEXT DOOR: ONE PRODUCT OF AN ERA OF PORN AND PLASTIC SURGERY.

BY JOHANNA SCHNELLER

Ay yi yi, have you seen this current film, *The Girl Next Door*? Its characters are high-school seniors on the cusp of graduation. Like every Hollywood movie these days, it's a tale of redemption – popsicle geek (sweet but frozen) rescues damsel in distress, and in return she thaws him. The theme, stated throughout, is “what is moral fibre?” It's even written with some wit.

Yet smack in the middle of this *Risky Business* Lite is a porn film. The damsel is an adult-movie pinup – all the high-school boys are intimately familiar with her videos – on the run from her producer/pimp, and in between life lessons her colleagues provide the geek's buddies with plenty of dry humping, stripping, and enough enhanced breasts to fill a bowlerama.

Every time someone says or does something remotely clever, sets of dirigible breasts float into the scene like pink Hindenburgs. Oh, the humanity.

In the first line of the film, delivered against a black screen, a woman's voice purrs, “How do you want me?” – which, according to this movie and its ever-burgeoning ilk, is the only question a woman is put on Earth to ask.

When the hero tells his best friend that he met a new girl last night, the friend immediately asks, “So did you bang her? It's what a man does.” Soon, the hero introduces the girl to his friend by having her appear at his door dripping wet, wearing low-rise jeans and a sheer white shirt tied at her midriff and completely unbuttoned over a pink lace bra. Later, the friend urges the hero on by saying, “What would JFK do? He'd tap that ass!” (Okay, that's kind of funny.) Later still, after repeatedly acting like a porn fantasy – never mind actually being a porn actress – the damsel, pouting, admonishes the hero for treating her like one, then drives away with her teddy bear. To a porn convention in Las Vegas. Cue the Hindenburgs.

The really depressing part is, no one in my after-school audience, one-quarter full of groups of teenagers, seemed to find any of this unusual. *The Girl Next Door* is just one more example of the pornification of everything.

A generation ago, in films such as *Porky's*, teenage boys had to crowd around peepholes for a glimpse into the girls' shower room, and the girls, who wore cotton panties, squealed in fury and chased them away.

Today, in *Porky's* successors, boys no longer have to spy; rather, the girls, who have traded in their cotton for lace thongs, vinyl bustiers, belly chains, stilettos and shiny, metal-slick lip gloss, invite the boys into their bedrooms and act out X-rated fantasies for their entertainment.

In *American Pie 2*, two otherwise hetero female friends make out with each other. They slap each other's bare backsides and nuzzle each other's breasts, while the boys watch – and it's presented as something gals do for a giggle. In *Old School*, a high-school student who has a one-night stand with the 30-ish hero is deemed the ideal woman because she tells the hero he was a great lay, assures him that he shouldn't call her, and leaves without telling him her name. Even a

spoof such as *High School High*, which mocks the callowness of teen genre films, has a gorgeous female character walking around naked throughout. It makes fun of gratuitous nudity, by showing gratuitous nudity! Bonus!

It's not just happening in fiction films, either. Take one look at the popular *Girls Gone Wild* video series or the movie *Real World Cancun*, and you'll believe there isn't a coed in the US who isn't a budding pole-dancer panting for the chance to flash her rack on camera. The miniskirts and low-cut sweaters of every woman candidate on the TV show *The Apprentice* (would-be employer Donald Trump always called them "the girls") may not have won them in last night's final two, but it did get them a gig posing in their skivvies in this month's FHM Magazine. And why shouldn't Janet Jackson think that baring a breast at the Super Bowl is a fine way to promote her sex songs, in a world where people sell yogurt by having a babe spoon the stuff suggestively into her wide-open mouth and then roll her eyes in ecstasy?

The Cannes Film Festival, which runs next month, provides a great visual metaphor: the yacht where adult films were bought and sold used to anchor far out in the harbour. Every year over the past decade, the ship moved closer to shore until it was docked smack in the middle of the festival action. Now the ship is gone and the porn films are dealt right alongside the so-called legitimate fare, and who can tell the difference?

I'm not a prude; I have no problem with sex or nudity. But I do object to all women being confined to one role and one role only. Certainly, today's legit actresses have to contend with a fearsome set of demands. The last three I interviewed for American magazines were at very different stages in their careers, but the subject of what was expected of them, male-fantasy-wise, always came up. Keira Knightley, who turned 19 a month ago, has already made two films for power producer Jerry Bruckheimer in which he personally got involved in her costume design. In *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, he asked that she be put in tight corsets to emphasize her bosom. In this summer's *King Arthur*, set in the fifth century, he wanted her stomach exposed. She plays Guinevere.

Singer and actress Vanessa Williams, 40, told me her career changed radically when she hit 38. "My L'Oréal contract disappeared, and my recording contract," she said. "About acting roles, 'I started to hear, 'They decided to go younger,' over and over. I thought, Wow, I'm out of my game! I've had my time as the, whatever, the hot babe. Now I'm seen as a mother, and that genre is gone." She said she was grateful to Cedric the Entertainer, the star of her current road comedy *The Johnson Family Vacation*, for "choosing someone close to his age to play his wife. A lot of leading men my age choose to play opposite gorgeous women in their 20s, whether they're believable as mothers of three or not."

Even an actress as accomplished and Oscar-nominated as Julianne Moore, also 40, told me she honestly believes the day may come when she's never offered another role. "you know, it's not unprecedented," she said. "There are women all around us who it's happened to. As an actress, you always think to yourself, 'God, this is going to just go.'"

Yes, yes, you can take heart in stories such as this week's saga in the "anti-Barbie"

Internet voters in Russia who supported a real-looking woman as their candidate for the Miss Universe pageant, until she was disqualified for being too young. You can vote with your dollars and turn off TV shows such as the wildly distressing *The Swan*, in which "ugly ducklings" confess their deepest self-loathing in order to win free plastic surgery that transforms them from ordinary women into extraordinarily scary creatures.

You can not got to movies like *The Girl Next Door*.

But plastic surgery and porn are major growth industries, and heir ethos is increasingly showing up in all kinds of films, even where you least expect it. The title *The Girl Next Door* isn't tongue-in-cheek, it's prescient. She's moving in on us all.

GLOBE AND MAIL: TUESDAY FEBRUARY 3, 2004
A FAN WHO'S TIRED OF BEING CALLED 'HO'
BY LYNN COADY

Even though I've long since wandered afoul of MuchMusic's target demographic, I'm still fascinated by the fare it offers up.

Lately I've been admiring the cheeky smut of Kelis's *Milkshake* video, and I'll run into the room if I hear one note of Missy Elliott getting her freak on. Mostly, however, I'm well out of the urban-music loop and I know it. It's good to have an acquaintance like Georgia Straight columnist Tara Henley, to break things down for me.

Henley is more than an aficionado of hip-hop culture. She grew up on the stuff, made it the subject of her master's thesis, and now writes extensively on both the local and international scene. This madder her the prefect person to with whom to chew over a subject I've always felt a touch too out of my element to really delve into – the hyper-masculinity and over-the-top sexuality of so much music today.

It's difficult to discuss without feeling like someone's Aunt Prudence, but Henley agrees there is a dearth of informed debate around the genre. We've all heard the one-note sermonizing, but what about more basic questions? Like why is Beyoncé air-humping her way through every song these days? What's with that backhanded-slap gesture Snoop Dogg makes in 50 Cent's P.I.M.P. video? What, come to think of it, is with the P.I.M.P. video?

Surely these questions can be asked without denying the talent of the artists involved or dismissing a culture that enthralls millions of young people.

It's complicated, though, because, one, North American society is messed up about sexuality in general – this is a fact. You may think Eminem has some issues about women and gays, but he's right about one thing: He's just sayin' what y'all are thinkin'. Eminem's massive popularity has much to do with the fact that he exists as an avatar of the young-urban-male id. As a culture, Slim Shady's issues are our own.

It's also complicated because the racism-tinged hypocrisy of a Mrs. Al Gore, or a Bill O'Reilly, perpetually looms. You remember Bill. He's the guy who came out so strongly against Pepsi using rapper Ludacris for commercial spots, only to be placated once the potty-mouthed MC was replaced with that white moral exemplar Ozzy Osbourne.

One of the first gloves-off reviews Henley wrote, however, dealt with Ludacris's *Word of Mouf*, calling it "an extravaganza of filthy lyrics, foul verse and Cro-Magnon style sentiments about women." An irate letter-writer responded by comparing Henley to Tipper Gore, insisting "a rap fan doesn't care if an album contains "filthy lyrics" or "foul-mouthed verses." Henley begged to differ. "One does not need to be a ... Tipper Gore protégé to be bored with the played-out sexism that prevails [in] certain streams of rap," she shot back.

“One need only be a fan who isn’t particularly impressed by women being cast as bitches and hos.”

Feminist writer Joan Morgan has struggled to understand the sexism endemic in a culture she cherishes, remarking, “Hip-hop is the only forum in which young black men, no matter how surreptitiously, are allowed to express their pain at all.”

But Brooklyn, N.Y., writer Jennifer McLune is less sympathetic.

“There is nothing new about misogyny, violence, and homophobia,” she writes on www.urbanthinktank.org. McLune argues that it is condescending to excuse these tendencies in rap on the basis of black-male disenfranchisement, and they are “part of a plan to silence any feminist critique of the culture.”

None of this makes the issue less thorny, but it does illustrate how bound up with the questions of race, sex and power the controversial aspects of hip-hop are. “[R]ap does not appear in a cultural vacuum,” bell hooks has written, “but... is expressive of [the] engagement of black youth culture with the values, attitudes and concerns of the white majority.”

Vancouver MC Josh Martinez believes regressive attitudes are waning, but notes that sexism has pervaded popular music since Elvis’s pelvis.

“There’s a lot more ‘bitch’ in hip-hop,” he admits, “but it all comes from the same place – you lead with your balls.”

Martinez, who is equipped with a history degree and a strong social conscience, has rapped on such topics as the Second World War, and, if you can believe this, forced retirement. Clearly booty and bling-bling aren’t his forte. Plus, he confides, “my mom would kill me if she heard me say a word like bitch.”

Another MC I spoke to, Big Rowd from Fourth World, will soon be promoting a CD released by Battle Axe. Fourth World will be making its own videos shortly, and Henley has been pleading with Rowd – her younger brother Rob – to think twice about the standard “gyrating video chicks.

“Rob and I have debated the more regressive elements of hip-hop for years,” says Henley. “There are just so many more interesting things [he could] do with that media time.”

Rowd is sympathetic, but – as a young man immersed in a vital, sexy industry – makes a salient point of his own.

“We’re trying to have a party at every one of our shows, so that’s what our video is gonna reflect,” he explains.

“And I think everyone from feminists to misogynists can agree that parties with just a whole lot of dudes really suck.”

FINANCIAL TIMES: FRIDAY MARCH 26 2004

ALL WE NEEDED WAS LOVE. INSTEAD WE GOT PORNOGRAPHY

BY RICHARD TOMKINS

When the Irish rock star Bono used the phrase “fucking brilliant” during a live television broadcast of his acceptance speech at the Golden Globe Awards last year, the US Federal Communications Commission ruled that the decency rules had not been violated because he was using the f-word “as an adjective or expletive to emphasize an exclamation,” not to describe a sexual act. The decision was, of course, outrageous. As any pedant will tell you, a word used to modify another adjective is not an adjective at all, but an adverb, so it was even more fucking brilliant to hear the FCC announcing last week that it had decided to overturn its previous ruling.

Regrettably, though, the FCC was not so much striking a blow for grammatical correctness as waging a campaign against lewdness and smut on the airwaves. In the last few weeks, especially since Janet Jackson’s right breast suffered its infamous wardrobe malfunction during a half-time performance at the Super Bowl, regulators and politicians have been competing to see who can strike the pose of greater moral rectitude in the face of supposedly declining standards of decency in the media. Congress is considering legislation that would bump up the present maximum fine on broadcasters from a paltry \$27 500 for each decency violation to a more thought-provoking \$500 000, which should do much to rein in the errant adverbs and nipples.

Fair enough: it is, after all, an election year. Yet does it not strike anyone as incongruous that these people are trying to keep US network television sex-free at a time when western society itself has never been as sexualized?

Sex and sexual imagery now permeate nearly every aspect of mass culture, especially the media, advertising, fashion, entertainment and pop. On television, or cable TV at least, even prudish America is challenging old taboos with programmes such as *Sex and the City*, *Queer as Folk* and a new lesbian drama series called *The L Word*, while on stage and the cinema screen, nudity and sex scenes are no longer either surprising or controversial. French Connection, the UK clothing company, raunchily advertises itself around the world as FCUK while women’s super-low-rise jeans have descended so far down the torso that they have all but lost their functionality as a means of concealment. Pop stars such as Britney Spears and Beyoncé are as much sex performers as songstresses, while much of the output of MTV is indistinguishable from soft porn.

And guess what? It’s great! At least, the sexual revolution of the 1960s has paid off. We wanted the permissive society, and now we’ve got it. Sex is no longer a dirty word or an act carried out, if at all, by inhibited people in darkened rooms. Repression has given way to expression: the birth control pill has separated sexuality from procreation and allowed people freedom of choice over the kind of sexual lifestyle they pursue. Now people can talk about, experience and celebrate sex in all its forms.

Still, I am sure you would be disappointed if I did not also sound a note of despair. And it is this. However deluded the 1960s hippies may have been when they advocated free love, what some of them had in mind was more than just sexual freedom. They had in mind a hopelessly romantic, utopian idea of a world in which love, rather than money or power, ruled.

Instead, just as commerce seized upon and exploited all the other fresh opportunities for profit thrown up by the liberalization of the 1960s, it sought to make money from sexual liberation, too. But since it could not legally sell sex itself, it had to make do with the next best thing: selling sexual images, sometimes known as pornography.

As a result, we are experiencing what you might call the pornification of society. In the days of prudery and sexual repression, pornography existed on the fringes of society; it was dirty, sleazy and often illegal. Now that we are sexually more liberated, pornography has entered the cultural

mainstream as part of the vast new sex industry that has sprung up to exploit the commercial potential of our more permissive social mores.

The great triumph of pornification is not that lap-dancing clubs are now almost as commonplace as McDonald's, but that no one feels guilty about going to them any more. And its even greater triumph is that, somewhere along the way, women stopped objecting to porn culture and embraced it. Now women go to lap-dancing clubs with their men, take pole-dancing lessons that they are told will empower them, wear thongs derived from strip club culture, put on T-shirts saying "Porn Star" and learn how to do dirty dancing just like their heroines on MTV.

I realize I may be missing the point here. Once, if it walked like a duck and talked like a duck, it probably was a duck. Now, if it walks like hooker and talks like a hooker, it is probably just a postmodern chick on a night out having a laugh and pretending to be a hooker. The next day she will be back at work complaining about the glass ceiling. Either way, as we guys like to snigger, it is just moan, moan, moan.

Does pornification matter? I will leave women to decide whether it degrades them or not. Otherwise, aside from the collapse of marriage as a social institution and the looming extinction of humankind due to the plummeting birthrate, it does not seem to be doing nay harm; although I do sometimes worry that it is turning sex into just another commodity. I mean, there is not a lot of warmth in the way it is peddled to us as a consumer good, is there?

The FCC notwithstanding, sex is out there in abundance; now, as somebody said in the 1960s, all you need is love.

MY SISTAHS

THE EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN IN HIP-HOP CULTURE

BY AYANNA

Hip-hop is the latest expressive manifestation of the past and current experience as well as the collective consciousness of African-American and Latino-American youth. But more than any music of the past, it also expresses mainstream American ideas that have now been internalized and embedded into the psyches of American people of color over time.

A part of the learned mainstream American culture is sexism and misogyny. Hip-hop culture is frequently condemned for its misogynistic exploitation of women, but this misogyny has its roots in the culture in which we live. Hip-hop but can be explored and used as a valuable tool in examining gender relations. It brings to surface the issues that face many young people, such as discrimination, peer relations, and self-worth, that can be considered in order to bring about change in the misogynistic aspects of hip-hop culture and American culture, in general. For young people that do not hold sexist ideals, mainstream hip-hop may influence them to do so as it spreads and continuously gains popularity. And others are directly and indirectly supporting an environment that allows sexism to continue.

Exploitation of women in hip-hop culture has become an accepted part of it for both the artists and audiences alike, and many critics blame the music without looking any deeper. When going to any hip-hop related event, my friends and I normally expect that we will be disrespected verbally and physically, and have to prepare ourselves accordingly. We have to be careful in choosing what clothes to wear, how we carry ourselves and what we say. I have often wondered

why it is so acceptable (for men and women) and what the roots of the values expressed in the culture are.

Hip-hop culture, started by black and Latino youth in New York City, (by definition) encompasses rapping (and now singing), deejaying, break-dancing, and graffiti-writing, but has evolved to be much more than that. It is now a lifestyle for many young people mostly between the ages of 13 and 30. It now involves music videos, fashion, language, the club scene, and the general way in which young people interact with one another. Hip-hop culture is widely used in commercials (Coca-Cola, Burger King), fashion advertisements, video games, TV shows, and there is even a hip-hop exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. The most powerful and influential part of hip-hop culture has come to be rap music, a form of poetry that is said over musical instrumentation. In recent years rap music has developed a reputation of being brutally honest, violent, and misogynistic.

Much of the music and many videos specifically transmit, promote, and perpetuate negative images of black women. All women, but mostly black women in particular are seen in popular hip-hop culture as sex objects. Almost every hip-hop video that is regularly run today shows many dancing women (usually surrounding one or two men) wearing not much more than bikinis, with the cameras focusing on their body parts. These images are shown to go along with a lot of the explicit lyrics that commonly contain name calling to suggest that women are not worth anything more than money, if that. Women are described as being only good for sexual relations by rappers who describe their life as being that of a pimp. In many popular rap songs men glorify the life of pimps, refer to all women as they think a pimp would to a prostitute, and promote violence against women for 'disobeying.'

Of course, not all rap songs are misogynistic and all black men do not speak and think this way, but large percentages within hip-hop culture do. The name calling disrespects, dehumanizes, and dishonors women. If a man labels a woman with any of these names, he may feel justified in committing physical or psychological violence against her. The name-calling may also be representative of the way these men are thinking and feeling the anger, disdain, and ill feelings toward women. Joan Morgan, who refers to herself as a hip-hop feminist, reveals, "Yeah, sistas are hurt...But the real crime isn't the name-calling, it's their failure to love us---to be our brothers in the way that we commit ourselves to being their sistas."^[1] Many black men within hip-hop culture who battle racism and oppression themselves everyday have been conditioned by society not to trust or love, and if they do not love themselves, it is difficult for them to love women or anyone else in a healthy manner.

Misogynistic hip-hop does not only expose black men's pain, but it also shows the issues that black women may want to deal with. Much of the sexual exploitation in hip-hop culture is done with the consent and collaboration of women. A significant amount of misogynistic hip-hop consumers are women, and hundreds of bikini-donned women show up for the music video shoots as unpaid participants.^[2] Dance clubs and backstages of concerts are flooded with women who express willingness to do anything sexually with a man to get drinks, money, jewelry, or just to feel privileged and wanted.

Women, especially black women, have less access to power, material wealth, and protection and so have historically used sex (in prostitution and various other domains) as the "bartering chip" to gain access.^[3] Misogynistic ideas and practices from the past have been passed down to today's hip-hop youth. For example, during slavery the black woman was often forced to have sexual relations with any male (slavemasters, overseers, and slaves) that desired her. Black women were

sometimes used as breeding instruments to produce more human property, and at other times forced to have sex to pay for food, the safety of her children, or to be treated less harshly on a day to day basis. They were "paying" with their bodies as a survival strategy.

Out of this emerged the stereotype of black women as promiscuous and oversexed, and this shaped some black women's sexual morality. Some started to look at themselves as society viewed them, and some accepted that they had no control over their own bodies. When trying to fit into white society after slavery and take on ascribed white gender roles. Some black men wanted black women to have a subordinate role in the home while some women wanted men to be the sole economic providers. They have been, for the most part, unable to meet each other's expectations, but these same obsessions are demonstrated in hip-hop culture. Some women want men to be the economic providers, and use their sexual power to receive economic gain from men. While some men within hip-hop want women to be passive and have learned to manipulate women by offering money and power to them.

In a study done about black male/female relationships of the hip-hop generation, many black men in the hip-hop culture that were interviewed valued economic resources and used these resources as a way to manipulate and control women. And some women negotiated with their bodies for things that they wanted.[4] In order to gain access to these things and to get the love and attention from men that they want, some women felt they must cater to the exploitative images of what men want and think women should be.

Many women defined their own worth on what they can do for and get from a man. Some women were willing to take risks with their bodies, minds and hearts hoping to raise their socio-economic status and gain security for their children's future, and they have learned to use their sexuality to do this. Vibe Magazine talked to four women in the September 2001 issue who all regularly had one-night stands or on-going sexual relationships with rappers. One of the women Vibe talked to is Nikki, a 30-year-old woman who has had many lovers in the hip-hop industry. Vibe said, "...her lovers read like a Who's Who of rap." [5] Her reason for partaking in multiple insignificant relationships with rappers was, "I've got nothing to offer...No education, no good job, no nothing. So why would a man want me, other than sex? I felt I had to give, so I used myself." [6] Many women like Nikki are put all of the blame on themselves for being used by men. They assumed and accepted that men would oppress and disrespect them. As another one of the women described, "If you had the right kind of man that wasn't controlling, and you were like a team, it'd be cool...But there's no man out there like that." [7] The four women described a new low in relationships between men and women within the hip-hop community. Men thought that women were only worth giving them sexual favors, and women thought men are only worth giving them money.

Censorship of hip-hop music is not the solution. Instead, the solution is to change the culture, system, and ideology so misogynist lyrics are not written. There are female hip-hop artists and consumers who are trying to fight against the hip-hop misogyny, but many times they are not taken seriously. Some female artists try to work within the current male-dominated industry and play the expected misogynist role. Others are seen as misusing sex and feminism and devaluing black men, or just "shootin' off at the mouth." [8]

Education is the first step in changing gender relations in the hip-hop community. People first need to be made aware that women's rights are being violated verbally in the sexist lyrics, in physical interactions at hip-hop events, and in the general way that hip-hop youth interact with one another everyday. Each individual can remember the roots of

his/her own internalized sexist ideology. Knowing the history of this ideology, we can keep history from being repeated. A change in the hip-hop culture's collective consciousness can spread to the larger population, or vice versa. We need knowledge to act and speak out against the exploitation of women, not only in hip-hop culture, but in all cultures everywhere.

THE VILLAGE VOICE: MARCH 17-23, 2004

THE HEIGHT OF DISRESPECT

NEW STUDY ON 'HIP-HOP' SEXUALITY FINDS ANTI-WOMAN STRAIN—EVEN AMONG YOUNG WOMEN

BY THULANI DAVIS



Teens in New York: Who's baggin' whom?

(photo: Cary Conover)

While statistics tell us that across the country teen pregnancy is declining and sex education is increasingly effective, most of the adolescents who are getting pregnant are the very poor. A recent study of sexuality among African American youth in households earning less than \$25,000 per year was prompted in part by figures showing that black adolescents are becoming sexually active at younger ages than other youth, and are suffering from HIV/AIDS in the highest numbers.

For some, listening to the young people videotaped (but not named) during focus groups for the recent study might be more disturbing than reading the stats.

Although the study gives short shrift to its second mission—to explore the connections between the teens' attitudes and media consumption—their comments overwhelmingly display the "hard" and cavalier posturing of some segments of rap and hip-hop culture. The tones are generally dismissive, the bravado is amped, and the vocabulary is objectifying. "Everything is flipped. We used to bag chicks—now they're baggin' us," said one New York

male. And even those who expressed these attitudes cited certain hip-hop artists as more "positive" and called for more "message" in the music.

The study, conducted by Motivational Educational Entertainment (MEE), a Philadelphia communications firm that researches and markets to urban and low-income groups, refers to these teens as "the hip-hop generation." In reality, the teens interviewed—between 16 and 20 years old—are probably children of the first hip-hop generation (usually considered people born between 1965 and 1980). The subjects of this study, then, have been raised during the rise of this influential culture and may reflect the long-term effects of the devastation of black communities following the civil rights and black-power movements.

The most telling attitudinal change from the "movement" years is the absence of any influence of feminism and the open disdain for black women. As the authors put it, "Black females are valued by no one." The study's glossary includes six nouns used to describe males: Dog, homeboy, playa, lame, sugar daddy, and payload, another word for sugar daddy.

For women, there are at least 15, none good: Block bender, woo-wop, flip-flop, skeezer, 'hood rat, 'ho, and trick all mean promiscuous female. In addition, there are freak, bitch, gold digger, hoochie mama, runner, flipper, shorty, and the more ambiguous wifey. Young women in the interviews also use some of these terms.

In the survey of 2,000 teens, who were contacted through 80 community-based groups in nine urban areas, the "play or get played" ethos is equally influential among males and females, along with this disrespect for black women. The survey found that urban youth continue to engage in risky sexual behavior in relationships the teens themselves describe as lacking emotional intimacy and trust.

MEE's study, funded by the California Endowment and the Ford Foundation, was conducted with the help of a multicultural group of 10 scholars—social scientists, clinical psychologists, and media experts. The group's goal is to get community-based service organizations and creators of entertainment programming to make more effective interventions with this generation of adolescents.

Professor Beth Richie of the University of Illinois at Chicago, one of the study's scholars, said, "Young people today in lower-income black communities are facing a . . . whole set of stereotypical images of themselves—hypersexual, sexually irresponsible, not concerned with ongoing intimate relationships. [They] can't help but be influenced by those images." When several young women were talking about their reluctance to use condoms, one said that no one on TV or in films is ever shown using them.

According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, African American adults and adolescents in 2001 had an AIDS case rate 10 times higher than whites. African American youth account for 60 percent of new AIDS cases, and black females ages 13 to 19 represent 66 percent of AIDS cases reported among young women, according to the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Minority Health. Teens repeatedly reported that "everybody" is having sex and complained that most sex-ed classes begin in eighth grade, by which time, they thought, most kids have already had sexual intercourse.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that black teens are more likely than whites to have had sex, more likely to have begun at an earlier age (13), and to have had more than four partners by that stage of life. Blacks are also much more likely to have been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant.

The MEE survey reveals some of the attitudes behind the behavior. On several occasions in the MEE focus-group videos, males casually mentioned group rape—doing "bust-outs," or handing off partners for others to "try out." Even if bravado or "lying on [one's] dick" may account for some of the tales and blasé attitudes toward this sexual violence, the fact that young women reported it too, along with some admitting to having had sex with more than one partner at a time, suggests a disturbing acceptance of the abuse of women.

One Atlanta teen explained his promiscuity by saying, "I ain't cheatin' 'cause I ain't shit; I'm cheatin' 'cause *she* ain't shit." And sadly, both males and females frequently displayed their distrust of females as a group. A young New York woman said, "If I have a problem, I prefer to take it to a man rather than a girl. A girl might try to take your man." Women are "girls" but boys are "men"? An Oakland male said girls "don't trust each other, that's why I can't trust them."

A number of women said having multiple partners was the way to combat this devaluation. As for the chance to have lives of their own, these girls, the study's authors said, do not expect or "feel empowered" to achieve them. Since many do not expect exclusive relationships with partners, and sex is spoken of as a transactional relationship rather than an emotional one, keeping a partner by way of sex or pregnancy seems a viable strategy, at least temporarily.

A partner whom a male turns to purely for sex, dubbed a "shorty," is not a person he wants to take out—and if so, only "to McDonald's," and there is no escape: "Once a shorty, always a shorty." Marriage is not a priority, and committed relationships are often disdained by both sexes, though some males have steadies they call "wifey." One man described his preference: "That's the chick you want to be with; she's always got a condom, she don't want to have no kids, she doesn't want to catch nothing."

The prevalent disrespect for women has also, some teens suggested, resulted in more open homosexual relationships among females. According to the study, "overwhelmingly, across all nine cities, youth of both genders spoke openly about the increased occurrence of female-on-female sexual relationships." While some teens attributed the phenomenon to mutual understanding among women, others, including one of the scholars, cited mistreatment by men. Only lesbians cited same-sex attraction.

Dr. Maisha Hamilton-Bennett, a clinical psychologist, said, "Young women have told me they are choosing homosexuality in response to this whole 'hood rat/skeezer' definition that some of the heavier, darker, and less attractive women are getting." A study of factors such as color and size in the disparagement of black women in pop culture would be welcome information. Among black women, there are volumes of anecdotal material affirming our sense of marginalization from the beauty norms, and magazines and music videos imply that Beyoncé is the ideal of the moment.

The scholars who worked on the study suggest broad reforms along with further outreach on health issues. "What we're finding out from our HIV prevention research is that if you're able to re-create social fabric within a very poor black community, you have a greater level of social control over youth," said Carl Bell of the University of Illinois, "and they tend to delay their sexuality expression and their risk-taking behaviors. So [for] intervention strategies, the whole issue is rebuilding the village and trying to re-create social fabric if it's not already there."

WASHINGTON TIMES: MARCH 8, 2004

HIP-HOP'S DANGEROUS VALUES

BY CLARENCE PAGE

Black teen girls don't get much respect, not even from each other. That's just one of the startling findings of a recent study of the sex and gender attitudes of low-income black teenagers. It offers new evidence, as if we needed it, to me and to other parents of black teenagers that the standards of "black authenticity" promulgated in hip-hop culture are not only too narrow but downright dangerous.

With funding from the Ford Foundation and the California Endowment, MEE (Motivational Educational Entertainment) Productions Inc., a marketing firm that specializes in the buying patterns of urban youths, conducted a 10-city research study of teens aged 16 to 20 years old.

The study found black urban youth from households earning under \$25,000 a year to be remarkably untouched by positive messages from schools, parents, the media and health-care providers about responsible sexual behavior.

But the teens did display attitudes consistent with the cool macho pose of hip-hop rappers. Their mottoes: "Use or be used," among others, and "Get it while you can."

And, consistent with a culture that uses "bitches" and "ho's" as labels for every woman but one's mama, the study reveals, "Black females are dissed by almost everyone," including other black females.

Compare, for example the half-dozen slang nouns in the study's glossary that are used to describe males ("Dog... homeboy... playa... lame... sugar daddy... payload") with some of the words used by both teen boys and teen girls in the survey to describe women: "skeezer... 'hood rat... 'ho... trick... freak... bitch... gold digger... hoochie mama."

The study of the "hip-hop generation" fails to pin down the big question: Does rap music and other hip-hop culture influence teens or merely mirror the culture that teens already have created? The answer is probably both.

Born since the mid-1980s, today's teens grew up awash in hip-hop and so did their parents. The sad consequences have been a narrow and distorted view among many black youngsters, among others, of what it means to be black.

It was back in the 1960s, I painfully recall, that "authenticity" began to replace the more generalized "cool" as the standard for acceptable tastes and behavior among black youths. It was a period marked by big Afros, dashikis, bib overalls, jungle combat boots and a propensity for greeting each other with defiantly raised fists. Ah, youth.

Such was the "authentic" look among black college students, of which I was fortunate enough to be one in the late '60s. The "authentic black" came to define a person who did not "sell out" to bourgeois middle-class standards, the same values that enabled our families to prepare us for college in the first place.

Even if we aging black Baby Boomers no longer buy that narrow notion of blackness, a lot of our kids and grandkids do. In 1986, Signithia Fordham and the late John Ogbu shocked many with a landmark study of "oppositional cultural identity" in black teens who derogate academic achievement by their peers as "acting white."

Still, there are signs of hope. Among those who expressed some pretty raunchy attitudes in the MEE study, some also praised certain hip-hop artists as more "positive" and called for more "message" in pop music.

And in another section headlined, "Wish I woulda waited: The secret allure of virgins," many sexually active youths said sex wasn't all they had hoped and that they wish they had waited until

they were married or at least older.

And many of the young men, in a reflection of times past, in the study still showed significant respect for virginity they would not express outside the group. Girls who don't "give it up" are males' top choices for long-term partners.

What is to be done? Pardon my dangling prepositions, but like other generations, today's youths probably are just looking for someone to look up to and something to believe in.

We, their elders need to provide it. We need not only to reach out and show the world a broader vision of what black culture is all about, but also to reach back and mentor our least-privileged youngsters. They're not going to learn life's valuable lessons from CDs alone.

Issues and Debate:

03.19.04 10:03 PM Brook'nam, Nu Yawk

"Black females are valued by no one."

Isn't that a very powerful quote? It's a quote from the authors of a recent study about African-American youth and sexuality. Thulani Davis penned [an article](#) in this week's *Village Voice* that discusses the study, and focuses on the notion that since the hip-hop generation came about (those born 1965 - 1980 would be considered the first hip-hop generation) there has been a dearth of feminist voices. ... While I was reading this Thulani Davis article, I thought about a post I was going to put up a couple of weeks ago. One Sunday, while reading *The New York Times*, I came across an article that talked about hip-hop artists joining the ranks of the adult entertainment industry. I didn't really read much beyond Lil Jon and the Ying Yang Twins and 50 Cent's foray into the porn industry. I believe the reason I never finished it was because I kept getting stuck on the fact that after the Grammys, Lil Jon was running upstairs to film some girl-on-girl action for his adult film series. Not so shocking of course, if you've seen Nelly and the St. Lunatics video for the "E.I. (Remix)" also known as "Tip Drill." Petey Pablo's "Freak-A-Leek" video pales in comparison, though it does have some moments where one would question how in the world it got past the censors. Hip-hop videos, often border the boundaries between soft and hardcore porn, and if you've got a public access cable station in your hood, or watch BET uncut, trust you've seen what I'm talking about. Women never appear in a positive light, but the truth is these women agree to appear this way.

Back in 2001, an artist who exhibited in *One Planet Under a Groove: Hip Hop and Contemporary Art* at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, juxtaposed images from adult entertainment and hip-hop music videos. I'd be damned if you could tell them apart. Women are to blame, just as much as men here.

For one, there is no strong female voice in rap music today. I mean the Queen, not the Bee, but the La, hailed once, but will an era like that ever have its chance to shine again? Shoot, even the first hip-hop act to really have some serious sales, Salt-N-Pepa, topped charts with hits that sang of "pushing it real good." Doesn't that kind of remind you of Ghostface & Missy's new song, "Push?"

At one time, when the whole black power and native tongue movement of hip-hop was the ruler, there were females with messages in their music. But what was interesting is that as time passed, women had to be as hard and as aggressive as men - remember Yo-Yo in her baggy jeans? Lyte, Rage, and a slew of female rappers went the boy/girl route for awhile. Then when Foxy and Kim hit, everything became sexualized (we watched Salt-N-Pepa go through this type of transition during their time of making records).

Whose the hottest female rapper today? It's probably, that's right you guessed it, Missy. And didn't she lose a "few pounds in her waist fo' ya?" C'mon, you gotta' see where I'm going with this. And I'm one who once wrote of Lil' Kim representing freedom of sexual expression for women. But when does enough become too far?

Hasn't bell hooks and others in the cult crit circle spoken again and again about hip-hop's misogynistic stance? Somehow those messages fall on deaf ear. As Todd Boyd pointed out in *The New HNIC*, hip-hop has somehow replaced the civil rights movement. And what is its message?

I'll give you an example. An animated film that Sony was going to bring to a theatre near you in either the 0-3 or the 0-4, entitled Lil' Pimp, about a white, freckled, 9-year-old pimp who struts his ho's around the 'hood is said to feature the voices of various hip-hop artists, including Ludacris and Lil' Kim. Sony has since pulled the movie back either for straight to DVD, or on demand release. You can actually check it out at MediaTrip.com.

All of these things are brutally connected. And trust, I'm no hip-hop hater, but as Ta-Nehisi Coates pointed out in *The Village Voice* back in its June 4-10 2003 edition, many of hip-hop's artists tend to keep it unreal and overblow ghetto stereotypes. Coincidentally, these stereotypes are what "our" youth are hailing as their own version of the *Bible*, and it is manifesting itself in the most ugliest of ways in their lives, every day.

Again, I'm not a hip-hop hater, there are other factions of hip-hop (though they don't rise to mass cult status), and I still have hope for the music and culture as a whole. Also as I've written here several times over, parents need to be responsible for their children, not hip-hop. But if in fact, today's youth are the descendants of hip-hop's first generation, then what does it say about how the first wave of hip-hop influenced lives just like mine?

Comments

I remember on my blog once you said: "You see, as a black woman, ...I got a love/hate affair with hip-hop. I live this duality when it comes to hip-hop music. The lyrics are often not women friendly. The videos are often not women friendly. And these things do a lot toward the degradation of the black female identity in a popular cultural context, as well as in a transglobal commodified world."

Since then I've wanted to ask you...how do you reconcile your love for the music and your feminist values? Are you allowing too much as a Black woman?

Forget what outsiders think of us...where's the voice INSIDE the culture/industry that's keeping us in check? There are too many woman involved in the business side of the music- publicists, journalists, stylists, choreographers, A&R's, managers, promoters, and most importantly the ACTUAL FEMALE BUYERS THEMSELVES for there not to be some sort of awakening concerning the misogyny in hip-hop. Recently, Lizelle of Paper Thin Philosophies challenged all hip-hop bloggers to consider this issue (see <http://www.hiphopmusic.com/archives/000468.html>) Was this post in response to that? I may post mine tonight...

But bottom line is you ladies can demand a change if you want to. But you don't. Instead it seems that while we destroy you in our music, you destroy us in your literature. Yup. Black female authors have a bad habit of dissing men in written word. Read *The Color Purple*, *Waiting to Exhale*, and all of the wanna-be novels that came after.

Ain't we negroes a big happy family?

Posted by [Hashim aka Madison](#) at March 19, 2004 11:35 PM

Now THIS is what I'm talking about. I hit your site every week, but this entry is on point. I wish THIS appeared in XXL or the Source. I believe that hip hop is going through its own growing pains like Common said back during my younger years. I also think that the moment corporations are no longer interested in it, it will return to its essence of the spoken word on tight beats (I know that that comment isn't really germane to the conversation, but that money does fuel some of the foolishness). I hope it survives to be enjoyed by others the way jazz has.

I'm sorry to go on and on, but you hit it with this one...you hit it. Thanks and have a safe trip.

Posted by [the tall one](#) at March 20, 2004 12:28 AM

I wish I knew enough about hip hop to comment intelligently on this topic, but I don't. I'm afraid that the rampant sexism of hip hop is the main reason I closed my ears to it many, many years ago. Oh sure, I've been seduced by beats by the odd track here and there just like other people, but by and large, hip hop never entered -- or more correctly -- I never **let** hip hop enter my space because I could not, in good faith, allow something that devalued my sisters and myself so strongly into my space. It's self-defeating and insidious, and because I truly believe you are the company you keep, I don't keep company with the majority of the stuff that's out there.

The one comment that's spun its way through all of these threads is that if women stood up and said something/stopped dancing to/stopped their tacit approval of hip-hop that all of the foolishness would stop. Well, that's a nice (and naive, and not terribly nuanced) thought, but I'm reminded of what Malcolm X said about teaching white people about racism. I'm paraphrasing here, but essentially he said that black people shouldn't bear the responsibility of teaching white folks about racism, because as long as the teaching came from those who were most victimized by it, white folks would continue to tune it out. Feminism is similar. As long as complaints **only** come from women, men -- and sadly, many women -- will continue to tune it out. So yes, while it is sad and notable that women's voices have been largely silent on this issue, it's time for some brothers to step forward and say that this has to end, to talk openly and honestly about the role (myth) of macho and hyper-sexuality in hip hop, and their active (and passive) participation in the continued degradation of (mostly) black women.

Posted by [Cecily](#) at March 25, 2004 11:28 AM

Yeah hip hop may not have the females going on in the spotlight like it used to (i think the rise of gangsta rap has so much to do with that), but what about the politics of being popular - of just getting your voice out there? I respect Missy, because although she did lose all that weight she still isn't Beyonce and doesn't get skimpy in her videos. Her popular songs may be about pushing various parts of the body, but there's examples on the same album about respecting yourself sexually and getting over the gangsta-image fever. It's not Ntozake Shange, but it does move in a certain direction - like Eve singing about domestic abuse. We need to think about what the musicians that we see (out of allllll there are trying to make it) have to maintain just to stay in the spotlight, and is there a sacrifice of putting on MTV, BET, etc a hot song so that some more interesting, social, and political material on the album will get to those willing to buy it. Should we allow/expect/make excuses for artists who are putting out mixed signals (about being and representing 'female'), or weak signals, because they are working within popular standards? I wonder if anyone has an answer to how to change the media's standards - and the popular tastes, even for many women, they propagate thereby - so that the Sarah Jones' of hip hop get out to the young listeners out there who may mistake the game for reality (as many rap stars seem to do too).

Posted by [cams23](#) at April 4, 2004 03:51 PM

personally i love hip hop and im a devoted fan. but i do find a problem in the degrading lyrics toward women. Rappers always talkn about how much they love "their" black women- but then you hear them calling us "bitches" and "hos." No doubt that rappers run into a lot of hoes and groupies on the road- but when you express it in your music, make sure you specify whose the hoe- groupie and the normal female who supports your rap career. when i hear them shout out " suck my dick" "drop it like its hot" " fuck me, suck me" i tend to feel like rappers have a one track mind and feel that way about all females. i cant personally say this is true about rappers because i dont see what they see and i dont experience what they do , but if you dont want people to assume something about you, say what you mean and mean what you say. put a more positive image in front of you.

Posted by [lez](#) at April 12, 2004 03:36 PM

IMHO, hip-hop is now in the same place that rock & roll was in the 1970's----apolitical, uber-macho, materialistic, selling out to the very (white male) Establishment it once despised (or claimed to).

Posted by [radical dude](#) at April 19, 2004 11:05 AM

Well there are women out here who are the typical "hoe" that these rappers rap about...they live that life...they are HOES....so I say " A hoe is a hoe", just as "a Bitch is a bitch" If the shoe fits, where that bitch

Posted by [Angel](#) at May 3, 2004 05:47 AM

[HTTP://WWW.FEMINISTE.US/BLOG/ARCHIVES/000813.PHP](http://www.feministe.us/blog/archives/000813.php) MARCH 23, 2004

"I'm such a bad feminist," I told Bryan the other day as I extolled the finer points of the Ghetto Boyz, one of the dirtier groups in old school hip hip. And should I mention that I just got a bunch of Three Six Mafia? Yup. Bad feminist. I'm just as likely to like a song for clever lyrics and a driving beat as I'm likely to love it for nostalgia's sake. When I was a young 'un and first realizing how important music would be to me, gangsta rap was coming to the forefront of the music scene. I remember watching "Nothing But a G Thing" on MTV after school one day, thinking it was the coolest, freshest thing that I'd seen in a long time. But why were they dousing that poor woman at the party in the end of the video? Was she being uppity? Didn't make any sense.

As Jason points out, many of the women who hear these songs think, "They aren't talking about me. Holla!" and drop it like it's hot, loving the music even as it degrades them. And yes, you can include me in that group.

The misogyny in hip hop is no different or extreme than the misogyny of 80s hair bands or jock rock, but we rarely discuss that music scene anymore, presumably because we think that these are white boys on rock n roll entitlement kicks and are thus beyond help. In the end, I think the misogyny in hip hop has more to do with the points raised in the article about [50 Cent's "gay problem"](#) in addition to misogyny in greater American culture than it does to an isolated problem in hip hop alone.

While female rappers do little to help the problem of empowerment, unless it occurs in the bedroom, we at least have their voices prominently lauded in hip hop. Surely more, and more progressive voices, will rise to the top. Nonetheless, I occasionally stop bobbing my head and wonder, *why the hell do I still listen to this?*

No conclusions here, but many questions.

3. Selling Out: Hip Hop as a Commodity

THE TORONTO STAR: TUESDAY APRIL 6, 2004
**RAPPERS AS PITCHMEN ARE A SELLOUT TO SOME
CBC PROGRAM EXAMINES COURVOISIER SYNDROME IN GENRE:
MATERIALISM IS REPLACING POLITICS,**
BY ASHANTE INFANTRY

Is hip hop for sale? What relationship does the genre have with the liquor industry? Are rappers intentionally writing lyrics that will and them advertising deals?

These are some of the questions raised in *Rhyme Pays: Hip Hop and the Marketing of Cool*, a *Marketplace* special airing on CBC-TV tonight at 8.

Over eight months, host Clifton Joseph traveled from Toronto to New York and France to explore the proliferation of product placement in hip hop.

He found few were willing to discuss the phenomenon that occurs on two fronts: the positioning of consumer items, such as cell phones and pagers, in music videos; and the referencing of brand names in rap lyrics.

And those who did talk didn't add much clarity.

Take hip hop mogul Russell Simmons, for instance. On camera, he opined that rapper Busta Rhymes was likely inspired to write his 2002 hit "Pass the Courvoisier" with fellow hip hop star Sean "P. Diddy" Combs after attending a Courvoisier-sponsored showing of Simmons's Phat Farm clothing line. Only after the song became popular, he noted, did the rapper receive money from the French cognac company.

However, in a separate interview, Courvoisier people said they never paid Busta Rhymes, merely sponsored a few of his events once the song took off.

Busta Rhymes wasn't available to answer Joseph's questions about remuneration and possible motivation for the tune.

"Busta has said that he's really a Hennessy drinker and that he used Courvoisier (in that song) because it rhymes better," said Joseph, also a well-known Toronto dub poet.

"My question is... better than what? Because in that song 'Pass The Courvoisier' is not rhyming with anything, it's the chorus.

"We found it suspicious that Russell Simmons's advertising agency dRush had been working for Courvoisier for a year or two before the actual tune was released."

One thing is clear: On the heels of that song, sales of the pricey drink jumped more than 20 per cent worldwide.

The *Marketplace* special depicts the increase in demand for the cognac at Toronto bars and nightclubs, as well as how influential hip-hop videos are helping to determine how Canadian teens shell out the \$25 billion in spending money at their disposal annually.

And while rappers Nelly and 20 Cent are shilling for Nike and iPod, respectively, in their music and videos, other artists are using their own power to tout in-house goods. Jay-Z owns U.S. rights to the Scottish vodka Armadale as well as the Roca Wear clothing line, and both appear in the rapper's videos.

Ownership is of little comfort, said Joseph.

“You can admire some elements of them taking charge, but when you're dealing with a genre of music that has prided itself on coming from the streets and being real and (on) its history of political-social consciousness and you look at what's happening now – you can clearly see that they've turned mainstreet rap into a marketing tool,” he posited.

“As materialism and getting paid have moved so much to the forefront of the music, it has de-emphasized politics and culture.

“What does it benefit this so called hip-hop generation if a small number of rappers get hugely rich?”

While product placement has become rife in entertainment since the use of Reese's Pieces in the film *E.T.* in 1982, (think Samsung cell phones in *the Matrix* films and Pepsi in *Charlie's Angels*), hip hop is more vulnerable to the temptation than other types of music, said Joseph.

“Although you'll see Sting in ads for Jaguar and Céline Dion selling Chrysler, their music remains separate,” Joseph explained.

“But hip hop is laced in product shout outs. And while the genre is expanding outwards and a lot of money is being made, the music itself is watering down almost to a level of irrelevance.

“This is the music that was supposed to be different. (Veteran rapper) ChuckD said rap was the CNN of black America, but nowadays it's more like *Entertainment Tonight*.”

Issues:

Rappers acting as pitchmen for products are seen as a sellout

Is hip hop for sale to the liquor industry/fashion industry? Are rappers writing lyrics with the purpose of snagging lucrative advertising deals? Is there anything wrong with that? Are they betraying hip hop? What is hip hop supposed to be?

What's the difference between a musician and a jingle-writer?

An artist and an ad designer?

- example: song by Busta Rhymes: 'Pass the Courvoisier' and its effect on teens' spending on the product

- also: Nelly plugging Nike and Parasuco, 50 Cent shouting out iPod and Bacardi

Culture Jam: Kalle Lasn's definition of the brand of Cool: what is it? Why do we buy into it?

Who's addicted to it? What would it take to reinvent Cool?

- “they've turned mainstreet rap into a marketing tool. As materialism and getting paid have moved so much to the forefront of the music, it has de-emphasized politics and culture.”

- Discuss: what role does hip hop have to play in this age of political apathy? Are we now voting with our wallets instead of our ballots?
 - What will you do on the next election day?

- Does the phenomenon of people staying at home have anything to do with music and TV?

Activities:

1. Hip Hop Code of Ethics

According to Joseph, “this was the music that was supposed to be different.” What is hip hop supposed to be? What guidelines should hip hop artists follow to be true to hip hop’s roots and keep it real? Should product plugging be allowed? Are certain subjects (politics, struggle, race, poverty) more true to hip hop than others (making lots of money, having lots of sex, selling drugs and buying cars)? What do you think? Draft up a hip hop code of ethics and – why not? – send it to local (or even multinational) hip hop artists and see if you get any reaction.

2. Commercial Hip Hop

Compile a playlist or an album of songs that make product shout-outs. Are there some repeat offenders? What kinds of products do they tend to plug? What kind of lifestyles do plugging artists promote? What would you call a CD of shout-out songs?

3. Dear Diary: All Life’s an Ad

Shakespeare wrote that all of life was a stage. These days, it’s as though we’re living in an ad. We can see this most clearly in films that address the way products are pushed on us every second – films like *The Truman Show* or *Wayne’s World*. Do some research and find out exactly how much exposure the average person gets to the over-mediated world of pop culture and product placements. Keep a diary for a day or for a week (or, if you’re brave, a month) and see how you add up. The diary could be for all ads of any kind, or more specifically for just ads on TV or product placements in movies, music videos, or songs.

4. Tough Sell: Music with Message

JUNE 15, 2004: TORONTO STAR

HIP-HOP ARTISTS WRITE ANTI-GUN SONG

DROP THE CHROME CD PROCEEDS GO TO SOCIAL PROGRAMS



LUCAS OLENIUK/TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Rapper Maestro is one of many Canadian artists taking part in the anti-violence song aimed at youth.

The morning show on Flow 93.5 FM is typical of commercial radio: hit songs, bad jokes and celebrity gossip.

But The Morning Rush struck an unexpected note recently when a young man called in about Drop The Chrome, an anti-violence anthem produced and manufactured by the station.

The voice on the line didn't provide a lot of details, but told the hosts, Mark Strong and Jemeni, that he'd recently felt cheated by someone and got so angry about it that he headed out to confront his nemesis.

"I actually went out there to go cause a problem," he said, "but ... as I was driving down there, I heard (the song on the radio) and I said to myself, 'You know what, this guy ain't even worth this, man.'"

"If it wasn't for this song, maybe I wouldn't even be on my way to work this morning. I just want to call and let you guys know it did touch somebody, and maybe that has been another life saved."

Such is the hope for Drop The Chrome, which is being officially launched today at noon at Nathan Phillips Square. The single will be available for \$2 at Toronto HMV stores starting June 22.

The hip-hop track urges reason over force and features a dozen Canadian artists, including rappers Maestro, Michie Mee and Skitz, as well as Canadian Idol finalists Toya Alexis and Gary Beals.

All proceeds from the CD, which contains three mixes of the song, will be split between two youth-oriented charities: Tropicana Community Services and Youth Assisting Youth.

The project, endorsed by Mayor David Miller, was born of conversations between producer Marcus Kane, who has previously worked with rapper Snow and singer Glenn Lewis, and Aisha Wickham, Flow's Canadian talent development manager, about the spike in Toronto gun deaths.

Kane, who wrote and produced Drop The Chrome, moved here from Brooklyn, N.Y., three years ago. He's shocked by recent unsolved random incidents, such as the shooting of Louise Russo, the mother of three left paralyzed by a bullet after a gunfight erupted outside a North York sandwich shop.

"Listen, even though it's improved, there's still a lot of crime in New York, but most times it's over money," he said.

"Here, people are just popping people off and it doesn't even seem like there's a reason, even though there can never be justification. But when it gets safer in New York and seems to get more dangerous in Toronto, that makes no sense."

"Drop The Chrome" carries a message that Flow wants its audience, in the 18 to 34 demographic, to hear.

"We're appealing to our listeners, not that they're the ones carrying the guns, but they can buy the CD and support the charitable efforts to help the young ones coming up to see that there are positive choices they can be making with their lives," said Wickham.

Not all the feedback has been positive since the station started playing the song in April.

"We had some people call and say we're wasting our time, because a song is not going to solve the problems," said Jemeni.

"But when I ask for a better solution, they don't have one."

Rapper Michie Mee, who like all the artists is donating her royalties, said the project is "long overdue."

"I think it's really important for the community to hear from the artists on this issue," she said.

John Provezano said any money earned from the record will help reduce the list of at-risk youth waiting to be matched up with positive role models.

"We deal directly with children who have been either physically or sexually abused, suffer from low esteem, or have been affected by bullying and gang violence," he said.

Sharon Shelton, Tropicana's executive director, said the money will go to youth programs, school workshops, mentoring and aggression replacement training.

And she has great hopes for the song.

"We hope it will really penetrate, make young people stop and think before they make the wrong decision."

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Drop the Chrome

Written by Marcus Kane, Thrust, Maestro, Michie Mee, Skitz and Toya Alexis

Chorus:

Drop the chrome, don't you know
Nobody wanna die tonight
No Mama wanna cry tonight,
Drop the chrome and use your dome
'Cause I'm tired of livin' this drama in my life.

Skitz:

In a hot second this whole game will change,
Now you standin' butt naked,
Headed for the Gates.
47,38,22,16 any one of them splits spleen,
Mamas still scream
Babies shouldn't die, y'all feel me with that vibe?
Say, I'm glad to be alive
Take 'em off that waistline and walk with love tonight
Don't bring that hate inside
And everything is fine, I'm speaking to your mind.

Chorus

Maestro:

I'm like Malcolm on the podium sayin' his last speech
Before the bullet took him out, everyday be lookin' out.
The world is gettin' cancerous,
Who would imagine this
21st century still they couldn't bang with this.
I cry freedom, never pledge allegiance with demons
But with trigger squeezin' heathens keepin' the beasts them with reason.
To keep seizin', I hear my ancestors breathin'
They say drop the chrome and stop my people from bleeding.

Chorus

Michie Mee:

Bad man badness was here before you,
It's true, not everybody wanna die in your crew.
Follow the lead, you little man wanna be just like you
Easy for me to say, harder for you to do.
You shame, go on go make your mother explain
'Cause me and her rules go the same.
This can't be fore fame, think about how you end tonight
I'll stop telling you what's wrong
When you star showing what's right!

Chorus

Thrust:

Let's plan to organize; they got us killing our own,
I mean, we're throwing up these sets like we live in the zone.
You can't relax, watch Sopranos at home,
Without a clack clack bullet straight to the dome?
And offenders of these crimes, they're often known,
But when the cops arrive, no I.D. is shown.
These streets have gone wild
Like the days of Capone,
I mean we need some higher learning, time to drop the chrome.
It's like...

Chorus

Toya Alexis:
I know that life goes on, and I know I gotta be strong.
Yet the dying still goes on and on and on and on and on...

THE GLOBE AND MAIL: THURSDAY MAY 6, 2004
ALL WE ARE SAYING IS GIVE PEAS A CHANCE
POP: THE BLACK EYED PEAS AT KOOL HAUS IN TORONTO ON TUESDAY
REVIEWED BY JOSHUA OSTROFF

The Black Eyed Peas are at a familiar crossroads. Having collaborated with Justin Timberlake and traded their dusty soul samples for a commercial sheen and uncomplicated rhymes – not to mention turning former pop princess Fergie into a Pea – the onetime underground darlings Will.I.Am, Apl.de.Ap, and Taboo have been accused of selling out.

Their newfound fans, of course, don't care. Sure, they cheered for the L.A. group's still great 1998 single *Joints and Jam*, but they were there for last year's smash album *Elephunk*.

Eager to please, the fun-loving foursome launched into their current hit *Hey Mama*, but the otherwise tight live band rushed through the dancehall-infected number, unable to recreate its studio riddims. They stumbled again with the Puttin' on the Ritz-interpolating *Smells Like Funk*, but thanks to Fergie's b-girl belting, *Labour Day* got the energy back up.

Each Pea then took a turn freestyling, with Taboo and Apl easily out-rapping their written rhymes albeit still paling next to Wills' fierce scratchy flow and Fergie's sweaty scat session. But though impressive, the scheduled interlude tried a little too hard to prove B.E.P.'s hip hop credibility.

Bringing local crooner Esthero on-stage was a far more effective means of conveying cool. Her torch-lit but still street-level voice was in fine form – as was her form, in a cut-to-the-navel dress – on their impressive 2000 collaboration *Weekends*. It was yet another party song, but much better crafted than, say, *Let's Get Retarded* – though the overlong, anticipation-building intro to that anthem-for-the-wasted prompted a near mosh pit once the band started rocking out.

The girl-heavy crowd went equally wild during the highly choreographed relationship drama *Shut Up* but understandably lost interest during the encore band solos. No matter, their closer *Where is the Love?* showed that it was in the Kool Haus, with everyone gleefully singing the Timberlake hook to the highly addictive anti-war hit (though still filled with platitudes, the CIA-as-terrorist reference certainly has greater resonance today).

Boasting plenty of credibility, but slight album sales, was opening act Sweatshop Union. Where the Peas make simplistic please for peace, the Vancouver hip hop crew rapped about worker's rights, fascist regimes, and media propaganda. The half-dozen MCs (and one DJ) traded verses and chanted choruses on emotional cuts like *Better Days* and the anti-war-on-terror raps *The Human's Race* and *US*.

Though the rhymes were evenly shared, Kyprios emerged as the most distinctive Unionist, especially after performing his MuchMusic mainstay *This Is My Hit*. But while satirizing commercial hip hop, the intentionally overcatchy song was also the first to truly grab the crowd's attention.

As Black Eyed Peas proved, to get mainstream fans hearing positive messages, you still have to reel them in with a hook (and maybe a song about getting retarded, too).

Issues:

- Drop the Chrome: can it really "help the young ones...to see that there are positive choices?" How much can a song do? Is this effort a 'waste of time?' Or 'long overdue?'
 - Hip hop credibility: commercialization of Black-Eyed Peas: "to get mainstream fans hearing positive messages, you still have to reel them in with a hook"
 - o why is there a market for manufactured music? (films, books, etc. Formulaic, exaggerated, predictable)
 - o Do you have to 'sell out' and go mainstream like the Black Eyed Peas? Is this necessarily a bad thing if it gets more people listening to music with message?
 - o What other bands are at the same 'crossroads' that the B.E.P find themselves at? What have they done?
 - Commercialization of music in general, and the resultant rise in popularity of individual playlists instead of radio stations: "it's about reclaiming the power to soundtrack our own lives as we see fit."
- Complaints about what's playing on top 40 radio: "is this what passes for music these days?"
- nothing of the power of music to express truth, to tell a story, to stir emotion
 - instead: "monotonous," "blah-rock," "easily digestible;" evokes only "aggressively drunken bumping, grinding"
- "we need to reclaim the power from those that use music to sell, to mislead, and to appease:"
- giant chain stores, corporations, conglomerate radio stations and music networks
- downloading phenomenon: why?
- "The allure of downloading is not just that it is free, but that it gives the listener unprecedented power over their own soundtrack."
- "Their eardrums no longer vibrate at the whims of corporations, radio stations, and neighbours with bad taste."
- BUT: what's lost is music as a collective experience, or get at the heart of the problem
 - o "this new individualistic power does nothing to deal with the larger issues at stake, such as the relationship between capitalism and music, or the negative effects of disposable, sensationalist culture, or the epidemic of people with really bad taste in music."
 - What is bad taste? Is this elitism when we proclaim one kind of music as inherently more worthwhile, more valuable, just better?
 - Who's to say what should be getting produced and played?

- Who is doing that currently? How do they decide?

Activities:

1. Compare ‘*Drop the Chrome*’ with other songs on the market. Discuss sales figures and popularity and why this is the case. Does ‘do-gooder’ music (music with message) sell? Conduct a sampling survey in your school to come up with your school’s top ten list of hip hop hits. Which songs are so-called ‘music with message’ (or, ‘music with morals’) and which are about sex, drugs, and violence?
2. Design a marketing plan for the single *Drop the Chrome*. Look at the ways that record labels promote artists like 50 Cent and find ways to creatively generate some buzz without using the gangsta gimmicks.
3. Promote some local ‘underground’ hip hop artist in Toronto – even in your own neighbourhood in Toronto. Is there a group or an artist doing important hip hop work that you think deserves to be heard? Put together a plan to get it played on the radio and talked about among your peers. Can local talent like the Dope Poet Society be as big a hit in your community as big commercial artists?
4. Plan a school dance party, or at least a play list for one, that consists of songs like ‘Drop the Chrome’ and ‘Where is the Love’ – songs that don’t necessarily enjoy the glamour of gangster rap, but have interesting, socially relevant messages to communicate alongside great beats.
5. What is your personal soundtrack, the soundtrack of your life? Keep it real by telling the story of your life in your own way, recreating your experiences with sound. Record a real soundscape of daily life in you home, neighbourhood, or school. You can also make a video telling these stories, and set it to music.
6. Mock a music video: re-write the words or spoof the messages being conveyed. Take a look at the Culture Jam section of this manual or read *Culture Jam* by Kalle Lasn for more ideas.

5. Tell It Like it Is: Poverty and Violence

THE GLOBE AND MAIL: MARCH 22, 2003

BA-DA BOOM!

WHAT U.K. HIP-HOP HOTTIE MS DYNAMITE LACKS IN SIZE, SHE MAKES UP FOR IN RIGHTEOUS ANGER

BY SIMON HOUPT

If you never really believed that a rose by any other name would still be a rose, consider the evidence presented by England's newest hip-hop sensation, a delicate 21-year-old waif who carries the explosively boastful tag of Ms Dynamite. As you walk into a hotel room overlooking Central Park at sunset, the singer doesn't so much shake your hand as brush it with her own, like a gentle spring zephyr wafting across the skin. She curls her small frame tightly into the corner of a couch and briefly lays her head against the armrest, as pacific and content and cuddly as can be, and you think: This is Ms. Dynamite?!

Her real name is Niomi McLean-Daley and, she says, she'd be happy to have used just her given name on-stage if she thought she could have gotten away with it. But in the world of British garage music, aka two-step, from which she hails, MCs are like superheroes (or rappers on this side of the Atlantic), defined by their stage names.

"If somebody said to me, 'Right, you either die or you think of a stage name for yourself,' it definitely wouldn't be something big and extravagant or boastful" she says with a girlish purr, pointing out that her name was dreamt up by a friend. "I'd probably end up using Niomi." The image would be vastly different, but the music would still be – as J.J. Walker might say – Dyn-o-MITE!

Ms. Dynamite arrived on Canadian shores last November with her debut disc *A Little Deeper*, which quickly climbed onto the Top 10 lists of many thrilled and startled critics. Since Americans often take a while to accept things they can't claim as their own, the disc is only now being released in the United States, but she's making up for lost time. Saturday Night Live featured her as musical guest recently, and she's already in heavy rotation on MTV with her first single *It Takes More*. The song, which smartly attacks the conventional materialism and sexism of the rap world, a bold and characteristic statement of principles for Ms. Dynamite, and for Ms. Niomi McLean-Daley as well.

"Who gives a damn about the ice on your hand? / If it's not 2 complex / tell me how many Africans died for the buggettes on your rolex," it asks. "So what you pushin a nice car / don't you know there ain't no such thing as superstars / We leave this world alone / so who gives a fuck about the things you own."

Nobody hearing lyrics like that can remain ambivalent, and oh, the music! Mind-bendingly slippery counterbeats, blazing Santana guitar licks, even an accordion laid against a funky dance beat in that first single. There's a lot of unlikely music here, and it can floor you like a new strain of flu bug.

After opening for Eminem during his British tour last year, Ms. Dynamite became the first black woman to win Britain's Mercury Music Prize (donating the 20 000 pounds – or about \$46 000 – to charity) and later picked up two Brit Awards. Her deeply felt morality and righteous anger have been embraced by all those in the British music establishment who are disturbed by the virulent misogyny of the rap scene but fear being accused of racism for criticizing black artists.

“I really strongly believe in, like, equality and puttin’ a stop to kinda the injustices that take place in the world that affect everybody, and not in a naïve, I’m-only-21-years-old way,” she says, a sharp north (or “norf”) London accent robbing her blind of consonants.

“I say what I mean, I say what I see, I say what I feel and I don’t care who doesn’t agree wiv’ me, because I think there are not enough people that are willing to say what they really fink and there are to many people that are willing to kinda just stand up and be part of the crowd and make money and just go with the flow. There are lots of followers and not enough leaders.”

At 21, Ms. Dynamite is still idealistic enough to say what she believes and damn the potential consequences. She has been a vociferous opponent of the war in Iraq. Earlier this year, she appeared at a memorial for two young women killed by random gang gunfire at a Birmingham party, and she just signed on to a 10-city tour of British universities aimed at shaming the British government into doing more to prevent gun violence in poor communities, especially black ones. “I just feel like the world’s big sister,” she says. “I can’t help caring about people.”

That’s probably because she is, in fact, a lot of kids’ big sister. She’s the first-born daughter of a Jamaican father and a Scottish mother, who raised her on her own. Her mom, a teacher, had 11 children in all, including a boy born only two years ago. Though the singer chants in her eponymous single Ms. Dynamite that the family wasn’t financially blessed, they never wanted for love. It was a big ol’ raucous household, with lots of family and just as much music.

Her dad and her five uncles are all DJs, so she grew up listening to a jukebox worth of styles. But what really gets her charged – and you can hear the echoes through much of *A Little Deeper* – are records from the sixties. “Diana Ross, James Brown, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, Otis Redding, Aretha – they were always talking about something.”

Though she takes the macho rappers to task on her disc, she’s quick to insist that the hip-hop world isn’t the only factor in creating a culture of violence. “The majority of people that carry guns don’t carry guns because they listen to Jay-Z or whoever and think that it’s cool,” she insists. “We have a role – don’t get me wrong – we have a responsibility, I will definitely, as a musician myself, definitely put my hands to that and say that is true. But we’re just a part of the problem. There’s like hundreds of parts of the problem and there’s, like, a so much bigger part of the problem.

“It isn’t about black, it isn’t about rap, its’ about poverty,” she continues. “They just chose to always talk about it when it happens to be a black man that has shot someone, or black people that have died. White people die, poor people die of shooting each other all the time just as much as black people do - but they never show that.”

Ms. Dynamite is awfully wary of being called a role model, though, because of what happens to celebrities in Britain. She’s flown so high, so fast that she knows she’s due for a comedown. It’s already starting to happen, as some of the press snickers about the fact that she’s pregnant with her boyfriend’s child, without a wedding date set yet. (She says they do intend to marry, but in their own time.)

“In Britain, I see that they’re only putting me on a pedestal and creating me to be this heavenly, angelic, never-do-anything-wrong type – and that is like, way beyond the truth – just to knock me down.”

She smiles, and cuddles a throw pillow. "I just feel like, let them speak, let them say what they're gonna say. I don't give a shit."

Ah, to be 21.

ALTERNET: MARCH 18, 2004

RAPPER 50 CENT'S GAY PROBLEM

BY EARL OFARI HUTCHINSON

The temptation is to chalk the "I ain't into faggots" silly, inane slur that former street thug and hip hop artist 50 Cent made in an interview in April's Playboy Magazine as yet another case of a show boating rapper playing to the street crowd. But 50 Cent's comment and slur is what many black men say publicly about gays and many more say privately, and that includes the slurs. Their contempt for gays is hardly new.

I vividly recall the audience reaction to the scene in the 1971 film, Sunday Bloody Sunday when Murray Head and Peter Finch gave each other a big passionate kiss. The mostly black audience went wild. They screamed, jeered and hooted at the screen. It took several minutes for the crowd to quiet down and ushers to restore order.

As I left the theater, I listened to the young men talk. Their contempt and disgust for these two men spilled out into the street and into the parking lot.

They called them "faggots," "punks," and "sissies." It seemed as if they were trying to scrape the slime off themselves that the scene of these two men kissing had left on them. That was thirty years ago. Rap artists such as 50 Cent, as well as legions of black novelists and poets, have railed against the gay life style as unnatural and destructive, and some have publicly uttered anti-gay slurs without batting an eye.

But three decades after actors Head and Finch kissed in Sunday Bloody Sunday, it's not men kissing on the screen, but gay marriage, and as polls show more blacks, especially men, more rabidly oppose it than whites. The issue still punches hot buttons among black men and threatens and challenges their fragile masculinity at the basest and most ambiguous level.

From cradle to grave, much of America has drilled into black men the notion that they are less than men. This has made many black men believe and accept the gender propaganda that the only real men in American society are white men.

In a vain attempt to recapture their denied masculinity, many black men, mirror America's traditional fear and hatred of homosexuality. They swallow whole the phony and perverse John Wayne definition of manhood, that real men talk and act tough, shed no tears, and never show their emotions.

These are still the prized strengths of manhood for many black men. Whether it's Rapper 50 cent, and his other rap buddies, grabbing their crotch on stage, or the mindless male testosterone driven gang violence that wreaks havoc in black communities, the hunt is on to wave their prized tough guy male virtue to the world. When men break the prescribed male code of conduct and show their feelings they are harangued as weaklings, and their manhood questioned. Many blacks in an attempt to distance themselves from gays and avoid confronting their own biases dismiss homosexuality as "Their thing." Translated: Homosexuality is a perverse contrivance of white

males and females that reflected the decadence of white America. They make no distinction between white gays and other whites. To them whites are whites. That's evident in the vehement opposition of many black ministers and black conservatives to any comparison of the fight for gay marriage to the civil rights movement.

Then there's religion. Long before the religious right launched its national crusade against gay marriage, black men listened to parades of ministers shout and condemn to fire and brimstone any man who dared think about, yearn for, or actually engage in the godless and unnatural act of having a sexual relationship with another man. If men had any doubt about the moral truth of this message, there is the oft-cited biblical passage that sternly calls men lying down with men, "the abomination." Ignored are other biblical passages that encourage love, tolerance and respect among all humans.

While many Americans have made gays their gender bogeymen, many blacks have made gay men their bogeymen and waged open warfare against them. Black gay men are the pariahs among pariahs, and wherever possible every attempt is made to drum them out of black life. They carry the triple burden of being black, male and gay. They tell woeful tales of spending sleepless nights and endless days trying to figure out ways to repress, hide and deny their sexual preference from family members, friends, and society.

Polls show that more Americans than ever say that they support civil rights for gays, and a torrent of gay themed TV shows present non-stereotypical depictions of gays. But this increased tolerance has not dissipated the hostility that far too many black men feel toward gays. That won't change as long as they feel that their manhood is subverted, accept America's artificial standard of what a man is, and as long as some black ministers and black conservative leaders stir anti-gay attitudes. 50 Cent is proof of that, slurs and all.

HIP HOP NEWS: FNV NEWSLETTER: MAY 25, 2001

CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION

CEDRIC MUHAMMED

The recent airing of **MTV Cribs** featuring the expensive and expansive homes of many of rap music's premier stars provided just the latest example, in public, of the mentality and habitual behavior that Black entertainers and Hip-Hop artists, in particular today, are conditioned and pressured to accept. Unfortunately, the past history shows that the lifestyle of the rich and famous, far too often, for Black entertainers ends up becoming the lifestyle of the "poor and once famous" as Black athlete after Black entertainer spends more than they have earned and can no longer borrow to make up the difference.

Those who believe that Hip-Hop music breaks the mold in this regard should reconsider. The biggest rappers in the world are following a path that has been well trodden - excessive and wasteful spending on a lavish lifestyle is nothing new; only the names and faces are new.

The confluences of forces that go into the poverty development of a rap star are complicated, in many cases, but there are several elements that are consistently visible in the process. First, there is the decision made by the artists that their sudden explosion in cash flow means that they are "rich". This definition of "rich" of course, is not the one accepted in the rest of the world of plenty. For starters, a high income does not equate to wealth. The average rap star who pulls in close to a million dollars in yearly income has usually just achieved that income. Yet, they immediately assume a spending clip that is on par with individuals who have been bringing in one

million dollars annually for over a decade. At times, these Hip-Hop artists are even spending more money in their first 2 years of millionaire status, then those who have been raking in tens of millions, for years.

And of course the purchases being made are some of the worst, in terms of their utility and maintaining their value. At the top of the list of purchases made by most of the millionaire rappers that we know about and those featured on MTV Cribs are jewelry, custom made cars and luxury homes. Of the three, we consider the homes to be the best purchase, in concept, but by the time the artists has finished shaping their massive homes, the real estate has lost much of its attractiveness to others in the marketplace and we have heard stories of artists in a liquidity squeeze who have been forced to sell their homes at a price that is less than half of what it was purchased for and redesigned.

For years beginning in the mid 1990s we worked with Hip-Hop artists on protecting and saving their wealth. In most cases, but not all, we found artists who were simply overwhelmed and unaware of how much dough was coming in and at times, ignorant of how much was leaving.

Quite often there was an unsavory business manager or accountant who was behind much of the confusion and disappearing riches, but in most cases, the artists was responsible for the problem by not taking sufficient interest in their finances. And it was almost necessary to twist an arm in order to persuade an artist to audit their chief source of income - the record label - much less their accountant or business manager. We are pleased to have learned, of late, of a few artists who are taking back control of their financial status through audits and lawsuits against accounting firms and dishonest business managers.

But the problem can be solved with a new mindset that places a premium on wealth creation and disciplined spending which places an emphasis on the formulation of long-term financial goals and which gives in less to short-term wants. Such a strategy can be developed with the help of financial advisors and professional investment help, but wealth creation and disciplined spending begins with a personal decision made by an artist that he or she will live according to a set of values and principles and will establish their spending priorities accordingly. Unfortunately, because many Hip Hop artists don't value their lives as they should (as further demonstrated by the development of drug dependencies), many find it difficult to think in terms of a long life or in terms of a lifestyle that seeks luxury, money and good-looking homes as well as healthy relationships with family, friends and loved ones.

Of course, not all artists are losing their money because of wasteful spending divorced from morality. In fact, we have seen several artists go through tens and hundreds of thousands of dollars due to their efforts to financially support childhood friends and family members. But the efforts usually fail and bring the artists balance sheet down with them because the help to family members is not the best and most affordable form of assistance that could have been provided.

We have seen artists literally give members of their entourage ten to thirty thousand dollars in one summer, in cash. The money ends up going toward a variety of causes - good and bad - but the artists and the individual(s) have little or nothing to show for the expense or gift because it was not attached to an activity that would empower the recipient of the charitable giving. Instead of an investment like a college education, vocational school tuition, barber's school and license or computer training class, which would have allowed the individual to move into real economic activity, the cash simply burns a hole in the pocket of the usually less-skilled entourage member.

There are a few artists that we know who don't have the conspicuous consumption lifestyle. We were always impressed with **RZA**, of the **Wu-Tang Clan** who actually buys producing land and who has a diverse portfolio of investments. We also are impressed with artists like Redman who are known to do as many as 200 shows in one year and who are legendary for their penchant for saving their money.

When we were actively in the business we encouraged our artists to save their money and invest it in a variety of ways ranging from real estate and gold and silver coins all the way to the latest initial public offerings (IPOs) in the stock market. Some artists listened and some didn't but we at least, exposed them to a different mentality then that which was pulling them to the new car lot to spend almost as much on custom embroidery, rims, electronic accessories and a stereo system as they did on a new vehicle.

Hopefully, at the upcoming Hip-Hop Summit hosted by **Russell Simmons**, the serious issue of wealth protection and creation and the poor spending habits of artists will be addressed.

For all of the talk of the surveillance that the FBI and law enforcement have the Hip-Hop community under, and for all of the discussion of Hip-Hop being culture being controlled by the major distributors, we think considerable attention should be given to the mentality, practices and pathologies that make Hip-Hop artists their own worst enemies.

Conspicuous consumption is near the top of the list.

Issues:

In hip hop “there are too many people that are willing to kinda just stand up and be part of the crowd and make money and just go with the flow.”

- Are minorities untouchable in today’s politically correct wariness? Who is allowed to criticize black artists or the members of any other so-called visible minority? How?
- What does it mean to take a stand? When was the last time you stood up for something or spoke up? Does it have to be divisive, dramatic, controversial? (With today’s sound-byte, ADHD environment, is divisive, dramatic work the way to make people sit up and take notice?)
- Conformity: why? How?
- Making money: by conforming? Or by standing out?
 - Also: career and lifestyle choices, illusions, success
- Culture of violence: hip hop is not the only one to blame ...
 - ... but what is its role in our violent society? Does it create violence or reflect it, or both?
 - Violence: where does it come from? How is it perpetuated? Does commercial hip hop glorify it? How?
- “It isn’t about black, it isn’t about rap, it’s about poverty.”

Activities:

1. The Culture of Violence: A Recipe

Niomi takes the macho gangster rappers to task on her disk, but she insists that the hip-hop world is only a small factor in the much bigger problem: a general culture of violence. How do you perceive this culture of violence? Is it real? What evidence do you have of it in your lives?

What other factors are responsible? Create a 'recipe' for violence in the form of a poster, 'cookbook' or skit of a cooking show. Present your recipe to your class and to younger grades, and lead a discussion about your work.

2. Keep It Real: Violence in your Community

Search for different conflict resolution and mediation groups/ anti-violence groups in your community and invite them to come in and discuss their work. What do you think of their methods? What method would work best for your school/neighbourhood?

The Toronto District School Board has an anti-violence/bullying conflict resolution strategy. The Central Toronto Youth Services produced a police/school partnership model for an anti-violence community school for the Ministry of Solicitor General of Canada. The Canadian Justice Department has gotten rid of the Young Offenders Act in favour of a new Youth Criminal Justice Act. What's your take on the adults' plans to target violence in your community? Get a hold of one of the plans (search online or write to the appropriate government branch) and evaluate it the way your teacher might mark your reports and papers. Does the plan measure up? What are your suggestions? Write back to the government report-writers with feedback.

Set up an anti-violence program or event at your school. Have discussions with your classmates, teachers, guidance counselors and principal to come up with a program that best fits your school's needs. This could take the form of a 'youth court' for your peers, an anti-bullying club or a training workshop for youth facilitators (your school has crossing-guards to help keep kids safe; why not anti-violence guards?). Look up young people who have done similar work – for example, after the Columbine Massacre, 17-yr.-old Brandon Wolff set up a program that expanded state-wide in Pennsylvania, called SAVE-R-US (Students Against Violence Everywhere Are Us). <http://www.teenwebonline.com/saverus.htm>

3. "It's about Poverty."

Brainstorm some of the problems that come with poverty. What are the roots of poverty? Where do you see poverty in your community? Collect articles related to poverty in the news and explore the ways they are connected.

Plan a trip to a local United Way agency or another organization fighting poverty in your community. Create a documentary or report that can be shown at your school or in your local paper or TV station. Or: organize an event to raise money for your community organization, and come up with creative ways to raise awareness of poverty issues at the same time

6. What's Appropriate: Obscenity and Censorship

NOW | JAN 22 - 28, 2004

FK THIS SH*T!**

HIPHOP WITH BLEEPED CUSS WORDS -- WHAT'S THE POINT IF WE SAY IT IN OUR HEADS ANYWAY?

BY ELIZABETH BROMSTEIN

I WAS IN A CAB THE OTHER DAY WHEN Obie Trice's The Set-up with Nate Dog came over the radio. The driver was listening to FLOW 93.5. It went something like this:

"He used to pay this (dead air) / Give her lots of (dead air) / (dead air) wrong with that (dead air) man?/ He used to bring her through the 'hood / Treat the (dead air) to (dead air) good."

The actual deleted words are, in order: bitch, shit, fuck's (as in "what the fuck is?"), nigga, bitch and fuckin'.

"Why are they even playing it if they have to cut half of it out?" the driver wondered. I'm wondering the same thing, since according to the CRTC there are no words you can't say on the radio. So you can say whatever the fuck you want. Apparently, it's up to stations to police themselves.

And does it serve any purpose to bleep the words if the sentiment remains? If you are offended by derogatory references to women and black people or the use of words that refer to excrement and copulation in Obie Trice's The Set-up, does their removal placate you?

Wayne Williams, program director at FLOW and host of Flow Factor, explains that most times the songs will arrive with the disagreeable words already removed.

"There are two levels to what record labels produce, a radio edit and then a 'squeaky clean' edit," he says. "Sometimes on the regular radio edit, depending on the context of the song, words like 'ass' might get by. It depends on what they think programs will play, depending on what demographic the station caters to."

I love it. Record labels trying to figure out what they can get away with and still get airplay in the face of an entirely undefined moral radar.

For Trice's Canadian distributor, Universal, even pot references are too risqué.

Chris Garcia, national promotion coordinator at Universal, tells me, "We'll cut anything that might be a reason not to play it on the radio. We had an IRS track recently in which 'hydro ces' was mentioned. Hydro I guess could be water, but we took that out."

Another example Garcia offers is Hawksley Workman's We Will Still Need A Song. "The lyrics were 'Fuck you, you're drunk and acting tough.' and it was changed to 'Baby, you're drunk.' "

If California congressman Doug Ose has his way, the line on potty words in the U.S. will soon be a little clearer. He's drafted a bill that would ban "the seven dirty words" – fuck, shit, piss,

motherfucker, cocksucker, cunt and asshole – from radio and TV. Both "asshole" and "ass hole" are on Ose's list, to make it crystal clear.

Lord only knows where one decides to draw the line. Note that neither "nigger" or "nigga" is on the list. Maybe that's because it's OK when black people say it?

Neither is "bitch," which could qualify when used as "a pejorative term for a female." Thank goodness "fisting" is not on the list, which last time I checked has only one meaning.

"Cunt" is an interesting one. It sure as shit sends women all over the place into fits of indignation. Well, ladies, the joke is on you. One possible origin of the word, according to Diane Ackerman's *A Natural History Of Love*, is "quaint," meaning "a many-layered and enfolded mystery." Another is that it came from the Hindu goddess Kali, the life-giver, who was also called Kunti or Kunda. The generally accepted Latin term "vagina" literally means "sheath," as in "for a man's sword." Now which word do you like better?

Ron Cohen, chair of the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council, which reviews complaints against private broadcasters, doesn't think a similar bill would fly in Canada.

"I don't think that a bill of that nature is one that would bear any relevance to standards in private broadcasting. It's too non-contextual. It's as though every word that is anticipated in the bill, the way the bill is framed, is inherently problematic. While we would share some of the concerns for some of the words, they too, depend on context."

Back at FLOW, Williams says, "It's a theatre of the mind, if you will. Knowing what the sentiment is and actually hearing (the words) are two different things. There are certain records we won't play if they have references to killing women or if they're offensive to a race or gender, be it male or female. We just won't play them."

Williams adds, "With hip hop the music is brilliant, and the lyrics. Despite the cussin' and swearing, the magic around those lyrics, how creative they are with the English language, is unbelievable."

So if you're going to play them at all, you might as well play them in their entirety. Then people can really make up their mind whether they want to listen.

You can bleep out all the "bitches" and "hos" and "niggas" you want – but underneath it all the meaning is still there. @

Issue: censorship of swear words in Hip Hop: "what's the point if we say it in our heads anyway?"

- derogatory references to women and black people; excrement and copulation (bitch, shit, fuck, nigga): does removing them make the songs more appropriate, less offensive?
- California congressman Doug Ose: proponent of bill banning potty words (fuck, shit, piss, motherfucker, cocksucker, cunt, asshole)
 - o Why these words and not others? (ex. Nigga, bitch)
 - o Origins of words – how offensive is each choice, as compared to other words? Ex. History of the word "cunt:" Hindu goddess Kali? 'Quaint?' 'Many layered ...mystery' vs. "vagina:" "sheath...for a man's sword"

Activities:

1. Airing Dirty Laundry

So many issues are tied up in language – stereotypes, prejudices, sensitivities... here is an opportunity to swear all you want, unleash all the 'bad words' and explore their meanings, where they come from, and what makes them 'bad' in the eyes of schoolteachers, legislators, and grandma.

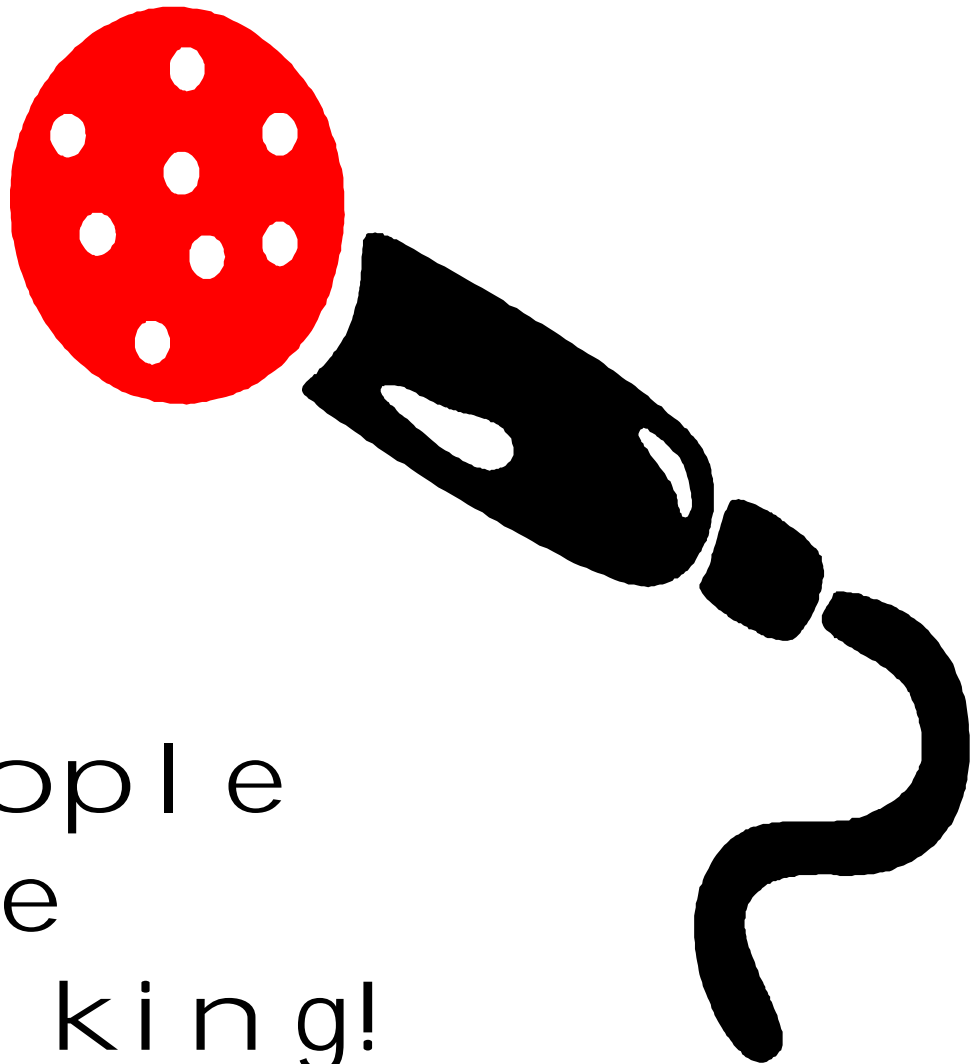
- Throw all the cuss words, 'offensive' terms and forbidden fruit onto a chart or blackboard, and discuss what they mean and when they're used.
- Have everyone look into the history and context of their 'bad word' and present it to the group.
- How can language be used for social change? (ex. "rape" vs. "sexual assault")
- Why are these words used? What is their effect? Why are they in hip hop?

2. Censor session:

Imagine you're the producer at a radio station. What would you bleep out and why? What would you choose to play?

Similarly, you can run this activity from the point of view of a politician like Doug Ose, setting up a bill outlawing vulgar words. Which should be banned from the airwaves? Why? How should it be done? Pitch the policy like you're defending it in Parliament.

SECTION 1



people
are
talking!

SECTION V: People Are Talking!

Here's what they're saying:

Hip-Hop Hates Women:

http://dieselnation.blogs.com/hiphop/2004/03/hiphop_hates_wo.html

In general: The question was posed by Lizelle: "...on all these hip hop blogs I go to and read, where is the discourse on gender, patriarchy, sexism, etc? Step up dammit!"

STOP generalizing everything! Nothing is that simple, not people, artists, or even genres of music.

Posted by: Meghan

GIRLS COLLUDING IN MISOGYNY

Ian said:

"When women stop buying, dancing to and generally supporting sexist hip hop (is that redundant?), I think that'll grab many male hip hoppers' attention and force the issues of sexism and female exploitation & objectification onto the table for discussion for real"

IT'S A SOCIETAL THANG:

IAN:

"In addition though, I think the principle theme expressed in the song "Everyone's a Little Bit Racist" probably applies as an explanation as to why I and other male bloggers don't feel the need to become more invested in discussing or combating the problems of sexism, feminism or patriarchal social systems etc. not just in hip hop but in society in general."

Cal Ullman:

Unfortunately, violence and misogynist lyrics sell. As long as it sells that is what record companies will sell. Large companies don't like taking risks. If the large companies see an example where certain changes can be profitable they will try it.

REAL VS. MANUFACTURED: IT'S THE CORPORATIONS, STUPID!

Whats going on, listen i'm a hip hop artist and have been for a while...but what your sayin is not true...sexism is barly ever used in underground hip hop...you do not have a good enough grasp of hip hop...all you hear is whats on the radio and selling in stores...now underground might not be as famous..but its a completly different thing than mainstream hip hop (which is all you hear). So i would just like to say that your so called "views" on hip hop...are only partially true, because not once have I even used the word "bitch" in my rhyming, or displayed sexism towards women, or even made derogitory comments

about anything...so I just thought id let you know, because being an underground hip hop artist myself, I take offense when people sayin all hip hop consists of is puttin down women, talking about "busting caps" and other related topics to that...when it really is not...you need to listen to all ranges of hip hop before you make snap judgements.

Thanks

Doktor Chaos

Mark clarified that:

Is the problem that sexism is in the art? Or is the problem in the saturation of sexist art? Perhaps there's a problem that there's a bunch of counter-sexist/feminist art that doesn't get play/heard/consumed"

WOMEN IN HIP HOP: CATCH 22?

David agreed with Ian and added:

"The question of how and why women like Lil' Kim and her ilk have been forced to participate in their own exploitation is probably the biggest gender issue we've got"

Also, recently Deesha Dyer of Verbalisms wrote about the lack of women at underground hip-hop shows:

"While the females are being fed the 50cent club mixes and remixes, the deep, thought - provoking, true hip-hop is marketed and targeted towards males, as if women don't have the intelligence to be included in this market."

Of course hip hop in itself is not sexist - it's just gotten to be that way. Grandmaster Flash actually reckons there were more females than men involved way back in the day. Trouble is the machismo and standing up and chatting about yourself aspect pushes women out of it. Mainly for their own reasons. Most women don't want to come across as mouthy and bragadocious cos it's not very feminine. There's a whole heap of reasons like that why women stay less involved. My theory is tho...that women need to pick up a mic, or get behind some decks because if they don't then ain't nothin' gonna change! We can only say what we want and get the guys to listen thru the music we all love.

Posted by: diss miss at April 16, 2004 11:28 AM

ARTISTS and CENSORSHIP:

Mark: "Sexism is in hip-hop but hip-hop is not sexism. Artists like 50 Cent, Lil' Jon, and Wu-Tang are young, sexualized, black men. Knowing that, they would be horrible feminists. Should the reality of their sexism be silenced or even reversed?"

I'm a white male fan of hip hop but I have to say its poor treatment of women is disappointing. And why can't we generalise about that? So many artists, and especially the dominant artists - Em, Nas, Biggie, Dr Dre, the Wu, even Gang Starr - have put out comments about women that are pretty unenlightened at best.

It's not good enough to blame the labels - they choose who to sign, but it's the artists that write the lyrics. That's where the ultimate responsibility lies.

Posted by: [grover](#) at [May 10, 2004 03:36 AM](#)

Mark: Before this started he had made a post on his own blog about [sexism in hip-hop](#): I'm not gonna say that there's not plenty of misogyny in Flip and Lil' Jon's respective oeuvres (sp?), or that misogyny is anything but vile, but I do have two points. First of all, I don't think that men encouraging women to enjoy their sexuality is evil or manipulative. Of course, the fact that so many of these songs are ostensibly about strippers makes things pretty dicey, since there's such debate over much control and power women in that position have - and I would gamble that women in the sorts of clubs Lil' Jon frequents have less than the median amount of flexibility and choice regarding how they make a living. But if you look at how the songs play in your average danceclub, it's not nearly as complicated. Nobody's forcing girls to get nasty to these songs - but trust me, they do, and some of them *love it*. We can talk about the submission and dominance patterns that infect society and make some girls (and some guys, don't forget) act and think that way, but by condemning them outright doesn't help anybody - and that's pretty much what you're doing when you condemn their music.

Which brings up the second point: simply harping on this stuff is just so easy that it quickly becomes really fucking *boring*, and despite the good intentions behind it I don't think it's the best way to have an impact. I love Sasha's writing, but the title "cultural critic" doesn't mean you just point out things that are bad, like some scolding old maid, it means you analyze and take it apart and help people understand it. Certainly part of that understanding should be a knowledge of artists' moral failings, both in their art and life, but condemning their morality and consigning their entire body of work to the dustbin are two very different things. The former is part of the work of criticism, and the latter is a near-complete abdication of critical responsibility. Especially when you're talking about pop music, which has for centuries been one long highwire act along the line between deviance and criminality, between misogyny and benign fleshly pleasure. Simply smacking someone on the hand for leaning a bit too far to one side is hardly to the poin

What's my take? I believe that America itself is deeply misogynistic. I could bring up many examples but I'll just stick with this- why was there only one [female presidential candidate](#) this year? The Philippines has a [female president](#) and we can't even muster two candidates? Hip-hop is a reflection of our flawed values in the U.S., as are other pop culture mediums like movies and magazines. It's just easy for the powers that be to scapegoat rap music.

But that blurs the issue, and I'm not one for letting us off the hook just because we're being attacked from the outside. Like Lizelle, who's complaint started this meme, I think there needs to be more honest critique from the inside, from those who live and love the culture. So here it is and here we are getting the convo started. Hopefully something bigger will come from all of this.

The problem is the *business* of rap music which helps promote not just sexist attitudes, but homophobia, violence, and other ignorant ills. First off, the people who own and control the music have no respect for it. No, I'm not talking about Dame Dash or Dr. Dre. I'm talking about

the guy who's two levels above them both, running Universal Music and pushing the green or red button on what gets produced and promoted in hip-hop. If Universal wants to push anti-women type music this year millions of dollars will be pumped into the budget of whatever rapper is ignorant enough to write the lyrics. Sure the artists can choose to make something different. They just won't have the backing that others do who agree to play the game.

Let me use movies as an example. When the big studios want to make a White gangster film they get the best in the business- Scorsese directs, DePalma writes, and Pacino stars. It's violent, but it's art. However, when they make a Black gangster film they find the latest hot rappers to play in it, and a music video director to pull it together. More thought goes into the soundtrack than the script.

Same thing for hip-hop. They push artists to make a quick hit with salacious lyrics and a video to match. They go platinum, then try to do it again for the second album. After that they're done with the artist. They don't want him to get more creative, more introspective, more worldly. Artists on their third album like to step out of the box they've been given, and the record labels hate that. And don't try to ask for a bigger share of the financial pie- no, no, no!

This doesn't happen to White musicians as much. White pop musicians maybe. And here's the problem- all hip-hop is treated as pop music with no artistic value. There's a lack of respect for our music. The music industry is deeply racist. And I don't say that lightly.

But am I still letting us off the hook by blaming others for what we say? I don't think so. There are plenty of rappers out there who don't objectify women in their lyrics. They just can't get a deal. It takes a lot for them to find a label who will stick with them past that first single and album. These artists are out there. However, without a good record deal we consumers don't even get the choice of buying their music.

I'm not saying to get rid of the club bangers, or even the overly violent gangsta rap. I confess- I like it and I buy it. But as I get older I also look for something a little deeper. Not deeper like "positive" or "conscious." I mean deeper like honest and sincere. I find myself turning to reggae and old soul albums for that.

What I am saying is that we need to open the idea market up. There's 101 non-sexist untold stories that mainstream hip-hop is not touching on. Thank goodness Kanye West has made an album that explores the anxiety he felt trying to finish college. I can relate, and I love it for that reason alone.

If I am downplaying the issue then let me go even further and say that I believe sexism in hip-hop is getting better. Foxy and Kim are out, Missy and Eve are in. The latter pair are both sexy and powerful at the same time. This is an improvement.

What do you think? (Diesel Nation)

Where's my Kangol? The Hip-Hop Appreciation Week W/O Old School Style
May 15 '01

The Bottom Line Money and the power is how it's rapped about today. How about respect, responsibility and peace instead?

First off thanks Madtheory for not only inviting me to this write off...

BUT, for also understanding that my post would be late due to computer troubles.

AND, for giving me back the gift of sleep. You see folks, your narrator (me) was at a loss for an artists name. It was a artist she loved back in the day. She loved him so much that she forgot his name! I sent a song title and a approximate release date for it. Voila, madtheory e-mailed me back the name and a sleeping pill. With that knowledge, who better to bring us all together for...

Hip-Hop Appreciation week

My fellow co-writers are (myself not included) :

LessThanNick1, churst, sfoster79, repulsemonkey, DVON, sXeJustin

Music brings together people that would otherwise never have crossed paths. Take for instance a concert. How many different people are you intersecting with? You share a common bond with them. The liking of the artist whose concert you are seeing. For those few hours your differences don't mean squat. Differences that make no difference when it comes to love of music. I listen to all types of music. I have a place in my soul for hip-hop though. A wonderous blending of various types of music, set to a hard beat. In the right hands it becomes poetry in action. I want to feel like I have just had a drive-by lyrical beating on my soul.

Artists seem to have forgot about the music itself. They concentrate on image, money and bottom dollar lines. Coast Wars, mic-checkin', battle of the emcees are all things that create good press. But, in the end I want good music. Afterall, my newspaper isn't going to sing to me at the breakfast table. If you can't feel the artist in his music, it's a waste of breath. I say spend less time cranking out album after album. Spend more time perfecting one album over a length of time. Keep it about the music and most of all.. Keep it real.

What Does Hip-Hop Mean to You?

Hip-Hop the artform means a lot to me. The beat and lyrics mesh together in a way that make me crave more. When hip-hop first started out it was different. I was a impressionable youth at the time. I was addicted to the beats and lyrical poets. I was never into the thug, or gangsta throw down either. I was more into the free-spirited positive rap/hip hop artists. *Music that was taken from the minds and hearts of artists. Not their middle leg or hired writers take on things.* Sure, an image sells...to others. Not to me. I am looking for a lyrically gifted hip-hop artist.

Fashion is a big part of the Hip-Hop I know. Why back in my day hoodies and Fila's were the shizznat. I recall walking to school everyday wearing my Air Jordan's that are making a comeback today. While I was into the style of dress then. I can't relate anymore. Today's fashion isn't really something I am down with. Nelly pull your pants up ;)

The theme of HHAW this year is Charity. In what ways have you heard of Hip Hoppers giving back to the community in a way that was cool?

Growing up in the ghetto so to speak was not a bad thing. I enjoyed every minute of my life. Sure times were tough and money was tight. But you know what else was tight? The neighborhood

bond. I never have been as close to my neighbors as I was then. There was a certain respect for people in the 5th Ward of Houston. We all took care of one another, and it wasn't uncommon to get dragged home by the ear. The kids of the neighborhood were taken care of by everyone in the neighborhood. You couldn't skip school. Cause Miss Mary would call your Mamma, and blab all of your business.

Where am I going with this? Well a true artist a responsible artist doesn't forget where he came from. Or where his fans come from for that matter. Social responsibility calls and what artists have answered it?

First and foremost **KRS-One** for the single "Self Destruction". I remember cranking this loudly on the radio at home. I even recall sneaking to watch the video on BET. The song was a call to unite. The coast wars and rivalries were somewhat calm for a while. It also raised money for the National Urban League.

Queen Latifah's public service announcements about AIDS awareness. Although mostly aired in California it was still a great thing to do. I respect Queen Latifah's early music. It was the answer to the growing trend in rap. To degrade, beat or badmouth a woman is uncalled for. She has also lent herself to domestic violence prevention.

What was your first rap album?

1988's **Slick Rick - The Great Adventures of Slick Rick**. Now I know what you are thinking. EricaAnn, um didn't that album have a song on it called Lick the Balls and Treat Her Like A Prostitute? Yes, the album did. I admit that it was a bad for me to own this album at a young age. However, Slick Rick was essential in getting the ball rolling in my love for hip-hop.

It was his smooth accented voice and catchy beats that hooked me. Scratching records become a love of mine soon after. Slick Rick's album was the first one I played as a DJ. I feel a tear forming. Excuse me...

But despite the adult theme of some songs, Slick Rick had a moral side. One can't forget the socially responsible "Hey Young World". I know everyone loved the song "Children's Story". However my favorite song is "Teenage Love". It spoke volumes to me later on in life. The accent and true knack for "storytelling" made Slick Rick a favorite cassette from back in the day.

Which rap artist do you feel represents Hip-Hop to the fullest?

KRS-One without a doubt. He embodies all that I mentioned at first in this editorial. Socially responsible, talented, mic slayer, and trademark voice. One listen and you know it's him. His beats and lyrics have almost always been on point. KRS-One assaults you purely with rhymes. Positive, talented and responsible. I am in love with the artist that lets me know I should be treated right. No more screaming of "Where the white b*tches at".

What's your favorite rap album and why are you feeling it?

The spin that has my vote is **Mtv Presents Hip Hop Back In The Day - Various Artists** a 1995 release. It contains the early hip-hop that I love so much. The memorable hits are listed below :

1. The Breaks ~ Kurtis Blow

2. The Message ~ Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five
3. Planet Rock ~ Afrika Bambaataa
4. Fat Boys ~ Fat Boys
5. Roxanne, Roxanne ~ UTFO
6. The Show ~ Doug E. Fresh & MC Ricky D
7. Freaks Come Out At Night ~ Whodini
8. The Overweight Lovers In The House ~ Heavy D. & The Boyz
9. South Bronx ~ Boogie Down Productions
10. Rock The Bells ~ LL Cool J
11. The Bridge ~ MC Shan
12. Funky Cold Medina ~ Tone Loc
13. The Message ~ Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five

Now Mtv normally doesn't compile songs I like. But, I have to say they did their homework with this one. Old School is how I like it. How can I say I feel each track without being here for days? Each one holds special memories for me. Be it a basketball game, or that fight I got into. Junior High dances and sneaking my walkman in gym class. I feel young again and carefree when listening to the tracks. Not to mention terrorizing my neighbors with bass. And by the way, I still catch myself singing Track 6. Which tracks are you into?

Man, I wish I could go back in time again! Each one of these tracks is outstanding. It kind of makes me wonder if hip-hop doesn't need to look to the future but the past. Which brings me to the next question.

What are your hopes for the future of Hip-Hop?

Hip hop I am hoping will take a turn for the better. Mindless music is not my style. Intellect, wit and talent is what I need. I want to see it go back to being about the music. Not the Cash, money, clothes and b*tches. Hell yes they have a social responsibility. It's time to look around at the fans who bought your album.

You the artist.

Create, inspire, teach and move musically and lyrically. Stop depending on a fake front to sell albums. People respect a real person, not someone with silicone lyrics, and collagen beats.

"Don't make a goal, be the goal. You are your goal. So in hip hop, you are doing, advancing, protecting, preserving, and educating yourself." KRS-One

And by the way my computer is still offline. I am submitting this via a friends laptop.
~EricaAnn~