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Progressive Voices, Energies, and Visions

*Why did one straw break the camel's back? Here's the secret:
the million other straws underneath it.*

—Mos Def, rapper, “Mathematics”

*Listen to your spirit, nothin' weaker than the flesh, so while
you try to keep it fresh you gettin' deeper into debt.*

—Talib Kweli, rapper, “Listen!”

*Don't think I haven't been in the same predicament, let it sit
inside your head like a million women in Philly, Penn., it's silly
when girls sell their souls cause it's in.*

—Lauryn Hill, rapper and R&B singer,
“Doo Wop (That Thing)”

IN THE BATTLE OVER THE POLITICS OF HIP HOP, convention separates the commercial realm from conscious rap, with the latter largely considered part of “the underground.” The distinctions made between the two tend to revolve loosely around whether or not a given artist has politically progressive content. Many conscious rappers are on commercially powerful record labels (or have distribution deals with them), but what generally distinguishes their music from commercial rap is that it avoids pandering to the worst images of young black people, favors more socially conscious content, and is not nearly as heavily promoted as that of artists who rely on the gangsta-pimp-ho trinity. Those considered “underground” are generally progressively

mindful artists, some of whom have not been signed to a major record label and tend to operate in local DIY (do it yourself) networks, online, or through local, marginally commercial distribution networks.

Throughout *The Hip Hop Wars*, I have deliberately labeled much of what I have criticized about hip hop's ascent into mainstream stardom as "commercial," even though many progressive artists have commercial contracts or distribution deals with major labels. Artists such as Mos Def, Common, Talib Kweli, Lupe Fiasco, Nas, and The Roots are visible in the commercial realm of hip hop, and most if not all have record contracts or some kind of distribution deal with major labels. The term "commercial" as it is used here, and by others who are similarly concerned about representations of black people in hip hop, is meant to illuminate the significant role of corporate and mainstream American cultural imperatives in shaping the direction and content of what is most visible and most highly promoted in hip hop for profit. This problem is far too often laid solely at the feet of young black people generally and of rappers in particular.

My pejorative use of the term "commercial" is meant to draw sharp attention to the power of Viacom, Universal, Sony, and other massive media conglomerates in elevating one thin slice of what constitutes hip hop over all other genres, because doing so panders to and helps reinforce America's veiled but powerful interest in voyeuristic consumption of black stereotypes. But I have not intended to suggest that nothing creative and community-enabling can or does take place through commercial outlets. Although it is tempting to tell everyone to "just turn it off," to stop paying attention to mainstream outlets such as BET, MTV, Vibe, *The Source* magazine, and other places where hip hop youth culture lives, this is not practical given the intense investment in these outlets and the role that corporate culture plays in creating community. Furthermore, unless nearly all viewers follow this strategy (which is hard to imagine), the content is not likely to change sufficiently. For better or worse, commercial culture is central to "the mainstream"; it shapes our collective conversation. As a space we all share, it must be taken seriously and challenged.

Many of rap's most visible commercial ambassadors are highly talented. Talent isn't the central issue in urging a transformation among hip hop's biggest stars, but using that talent in service of the common good is. Furthermore, the most-fun music has not always been challenging and complex, so calls for increased complexity isn't the main goal either. The issue is best framed as a question: Toward what end is black popular creativity being expressed and promoted? The crux of the problem is the profits-over-people mandate that too often dominates in the marketplace and has been internalized in hip hop cultural attitudes and lyrics. Hip hop has been a casualty of this mandate, all under the guise of "authenticity." As Andre Willis wrote in 1991, long before hip hop's destructive commercial fate was sealed, we must work to push "these artists to understand the tradition whose shoulders they stand on, and encourage them to comprehend struggle, sacrifice, vision and dedication—the cornerstones for the Black musical tradition."¹

The conventional split between commercial and politically conscious rap creates a narrow "alternative" to the commercial options that saturate hip hop. One of the ways that hip hop's progressive spirit has been driven to the margins is through the fashioning of an overtly "political" identity (i.e., conscious rap) as the only alternative to gangstas, pimps, and hoes. It's as if the only answer to a stylishly conceived "thug life" is to grimly "fight the power." But this is a rigid and one-dimensional set of options that significantly disadvantages establishing a progressive vision as the basis for a wide variety of hip hop styles, approaches, and levels of explicitly political content. Because of the restricted vision used to label progressive artists, being called "socially conscious" is almost a commercial death sentence for artist visibility and everyday casual fan appreciation. From this sober perspective on consciousness, gangstas appear to be the only ones having fun. Generally speaking, "socially conscious" artists, no matter how brilliant their rhymes or how funky their beats, have been kept on the margins of commercial radio and industry promotional agendas. This seriously shapes fan perception of value in the musical market economy. In our advertising-driven society, we tend to gravitate

toward what is most accessible, most highly promoted. Marginality, then, is related in part to the power of the fiction that black gangstas are “keeping it real” when they venerate street life. The suffocating grip of the perception of street culture as the key to what makes black people “really black” contributes as well. This perception is a fundamental lie that has to be exposed in order to move progressive artists and progressive visions center stage in hip hop.

Popular music must be dynamic, playful, exciting, and cutting edge. Sometimes this involves politically conscious content, but it surely cannot nor should not always do so. A crucial aspect of a progressive reclaiming of the soul of hip hop is the refusal to limit the scope of progressive art to the narrow application of “social-consciousness”-oriented topics, as has sometimes been the case. A story with a progressive foundation can and should be about any subject, any facet of the human experience. And socially conscious artists should be able to talk about anything, including ghetto street culture. Progressive, community-centric music can sometimes be vulgar, explicit, and violent. Rappers with a progressive social consciousness can’t be expected to pretend that street violence, exploitative sex, and self-destructive behaviors don’t exist, or claim that nothing being said about them is worthy of artistic examination, just because of the current state of mainstream commercial hip hop. The distinction, then, between “gangsta rap” and progressive or “socially conscious” rap is not solely about the subject of the story being told but also about how and how often that story is told. What kind of community is being hoped for, what standard for treating others in one’s community is being elevated and emulated? Progressive artists have resisted various dividing lines, refusing to succumb to a kind of elitism that suggests that gangsta rappers aren’t sophisticated or intelligent and that dance-oriented hip hop is automatically less valuable than politically explicit hip hop. Many have shown solidarity with the realities of black street life from which commercially peddled “authenticity” is crafted. Lupe Fiasco, who is properly considered one of the most talented and progressive recent artists to emerge in hip hop, has rejected these terms of

criticism—both the idea that street life equals “authentic” blackness and the elitism sometimes expressed by politically sophisticated fans—while still openly criticizing what he thinks has become of mainstream hip hop. Originally signed as a gangsta rapper on Epic Records, Fiasco eventually made a decision to stop using his talent to promote that life, despite his own connections to it:

I felt like, man, I can't keep putting all this negativity into the world, cause it's gonna come back and get you. . . . I don't wanna go platinum because I'm dead. So, I'm not gonna put that out there. . . . Don't get me confused: I come from the hood, the west side of Chicago—don't let that fool you just 'cause I was riding skateboards—all my friends are gang-bangers, hustlers, convicts, killers, the whole situation. I just—I just don't want to put that face out there into the world because it's not necessary. It ain't gonna do nothing but glorify it and add to the saturation that's in the game right now. . . . So I'm like, you know what, I'mma go out there and stand up for it [hip hop]. I'mma stand up for that little sixteen year old kid who either has the option to make a bunch of bang bang shoot 'em up kill 'em records because he thinks that's what he need to get played on the radio or I'mma show him that he can be successful with a record talking about skateboarding and robots.²

Given what artists who are committed to progressive values are up against in the current commercial terrain, we should work hard to support them. Politically thoughtful consumption, while not the only means of contributing to positive change, is an important strategy in a market where sales often determine visibility and power. Artists who visibly pander to the hip hop trinity should not be rewarded for doing so, even if they have the occasional progressive rhyme in their repertoire.

Categorically rejecting songs about sex or violence or materialism is not the answer, although reducing their overall space certainly is. We must also keep our eye on how often and in what way

such stories are told: What are the implicit politics of community being expressed in them? Will these politics enable and support progressive change, mutual respect, and empowerment? Is an artist bragging about having stylish gear, or is the entire rhyme driven by a celebration of symbols of luxury excess and brand-label name dropping? Is the song's tale of sexual exchange supporting mutual desire or at least regarding women with basic human dignity, or is it treating them as nameless, dehumanized sexual objects? During a recent Hip Hop Honors program on VH-1, where A Tribe Called Quest was honored, group member Ali Shaheed Muhammad put it this way: "We noticed that the world was kind of negative and a lot of people in hip hop talked about their love of jewelry and money and love of cars. We wanted to discuss the love of humanity, loving yourself, loving the real emotion that's relevant to life." Some progressive hip hop artists have sensual and sexual lyrics about women but they are not in the spirit of degrading, insulting, and dominating them. When A Tribe Called Quest said "I like to kiss ya where other brothers won't" in their 1990 hit "Bonita Applebaum," they weren't referring to kissing her hand. What would the musical world be without sexual and sensual content? What would happen to the next Marvin Gaye, Al Green, Prince, Teddy Pendergrass, Donna Summer, and Jill Scott if this challenge to exploitation were conflated with a rejection of sensuality?

Artists are not alone in the effort to expand the vision, critical language, and use of hip hop. Journalists, bloggers, activists, teachers, students, filmmakers, social workers, and novelists are all working to broaden the creative and intellectual grounds for progressive hip hop. Their work suggests that there is a diverse, invested, and significant group of people who are part of hip hop but willing to challenge and re-envision it. Their films, essays, curriculums, youth festivals, and other activities not only generate literacy about hip hop, black culture, the power of progressive cross-cultural exchange, and social justice but also make incisive challenges to corporate agendas.

The remainder of this chapter is devoted to identifying some of these warriors in the hope that doing so will help spread the word about their activities and perhaps encourage readers to seek them out. Two important caveats: First, the artists, people, and organizations listed are not “perfect”; there is no such thing. (The standard for progressive belonging cannot be so restrictive that only a few can make the cut.) And, second, the lists below are not intended to be exhaustive, nor should they be taken to imply that only the most important people or organizations are named. Rather, the aim is to give readers a way of discovering what is missing from the mainstream conversation on hip hop, to show that there are many people who are against both extremes in the hip hop wars, to help consolidate progressive spaces, and, ultimately, to help build community. Too many of the people and organizations listed below have been marginalized in the public conversation on hip hop. Their marginalization helps keep the conversation trapped.

If you know of other current and active hip hop–related progressive organizations, groups, artists, activists, writers, or teachers who should be included in the following lists, please visit www.triciarose.com/bpc and let me know about them.

Progressive Artists

This category includes the following active artists, among others: *Afu Ra, Akrobatik, Alternate Reality, Bahamadia, Black Star, Brand Nubian, Brenda Gray, Common, The Coup, De La Soul, Dead Prez, Deep Dickollective, Derrick “D-Nice” Jones, El-P, Faqts One, Gangstarr, God-des and She, Immortal Technique, Jean Grae, Jurassic 5, Kam, Kanye West, Kev Brown, KRS-One, Lauryn Hill, Little Brother, The Living Legends, Liza Jessie Peterson, Lupe Fiasco, MC Lyte, Mos Def, Mr. Lif, Nas, Outkast, Paris, Perceptionists, Rainbow Flava, The Roots, Sage Francis, Saul Williams, Sarah Jones, Spearhead, Strange Fruit Project, Tori Fixx, Staceyann Chin, Talib Kweli, Tim’m, Wyclef Jean, Zimbabwe Legit, and Zion-I.*

Progressive Organizations

Bling: A Planet Rock

Director: Raquel Cepeda

Executive Producer: Irena Mihova

Released: September 2007 (United States)

Directed by Raquel Cepeda, *Bling: A Planet Rock* critically examines the overlooked relationship between the violent, illicit diamond trade in Sierra Leone and hip hop culture in the United States. Cepeda follows Pall Wall, Raekwon, and Tego Calderon to Sierra Leone, where these hip hop artists are exposed to the realities of the illicit diamond industry from the perspectives of miners, war survivors, government officials, local hip hop artists, UN groups, and NGOs. *Bling* digs deep into both the history and significance of diamonds in hip hop and the significance of hip hop in diamond trading regions. Finally, the film explores the way in which the hip hop community can be a source for responsible consumerism and positive change.

Byron Hurt

Website: www.bhurt.com

Byron Hurt is an anti-sexism advocate and filmmaker concerned with gendered and sexualized violence. His 1998 film *I Am a Man: Black Masculinity in America* examines black masculinity in the contexts of racism, sexism, homophobia, and violence, and his 2007 film, the acclaimed *Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*, examines representations and performances of race and gender in hip hop music and culture. The latter, a groundbreaking documentary, features interviews with fans, industry executives, artists, and scholars and is especially concerned with questions of violence, masculinity, sexism, and homophobia. Hurt's forthcoming film *The Masculinity Project: Black Community in Focus* will take a multigenerational look at black masculinity in the United States.

*Davey D***Website:** www.daveyd.com

Davey D's Hip Hop Corner is one of the largest and oldest hip hop hubs on the Internet, run by "hip hop historian, journalist, deejay, and community activist" Davey D. The site features Davey D's "Hip Hop Daily News" as well as interviews; articles on hip hop history, politics, culture, and industry; music reviews; discussion boards; and venues where artists can share their work.

*Enough Is Enough: The Campaign for Corporate**Responsibility in Entertainment***Founder/Convener:** Reverend Delman L. Coates**Location:** New York City**Website:** www.enoughisenoughcampaign.com

Reverend Coates founded Enough Is Enough to respond to corporations that proliferate and profit from degrading depictions of black men and women in popular culture. The campaign stages weekly protests at local media outlets and corporations that sponsor such images. In so doing, Enough Is Enough challenges both the commercialization and the marketing of degrading depictions of black men and women.

*Global Artists Coalition***Location:** New York City**Website:** www.globalartistscoalition.org

The Global Artists Coalition is a nonprofit group that helps youth from underserved communities to attain success in the arts, communication, and entertainment fields by developing mentoring relationships with industry professionals. These professionals serve as career mentors and provide the resources and funding for the workshops so that the youth can participate free of cost. The Global Artists Coalition is also affiliated with the Hip Hop Culture Center in Harlem and with a traveling hip hop culture and history exhibition.

H.E.L.P.: Hip Hop Educational Literacy Program**Founded:** 2005**Cocreators:** Gabriel Benn and Rick Henning**Location:** Washington, D.C.**Website:** www.edlyrics.com

H.E.L.P. uses hip hop to promote literacy and critical-thinking skills in ways designed to meet the needs of a diverse community of learners. Its curriculums use hip hop's popularity to engage students in reading and to increase vocabulary, comprehension, and writing skills. Each month, new workbooks use the work of hip hop artists with "socially conscious content and rich vocabulary" to promote comprehension and critical thinking at individual, small-group, and classroom levels. H.E.L.P. is currently seeking corporate partners to provide H.E.L.P. materials and trainings to schools free of cost.

Hip Hop 4 Humanity**Founders:** Michael Mauldin and Jermaine Dupri**Founded:** 2001**Website:** www.hh4h.com

Originally founded to provide support to those intimately affected by the attacks on September 11th, 2001, Hip Hop 4 Humanity now works in concert with Georgia State University on a series of summer camps that provide alternative education opportunities to Georgia youth. These camps engage youth by teaching them about the business side of the entertainment industry.

Hip Hop Archive**Director:** Marcyliena Morgan, Harvard University**Website:** www.hiphoparchive.org

The Hip Hop Archive was established in 2002 to enable the development of knowledge, art, culture, and leadership through hip hop. It acquires, organizes, and develops collections relating to hip hop in the U.S. and internationally and its collections include audio recordings, videos, websites, films, original papers, and interviews that are orga-

nized around themes and initiatives. In this way, the Hip Hop Archive facilitates research and scholarship concerning the knowledges, movements, cultures, and arts that have developed around hip hop.

H2A: Hip Hop Association

Founder and President: Martha Diaz

Founded: March 2002

Location: Harlem, NY

Website: www.hiphopassociation.org/about.php

The Hip Hop Association, a “Global, Multicultural, Multilingual” organization with over twenty annual events, was founded in Harlem in 2002 by Martha Dias in response to the commercial appropriation of hip hop culture that “exploits and perpetuates negative stereotypes.” H2A concerns itself with supporting a hip hop culture that is engaged in social change and community building: “facilitating, fostering, and preserving hip hop’s original vision.” H2A has two central initiatives through which it works toward this objective: “Hip Hop Odyssey” and “H2Ed.” “Hip Hop Odyssey,” H2A’s media initiative, creates its own apparatus for the dissemination and appreciation of cultural forms. Its programs include the Hip Hop Odyssey International Film Festival, the Freshest Youth Program, and the Odyssey Awards. And “H2Ed,” H2A’s education initiative, uses hip hop—“the most influential cultural force today”—as a tool for youth education and empowerment. Its programs include the Summer Teacher Institute, the H2Ed Summit, the Hip-Hop Education Wiki, and the Hip-Hop Education Guidebook.

Hip Hop Project

Website: www.hiphoproject.com

Founded in 1999 by Chris “Kharma Kazi” Rolle, the Hip Hop Project helps at-risk teens to express themselves using hip hop. The project brings the teens together with music industry professionals who work with them to create albums and marketing materials, the proceeds of which go toward scholarships for the students.

Hip Hop Speaks**President:** Donyale Hooper-Reavis**Location:** Philadelphia**Website:** www.hiphopspeaks.org

Hip Hop Speaks responds to a contemporary situation in which young people are increasingly less connected to traditional community structures such as school and church and increasingly more influenced by the media and entertainment industries. Hip Hop Speaks's school-year kaPow! programs use an arts- and media-based approach to help students achieve state academic standards. Its after-school programs and summer camp encourage media literacy; youth critically examine hip hop music, film, television, and advertising, challenging representations and creating space for marginalized perspectives. Thus engaged, youth participating in Hip Hop Speaks are also given the tools and mentorship to "create new and exciting media of their own."

Hip Hop Summit Action Network**Founders:** Russell Simmons and Dr. Ben Chavis**Founded:** 2001**Website:** www.hsan.org

The Hip Hop Summit Action Network is a coalition of hip hop artists, industry executives, education advocates, civil rights proponents, and youth leaders that was formed after the first National Hip Hop Summit in 2001. In accordance with that summit's theme, "Taking Back Responsibility," HSAN has focused on directing the cultural and economic capital of hip hop toward initiatives for community development and youth empowerment. Since its inception, HSAN projects have included more than forty hip hop summits, voter registration initiatives, youth leadership development programs, and public awareness campaigns. See especially the "what we want" page of their website.

Hip Hop Theatre Festival**Founder:** Danny Hoch**Founded:** 2000**Website:** www.hiphoptheaterfest.com/node/3

Based in four festival cities—New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C.—HHTF events feature live performances by artists who are breaking new creative and aesthetic ground in the areas of theatre, dance, spoken word, and live music sampling. Through soliciting and supporting the development of new work and building networks and coalitions, HHTF works to promote the integrity and visibility of Hip Hop Theatre as a genre. HHTF engages social and political issues and is committed to keeping live theatre vital and accessible to audiences across race, class, age, and gender lines. Education and outreach initiatives such as the Arts Cultivation and Education program reflect the organization's dedication to serving urban youth.

Hip-Hop Therapy Project**Founder:** Nakeyshaey M. Tillie-Allen**Websites:** www.thehiphoptherapist.com,
www.hiphoptherapyproject.com

Founder Nakeyshaey M. Tillie-Allen launched the 'Hip-Hop Therapy Project' in 1994. 'Hip-Hop Therapy' synthesizes various therapeutic methods into a hip hop–centric therapeutic technique applicable to both individuals and groups. 'Hip-Hop Therapy introduces and analyzes Hip-Hop music, its lyrics, and culture as it relates to the person in therapy or community development.' Hip-Hop Therapy uses a 'person in environment' to serve 'high risk persons and/or persons of color' whose social and cultural realities are often [left out of] mainstream therapeutic techniques. Hip-Hop Therapy seeks to empower youth and communities through its critical deployment of hip hop music and cultures.

HOTGIRLS: Helping Our Teen Girls, Inc.**President, CEO, and Founder:** Carla E. Stokes, Ph.D., M.P.H.**Founded:** 2001**Location:** Atlanta**Website:** www.helpingourteengirls.org

HOTGIRLS is a small nonprofit that uses hip hop and youth culture as foundations and inspirations for “culturally relevant and age-appropriate, girl centered information and programming” aimed at improving the health and well-being of black girls and young women. Through HOTGIRLS, girls and young women challenge dominant conceptions of black girlhood and womanhood not only through media literacy but also through technology and media production. HOTGIRLS also invests in the leadership potential of black girls and young women in its Young Women’s Leadership Council, Girls’ Leadership Council, and annual girls’ summits. In 2008, HOTGIRLS relaunched FIREGRL.COM, a safe space online for advice, support, and discussion. It is also working with the Young Women’s Leadership Council to develop a website—www.getyourgameright.com—that will raise awareness about gendered violence and advocate for black women and girls.

Industry Ears**Co-Founders:** Lisa Fager Bediako and Paul Porter**Website:** www.industryears.org

Industry Ears is made up of professionals from the entertainment and broadcast industries who are “dedicated to revealing truth and promoting justice in media.” The group addresses disparities in media that have ill effects on individuals and communities, such as the disparity between consumer expectations and the FCC standards. It also works to empower both individuals and communities to advocate for themselves within media structures by providing educational and research materials and by promoting media literacy and dialogue between consumers and industry professionals.

J.U.I.C.E.: Justice by Uniting in Creative Energy**President:** Erik Qvale**Founder:** Dawn Smith**Founded:** 2001**Website:** www.rampartjuice.com

Justice by Uniting in Creative Energy is a nonprofit hip hop collective in Los Angeles's Rampart District that uses artistic elements of hip hop culture as tools for education, social change, and youth empowerment. These tools are provided to at-risk youth through its programs in breakdancing, graffiti murals, emceeing, spoken word, and music production.

Kevin Powell**Website:** www.kevinpowellforcongress.org

Kevin Powell wears many hats: activist, journalist, anti-sexism activist, social critic, hip hop historian, public speaker, and aspiring politician. A high-profile figure in hip hop and popular culture, Powell has hosted and produced shows on BET, HBO, and MTV and is dedicated to using hip hop as a tool for social change. In 2008, he turned his talents to politics, running as a democratic candidate for U.S. Congress.

PeaceOUT World Homo-Hop Festival**Founded:** 2001**Website:** www.peaceoutfestival.com

PeaceOUT is an annual international festival that celebrates the "worst of the best" queer hip hop artists engaged in DJing, emceeing, spoken word, filmmaking, art, and dance. The first PeaceOUT was held in Oakland in 2001; the festival has continued to be held there on an annual basis and will be held biannually beginning in 2009. This original PeaceOUT festival inspired Peace Out East, Peace Out South, PeaceOut Northwest, and Peace Out UK.

pH Music, LLC**Director of Operations:** Dumi Right**Website:** www.phmusic.ouofam.com

Dumi Right's long-term goal is to revolutionize the operating paradigms of the commercial music industry. On a more immediate level, pH Music enables the recording, publishing, and distribution of underground hip hop music. The "pH" part of the name represents the type of hip hop that the company supports—pure and progressive. The name also plays on the acid-base scale of the periodic table, as pH Music intends to provide a positive balance to the "negative images and subject matter" that predominate in commercial hip hop.

Project HIP-HOP**President:** Eric Esteves**Executive Director:** Mariama White-Hammond**Founded:** 1993**Location:** Boston**Website:** www.projecthiphop.org

Project HIP-HOP (Highways Into the Past—History, Organizing and Power) began its "Summer Leadership Institute" in 1993. Through 2007, SLI-participating high school students traveled to important sites of the civil rights movement and met with both civil rights movement leaders and leaders of contemporary social change efforts. Upon returning to Boston, the youth then traveled to area classrooms to teach what they learned. Beyond the SLI, Project HIP-HOP has grown into a larger organization. Its youth-led programs focus on cultivating organizational and resistance skills among low-income youth of color, drawing on hip hop culture and histories of resistance to oppression. Project HIP-HOP initiatives include such areas as political education, critical thinking, hip hop arts and media work, leadership development, and community activism.

*Rap Sessions***Founder:** Bakari Kitwana**Founded:** 2005**Location:** Westlake, OH**Website:** www.rapsessions.org

Founded by Bakari Kitwana in 2005, Rap Sessions encourages dialogue around the most pressing issues concerning the hip hop community and social change. Rap Sessions' panelists bring town-hall-style meetings to cities across the nation. The organization engages issues within the broad categories of "Politics and Hip-Hop," "Race and Hip-Hop," and "Gender and Hip-Hop." Past themes have included "Does Hip-Hop Hate Women?" and "Hip-Hop and the Presidential Election of 2008." Rapsession.org's video center makes these dialogues available to the broader, web-based audience.

*The Rhode Show***Website:** www.therhodeshow.com

The Rhode Show is a group of young performing artists from Providence, Rhode Island, who "use their music and creative process as a tool to empower, engage, and educate youth." They perform hip hop, R&B, and spoken-word pieces based in the communities and lived experiences of its members, affirming the importance of young voices both in musical innovation and in social change.

*Rosa Clemente***Website:** www.hiphopliveshere.com

Rosa Clemente is a hip hop journalist, scholar-activist, and community organizer. Long involved with media justice issues, she formed Know Thy Self Media Messengers in 1995 and conducted workshops at colleges, universities, high schools, and prisons. She helped to form the National Hip-Hop Political Convention in 2003 and co-founded R.E.A.C. Hip Hop, a media justice group. She also cohosts the weekly radio program *Where We Live*.

*Take a Stand Records***Founder:** Master P and Romeo**Founded:** May 2007**Website:** www.takeastandrecords.com

A “Record Label for Responsible Hip Hop Artists,” Take a Stand Records promotes hip hop artists whose music empowers communities and refrains from employing offensive lyrics and negative imagery. Take a Stand Records is currently recruiting artists through a nationwide talent search, “America’s Next Hip Hop Star.” Proceeds from record sales go toward scholarships for high school students.

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*Take Back the Music Campaign***Website:** www.essence.com/essence/takebackthemusic/about.html

Take Back the Music is a campaign that developed out of ESSENCE in response to negative representations of black women in the media generally and in hip hop music specifically. TBTM creates space in which to discuss these derogatory images of black women and encourages self-reflection. It also works toward more balanced representations of black women and men in popular culture and promotes artists who engage in more positive representational practices.

*Team Rescue***Founder:** Master P**Website:** www.teamrescueone.com/about.html

Team Rescue is an initiative begun by Master P in response to high rates of crime, gang involvement, drug abuse, teen pregnancy, and truancy among youth. Libraries and Gymnasiums in P. Miller Youth Centers in New Orleans, Chicago, and Los Angeles help youth to build alternative pathways using literacy and athleticism. Team Rescue has also concerned itself with helping communities in Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi to recover from Hurricane Katrina.

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Womanhood Learning Project

Team: Martha Diaz, Mona Ibrahim, Nakia Alston, Beth Sachnoff, Kompalya Thunderbird, Deanne Ziadie-Nemitz, Amanda Cumbow, Renee Moore, and Ebonie Smith

Website: www.netvibes.com/hiphopassociation

The Womanhood Learning Project, a two-year program launched in March 2008, was developed by the Hip Hop Association with the aim of cultivating “unity among women in Hip-Hop to create a space to learn, build, and bring about concrete change.” The WLP seeks to create awareness of and give voice to the contributions of women in leadership positions in the music and entertainment industries who have “maneuvered the sexist system.” At the same time, the project hopes to acknowledge and illuminate aspects of the media that not only limit these women’s opportunities and awareness but also adversely impact young girls.

Women in Entertainment Empowerment Network

Founder: Valeshia Butterfield

Founded: September 2007

Website: www.weenonline.org

In the wake of the increased outcry in 2007 over sexism and racism in the entertainment industry, Valeisha Butterfield, executive director of the “Hip Hop Summit Action Network,” founded WEEN to organize entertainment executives around the goal of promoting a more positive and balanced portrayal of women of color in entertainment and society. WEEN aims to use its members’ “impact and visibility” to push for change in three broad areas: corporate social responsibility, media and artist responsibility, and community programs and outreach. One of WEEN’s earliest initiatives was “the Pink List,” a list of films, books, movies, music, publication, and other media programming whose portrayal of women meets WEEN’s standards.

*Youth Speaks***Founder:** James Kass**Website:** www.youthspeaks.org

Founded in 1996 in San Francisco, Youth Speaks embraces the creative and liberatory capacity of oral and written literacy to empower youth to be agents of social change. It offers literary arts education and youth development programs, publishes the work of young artists through “First Word Press,” and hosts several poetry slams, theatre productions, festivals, and reading series throughout the year. Currently, Youth Speaks works with 45,000 teens annually in the Bay Area, and has partner programs in thirty-six U.S. cities.

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