



News Release

POLITICIANS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR TOXIC, MISOGYNIST ENVIRONMENT FACING GIRLS

“You hear stuff like ‘What’s up, bitch?’ and ‘Hey, ho’ every other second” – Tanya, Grade 9

Toronto, Ontario – February 2, 2008: “Violence against girls and young women is a pervasive problem” in Toronto schools, according to the final report on school safety recently released by the School Community Safety Advisory Panel. The Panel found that “gender-based violence, including sexual assault and sexual harassment, is occurring at alarming rates” and they conclude that the seriousness of the problem requires immediate attention.¹

As reported last week in the Toronto Star, the abusive language routinely directed at girls is being lifted straight from pop culture. In conversations with girls from five east-end Toronto high schools, the girls reported being subjected to a barrage of misogynist comments, as well as being sexually assaulted “at any time in the halls”. 14-year-old Tanya said, “You hear stuff like ‘What’s up, bitch?’ and ‘Hey, ho’ every other second”. They hear girls being called skank, ho or slut every day, and they hear guys yell out which part of the male anatomy they want them to suck. 18-year-old Jhanelly Porter thinks it may be “too late for our generation” to get guys to respect girls, to get girls to respect each other, to get girls to respect themselves – “especially against the backdrop of the sexually degrading lyrics of” rap and hip hop.²

“This toxic environment is no surprise,” says Valerie Smith, an activist who has lobbied against violent media for the past seventeen years. “Misogynist rap was introduced over 25 years ago, and because it was popular with the kids, other segments of the entertainment industry picked up the language and ran with it. Politicians sat around with their fingers in their ears for 25 years doing nothing, with the result that misogyny sluices freely through this country contaminating everything it touches, including the lives of the girls who are forced to live with the results of that political “hear no evil” do nothing attitude.”

For those who want to absolve popular culture of any blame, this is a quote from a new book, *Misogyny & the Emcee: Sex, Race & Hip Hop*, by American political activist, Ewuare Osayande:

“Rap music and the rappers who create and produce it are responsible for the impact of their message on the minds of impressionable youth. When a sixteen or seventeen year old boy hears a rapper he admires counsel him to “smack that bitch,” why do we think that he would not consider doing that? What other force is as compelling that is advising him not to strike a woman, when the majority of mediums in American life only reinforce his destructive desires? Who are we fooling? None but ourselves if we think we can deny the impact rap(e) music is having on the minds and behaviour of our youth.”³

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¹ *The Road to Health: A Final Report on School Safety*, School Community Safety Advisory Panel, 2008

² *Girls candid about sex harassment*, Toronto Star, January 28, 2008

³ *Misogyny & the Emcee, Sex, Race & Hip Hop*, Ewuare X. Osayande, 2008

In Canada, there is very little we can do to curtail misogynist expression, since girls and women are excluded from the protection of the *Criminal Code* hate laws (in contravention of our *Charter* rights, it should be pointed out). And, in Ontario, we have no protection from hate material under human rights law, according to the 2006 decision from the Ontario Human Rights Commission, which opted to do nothing about the distribution of hate rap by music giant, HMV Canada Inc.⁴

Bernie Farber, CEO of the Canadian Jewish Congress and a court-designated expert on hate crimes, calls Canada's hate laws a "fence of protection"⁵ for vulnerable groups. Women and girls have been deliberately denied that "fence of protection" by politicians, and not through oversight. In 2003 when the *Criminal Code* hate propaganda law was amended to add gays and lesbians to the protected groups (Bill C-250), politicians *refused* to add women and girls!

Last week, Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day said, "The promotion of hate and violence has no place in Canadian society, and it is an offence under the *Criminal Code*."⁶ "Either Mr. Day's memory is very short or very selective," says Smith. "For the past two years, his government has been deliberately obstructing attempts by Liberal MPs to add women and girls to the groups protected under the very *Criminal Code* section to which he refers. And, as long as we lack that protection, the girls of this country will be the ones paying the price."

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Background: Attached are quotes from various media describing the pervasive misogyny of rap and hip hop. For more on the human rights complaint against HMV Canada Inc. and the refusal of politicians to protect women and girls from hate propaganda, see the Hate Propaganda and Music sections at www.thefreeradical.ca.

About The Free Radical (www.thefreeradical.ca): The Free Radical web site is maintained by Toronto anti-violence activist Valerie Smith to provide information on media violence and strategies for combating it. Smith has lobbied on media violence issues for the past seventeen years, with a particular focus on the mistreatment of women and girls in popular culture. She is the author of the *Action Agenda: A Strategic Blueprint for Reducing Exposure to Media Violence in Canada*, funded and published by Ontario's Office for Victims of Crime, an agency of the Ministry of the Attorney General. The report is available for free download from The Free Radical web site.

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⁴ *Hate Rap Doesn't Contravene Ontario Human Rights Code... If Sold Tastefully*, The Free Radical news release, October 16, 2006 (www.thefreeradical.ca)

⁵ *Hate-crimes charge sparks backlash on the Internet*, National Post, January 26, 2008

⁶ *Killing Canadians 'best way': student*, National Post, January 30, 2008

QUOTES FROM NEWS AND ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA

Rap Culture: The Dark Side, Hilary Magazine, August 31, 2005

In the delusive fantasy world of music videos, women are pets to be walked on leashes and given names like “bitch” and “hoe”.

The video for “P.I.M.P.” [by 50 Cent] has an equally misogynistic music video which depicts women dressed like “hoes” or “bitches” -- bikinis, thongs and spike heels. In the uncensored, X-rated version, the women are all topless... “P.I.M.P.” also shows two women being “walked” on leashes -- repeated again at the MTV Music Video Awards. The constant dehumanizing of women in the media and especially in hip hop culture has become mainstream.

For some, misogyny’s spelled r-a-p, Seattle Times (Knight Ridder Newspapers), August 19, 2005

A lot of rappers, too, are making money by degrading women.

There’s a horde of songs shaming women stampeding the airwaves this summer.

“Give Me That,” by Webbie, has the young rapper practically demanding sex from a female and demeaning her while he is doing it.

“The misogyny has always been there,” says Serena Kim, features editor for Vibe magazine. “But it’s different now because the culture is bigger and mainstream. Now every kid in America is well versed in hip-hop.”

Misogyny in hip-hop, however, is running rampant, [Cori] Murray [arts and entertainment editor of Essence] says, and what’s popular in hip-hop is misogynistic and headed toward porn.

Spittin’ Acid at the Sistahs: Rap(e) & The Assault of Black Women, by Ewuare Osayande, SeeingBlack.com, April 29, 2005

This cultural attack on Black women would warrant a state-of-emergency even if the madness began and ended in the studios, but it doesn’t. More and more, Black men and boys are reciting these lyrics until they become the mental script that directs their interactions with Black women even as these tracks advocate real-life hatred and violence toward women.

My words fall way short of capturing the deadly effect misogynistic rap is having on Black women. The fact is that what many rappers are spewing is criminal by most societies’ standards.

The combination of violent lyrics and pornographic images result in a poisonous concoction that is literally numbing our youth to the deadly ramifications of what the record industry has made rap to be.

At last, women lash out at hip hop’s abuse, New York Daily News, January 3, 2005

Essence is taking on the slut images and verbal abuse projected onto black women by hip hop lyrics and videos.

“We started talking at the office about all this hatred in rap song after rap song, and once we started, the subject kept coming up because women were incapable of getting it off their minds.” [Essence editor, Diane Weathers]

At a listening session that Weathers and the other staffers had with entertainment editor Cori Murray, "We found the rap lyrics astonishing, brutal, misogynistic..."

Snoop Dogg's Smokescreen, Toronto Star, November 15, 2004

Finally got Rhythm & Gangstas a few days ago. Basically it's the same ol' Dogg — he's the boss, he's got the best rhymes, the most women, yada, yada, yada — except he's added "wench" to bitches and hos as his stock references for women.

The record also contains a couple of the most misogynistic rap songs I've heard of late.

The current state of hip-hop, Toronto Star, March 16, 2004

Today's hip-hop music, as well as its videos, almost exclusively revolves around misogynistic lyrics of a "thug" variety.

Attack the rap, The Guardian, March 8, 2004

In the poor Boston neighbourhood where 18-year-old Stephanie Alves grew up, words such as bitch and ho are part of everyday male conversation. This slang is not used to pass judgment on a woman engaged in a particular activity but to describe any female.

Rap has been criticised for its negative portrayal of women right from the start. Artists such as Snoop Doggy Dogg and Ja Rule have attracted particular criticism - both were charged for use of indecent language back in 2001 at the SunFest festival in Jamaica. Lyrics such as "Game is the topic/And what's between your legs is the product/Use it properly/And you'll make dollars bitch," from Ja Rule's Bitch Betta Have My Money, continue to incense women.

The worse it gets, the better it sells, Toronto Star, October 26, 2003

These days, you wish you had a dime -- make that 50 Cent(s) -- for every time you heard a raunchy rhyme calling the fairer sex slime.

The top hits feature a pimpin' parade of "bitches" and "ho's" who are depicted as nothing more than sex toys for boys.

CRTC restrictions ensure the worst parts are bleeped out on the airwaves. Eminem's hit "Superman" had so many references to "ho's" and "sluts" cut out of the radio version that it barely made sense.

Sexist lyrics have been around for decades and in other musical genres like rock and punk... but they're even more visible in rap now because of its current mainstream popularity.

How Hip-Hop Holds Blacks Back, City Journal, Summer 2003

Rap also began to offer some of the most icily misogynistic music human history has ever known.

Controversial Eminem steals awards show, National Post, February 22, 2001

Eminem's Grammy wins came after weeks of protest from gay organizations and women's groups who were angered Eminem — whose lyrics they say are homophobic and misogynistic — was even nominated for the industry's highest honours.

Storm grows over Eminem's Grammy nominations, National Post, January 12, 2001

In the week since Eminem received four Grammy nominations – including album of the year – the rapper's violent, homophobic and misogynistic lyrics have sparked a new firestorm of protest from individuals and groups who cannot believe Grammy voters would recognize anything artful in Eminem's angry raps.

Confronting Eminem, Globe and Mail editorial, October 27, 2000

His lyrics are misogynist... Mathers' lyrics are sick-making; they express an odious hatred of women.

Girls just want to have angst, National Post, July 19, 2000

Eminem, whose unbridled venom toward women, gays, most of his colleagues in music, his wife, and his mother, sets a new standard for violent and hateful lyrics.

Invisible man, Salon.com, June 7, 2000

Eminem may be the most violent, woman-hating, homophobic rapper ever.

Eminem: Rap or Consequences?, PlanetOut News & Politics, June 20, 2000

There is no evidence that Eminem's homophobia and misogyny are satirical. If he were rapping about lynching colored folk or slaughtering "towel-head" Muslims, for example, the satire claim would probably not fly – a point lost on pretty much every journalist except Salon's Eric Boehlert.

Province wants rapper kept out, National Post, October 26, 2000

Ontario's Attorney-General wants Eminem, the Michigan rap star whose profane, misogynist songs have topped the pop charts, barred from entering Canada and performing tonight at the SkyDome.

Gangsta warfare, Boston Globe, March 10, 1996

Considering the heavy doses of graphic sexual content, violent imagery and uncompromising misogyny, it's easy to see why gangsta rap has attracted high-profile enemies determined to curb it, then kill it.

Women rap gangsta rap, Toronto Star, December 20, 1993

A coalition of American black women's groups Friday urged the music industry to stop releasing "gangsta" rap because the lyrics demean women and promote crime. Citing a string of hit rap songs with lyrics about rape and shootings, the National Political Congress of Black Women and other groups said at a Senate building news conference in Washington that the songs should be banned from the airwaves.

Rat-a-tat of gangsta rap is sick, say blacks, Sunday Times, November 28, 1993

But black parents, politicians and intellectuals are sick of rap's glorification of ghetto violence and the degrading depiction of black women as "bitches and hos [whores]".