

OUR VIEW

Political Rap

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina's devastation of the New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, passions were high. Understandably so. Only the most hardened person could look at the images of desperate New Orleans residents—most of them poor and Black—and not empathize. While they waited for help from a dithering federal government, people suffered and died. When hip-hop superstar Kanye West told a national televised audience that President Bush "don't care about Black people," he was simply giving voice to unspoken thoughts running around in the heads of many African-Americans. What was so fitting about the incendiary statement was that it came from a rapper, from someone immersed in a culture created out of a necessity to give voice to a voiceless people: the people of Inner City USA.

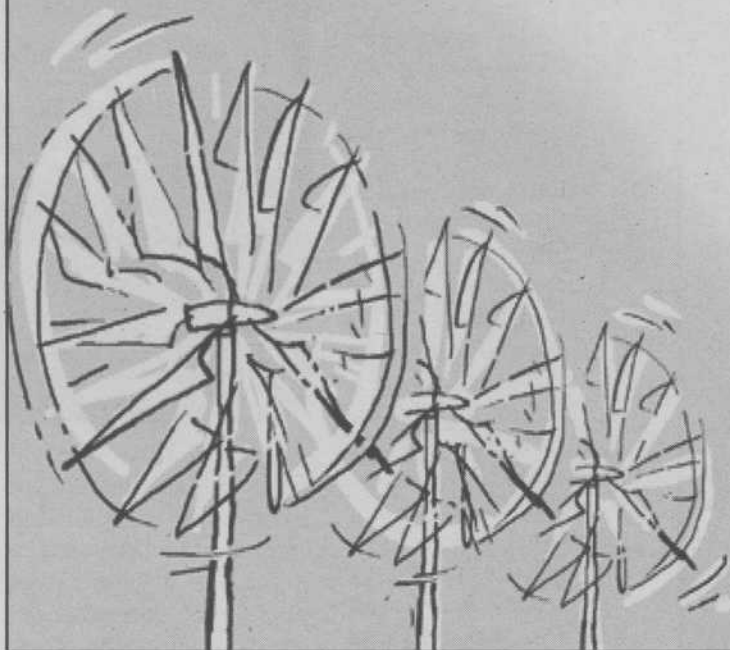
Hip-hop has grown up since its founding on street corners in New York. In 2003, hip-hop CD sales topped \$1 billion. By 2004, the hip-hop had become a global, \$10 billion enterprise whose influence could be seen in nearly every aspect of culture and pop culture. Rappers are sought after to endorse products, to take photo ops with V.I.P.s and partner, star in their own television shows (Flavor Flav, Snoop Dogg, Irv Gotti, Rev Run) with or start their own companies. Jay-Z and Nelly own interest in NBA teams. Jay also has a string of nightclubs, including 40/40 at the Palazzo. P.Diddy and Jermaine Dupri own restaurants. Let's not forget that box-office titan Will Smith—who owns television and film production companies—started his career as a rapper. While rap gets a bad rap, if you will, for some of the negativity it portrays, we should remember that 80 of America's nearly 50 million hip-hop consumers between ages 13 and 34 are White.

In the past 12 months, two rappers, Kanye West and Lil Wayne, have single-handedly generated interest in a moribund music industry. West sold 957,000 first-week copies of *The Graduation*. This summer, Lil Wayne's *The Carter III* became the first album in three years to ship platinum in one week. (The last album to do it was from a rapper: 50 Cent's *The Massacre*). So hip-hop remains as vital a force as ever. The timing is perfect because the upcoming election season is the most important in a generation and, perhaps, the most important in 50 years. The hip-hop community has arguably never been in a better position to show its maturity and influence the direction of a nation.

By default, Illinois Senator and presumptive Democratic Party nominee Barack Obama is the hip-hop candidate in the race for the White House. That he listens to hip-hop should comfort the hip-hop nation. It means that he understands the messages behind the music, something vitally important if its denizens are to become politically empowered and motivated enough to tackle the very serious problems facing America. On this end, the National Hip Hop Political Convention, in town this week for the first time, should serve as a launching pad for mobilization, education and activism. The itinerary (most of the events are at UNLV and Alexis Park resort) reflects the culture's maturity. Topics will cover such weighty topics as electoral politics, sexual discrimination, grassroots lobbying, maximizing use of broadband technology, and creating hip-hop political agenda, among other things.

But convening isn't enough. For the convention to be a success, its attendees will have to emerge enlightened, empowered and equipped to make a change. Local artists should attend and get as much knowledge as they can in order to help change the climate for the hip-hop community in Las Vegas. Just three years ago, the former sheriff sought to ban gangsta rap from the Strip after a string of violent incidents. Recent convictions in the murders of two rappers certainly didn't do anything to help change it's negative image. The hip-hop community and its supporters must turn their economic clout into political clout. They must be cognizant of the ill effects of underfunded schools, unemployment, lack of recreation and discriminatory sentencing laws and dedicate themselves to electing politicians with like ideals and targeting those with destructive policies. When the hip-hop community puts someone in office, then it will have grown up.

HOW WIND POWER WORKS



Mental health vital for teens

By Marian Wright Edelman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

To a stranger, Samantha Brown, 18, would look like any other teenager. The petite student is dressed in the latest gear, face covered in glitter makeup. Her friendly eyes dance behind oversized glasses while two pink barrettes keep her hair off her face. She's extremely bright and does well in school — she has the highest grade point average in her class. And like most girls her age, she thinks about going to the mall and meeting boys. But Samantha's warm smile and cheerful demeanor belie the emotional fragility and torment that lie inside. Samantha (not her real name) suffers from schizophrenia and has had bouts with bulimia. She writes suicide notes and cuts herself, something she says the "voices" tell her to do. She has an unhealthy infatuation with rapper, "Eminem," Marshall Mathers, which is one of the voices in her head.

Samantha is currently enrolled as a senior in a school for teens with special needs. She has been hospitalized several times for her disorders and has a family history of mental illness. In addition to her mother's post-traumatic stress disorder, her mother's mother, Samantha's grandmother, has been diagnosed with schizophrenia and depression. Her mother lost custody of Samantha af-



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ter not seeing her for two years.

Her family's instability hasn't helped Samantha. By the time she was eight years old, she had lived in three different states. When Samantha met her father for the first time, he was in court giving up his paternal rights to her. She was 12 years old at the time.

Sadly, Samantha's story is only one of millions of children who suffer from a variety of emotional, behavioral and mental disorders. As many as one in five children in the United States has a mental health disorder, and as many as one in ten has a disorder serious enough to impair their day-to-day functioning.

Only 20 percent of children and adolescents with mental disorders are identified and receive mental health services in any given year. Abuse and neglect can take a significant toll on children's emotional health, and when they are separated from all that is familiar and are moved from school to

school and community to community, those problems only grow worse.

Fortunately for Samantha, she receives appropriate quality care and support at her school from a team of school psychologists and social workers who provide psychological counseling. Medication management also is available to her. She receives occupational therapy to improve her fine motor skills, handwriting and keyboard use, as well as speech and language therapy. Each time she has a dangerous psychological or emotional episode, doctors are available to ensure she gets the treatment she needs.

Samantha has lived with her 78-year-old great-grandmother since she was 10 because of her parents' inability and refusal to care for her. Her great-grandmother works to ensure her safety, but limits her freedom and

forbids dating.

The two of them subsist on Social Security payments. They also receive some help from others. At times relatives pitch in and help buy food and Samantha's clothes and shoes. But Samantha and her great-grandmother barely get by. Unfortunately, they aren't connected to the financial help available for some of the children being raised by grandparents and other relatives.

Samantha wants to go to college someday but there are big questions as to what will happen to her when her great-grandmother can no longer take care of her. What resources will be available to her when she no longer has the school-based support team of social workers and health professionals upon which she relies? Will she be able to live independently? And who will make sure she

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