

Rise up Hip Hop Nation: Making 2007 the Year of Sustainable Change by Kristine Wright (Tina)

On the eve of a new year, I'd like to begin by offering peace and respect to everyone everywhere. While many are celebrating the holiday season, many more are suffering. Some are reflecting on the year gone by, while others are just praying the New Year will bring new possibilities for joy, peace, sustenance and justice. This is the time of year for reflection on the past and resolutions for the future. For me, this annual process led me to important questions. How can we make 2007 the year of sustainable change? What concrete steps can we take to address what ails our communities and our global village more broadly? Wherever we are in life, whether blessed or oppressed, affluent or struggling, the condition of the global village will directly affect us all sooner or later, and it is in our best interest to work towards sustainable change.

The first thing we must do is realize that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. We can no longer wish for better and act the same, maintaining status quo by default. To get out of the hell that corporate greed, concentrated power, western imperialism, religious fanaticism, and "ideology over reality" have created, we must get specific about what it will take to realize people power. It is not enough to be compassionate; you must act (14th Dalai Lama, 1992). And here are a few specific things you can do:

1. Pick one local issue and one global issue that you will educate your self about and stay informed!
2. Join two organizations that deal with your issues of choice (feel free to email me if you need some suggestions).
3. Mentor one child (For parents, mentor your children fully and completely). For childless adults (21+), mentor a child at your local school, Boys/Girls Club, or Big Brother/Big Sister organizations. Each One Teach One; Each One Reach One.
4. Sign at least one petition a month. Activism in the digital age is much easier than in previous ages, and it is easier to stay informed via the internet and email. For those that do not have

internet access at home, utilize your city's public library.

5. Recognizing that all media is framed (left/right, conservative/liberal), get your news from multiple media sources. By doing this, you will learn to separate facts from ideology.

6. Attend three community meetings or rallies a year or volunteer at community service centers at least three times a year. Getting involved in your community will lead to changes on the community level which will manifest on the global level eventually.

7. Be a conscious consumer. It's as simple as this: support what you believe helps your community, reject what does not.

8. Vote. Whether the system works or doesn't; whether elections are stolen or not. Too many of our forefathers and foremothers died to give us the right to vote, and for no other reason than that, we need to honor that right. I strongly recommend all, particularly full time workers, consider absentee voting (this way you don't have to worry about making it to the polls on the day of the election). Visit your state's Secretary of the State page to register to vote and/or sign up as an absentee voter. Voting is easy and doesn't cost to do, but it might cost greatly when we do not. Do not buy into the idea that two evils are the same. There is no more striking example than the Iraq war to disprove this belief. I know if the 2000 election resulted in President Gore instead of Bush, we would not have hundreds of thousands of dead Iraqis and thousands of dead and wounded service people. As well, global warming, and science in general, would be taken much more seriously. Voting may not directly affect your community but not voting could. To directly affect your community, it takes activism by community members and this list hopefully provides some guidance.

9. Make a sincere effort to communicate across class, color and generational lines. Most of what ails our community could be fixed with honest, open dialogue. With this we could overcome the internal divisions that separate us, and unity could be realized.

10. FORGIVE. No sustainable change will be possible until we develop the ability to be critical but forgiving, unyielding on principle but yielding on people and humanity. Mistakes have been made but if we let our mistakes keep us divided, it will impede our progress. We have to embrace our mutual interests and avoid getting clogged down in our differences. A community

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divided is a community conquered indeed. I challenge those in conflict to take time to dialogue on what divides us (hip hop v. civil rights generation, mainstream v. underground, rapper v. rapper, bourgeois v. proletariat) and find common ground to work together on. Sustainable change will require that brothers and sisters reconcile with our humanity, and forgive past (as well as future) shortfalls and indiscretions.

It is in human nature to be self-preserving, even at the expense of our progress at times. Informants have sold out movements for personal reward – and will again; some leaders have played politics at the community's expense for power – and continue to; brothers and sisters have disrespected themselves and their ancestors through some thoughtless actions (and even profit from some of this in hip hop). Our inability to forgive one another's trespasses will be our biggest impediment toward self determination. While I believe critical analysis of people that hurt our cause is essential, making criticism of others our primary focus makes it that more difficult to find common ground and unify around common interests. In the words of Iyanla Vanzant, Be against nothing...just be clear what you are for.

Here are a few things I'd like to see happen on an institutional level:

1. Black media needs to step up and serve the community, not exploit it. I see great room for this right now because it seems that commercial "urban" radio is at a crossroads. The music industry in general, and the hip hop industry, in particular, will never be the same, due to many things: the digital age being one of the major reasons. Hip Hop radio is struggling these days. It is the perfect time for radio to get innovative and diversify its play lists. It's obvious that the listening community is finally grown weary of the same ole" same ole". What is needed is a more representative and balanced vision of hip hop. But even more than that, the media needs to inform listeners of issues that affect their lives. I see some success of that happening with national syndicated programs like the Michael Baisden Show (which is creating a community of 50+ heavily populated Black cities across the country every weekday and discussing some important issues that affect the community). As well, he has given airtime for everyday community organizers and entrepreneurs to promote their events and businesses. This is a good model to embrace.

Hip hop stations need to give quality time to issues important to the hip hop community. I'd like to see commercial stations like K-DAY (in L.A. and streaming worldwide) give a primetime 30 minute spot weekdays, and an hour weekend spot to this type of broadcast. Davey D's Breakdown FM Radio provides a great model. I'd also like to see 5 minute spots @ 4pm for community event listings, particularly for positive youth events. Finally, radio stations need to sponsor & broadcast dialogues at community high schools at least once a month. All these

efforts will build community through dialogue and activism.

2. The panel on the annual State of the Black Union must be diversified by class and age. I know Tavis Smiley has interviewed a number of hip hoppers on his show, including Talib Kweli, Jill Scott, Common, Chuck D, KRS-One, Nas, Queen Latifah, and Saul Williams. Last year, given the emphasis on Katrina, it would have been beneficial to include on the panel someone like David Banner, or Kanye West, or community activists like Rosa Clemente or Fred Hampton Jr. (who organized community level Katrina relief efforts).

Hip hop needs to be represented for the annual State of the Black Union to have legitimacy. So I hope this message make its way to organizers and the oversight from last year will be remedied this year. All classes of our community need to be heard as well. At last year's forum, two Katrina survivors were brought on stage and given a couple minutes to discuss their experiences. Why was this brother and sister not invited to sit on the panel and add their perspectives to the dialogue? As long as activist do not respect the intellect of the most oppressed among us (poor and working class), and activists and leaders preach to the community they wish to uplift, instead of working with and learning from the community they wish to uplift, there will be no sustainable change.

3. Rappers and Media Program Producers: Stop using the n-word and derogatory words like bitch for women on records and other media forms. Substitute these with words like brotha, sista, and fam(ily), etc.. I realize that erasing a word that has a 400 year history in the vernacular of the Black community is not going to happen anytime soon. The masses in day to day speech will continue to use it, but people that put out products that must be edited and packaged before sale have the ability to be much more selective in what they put out there. Leading by this example will make a difference in our youth's psyche. We already have proof of that. When Public Enemy and other rap groups wore the X caps and African medallions in the late 80s and early 90s, the masses followed their example, and the consciousness of the people grew.

4. Community Policing. All oppressed communities should adopt the Black Panther model of community policing. Police watch organizations like the Ella Baker Center in Oakland, CA have had success in keeping the police (who are sworn to protect and serve the community) accountable. On top of this, community policing will counter the power that destructive entities (violence, drugs, delinquencies) have on our community youth. Be visible and be engaged.

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This list is a start. It is in no way definitive, but it will bring sustainable community change if each and every one of us acts on suggestions listed (and others). The reason I focus on sustainable change is because our history shows us that we are very capable of big movements (Abolition, U.N.I.A., Civil Rights, Black Power), but what we have not been able to do as yet is sustain these progressive movements. To sustain them, we need continual people power and community involvement. Micro level activism can off set macro level power imbalances.

Sustainable change will take more than just vision for a better tomorrow; it will take reconciliation with the past and acceptance of the present reality. The reality is that social structure rules our lives. And like the entire natural world, humans must adapt to survive whatever structural conditions they must bear, and today that entails an uneven distribution of resources where 6% control most and 94% have little. When we reconcile with this reality, we can move to build solutions, based on "what is" instead of "what ifs".

So while the Panthers tried to build consciousness they also served the community with hot meals and health care. Bob Marley inspired souljahs across the globe, but those in most need in his native country, he gave food and shelter to daily. It is the only way to liberation: people must live before they can grow in consciousness and self determination, and each of us can take these specific actions to help our fellow beings live, learn and grow, both physically and consciously. Through self determination, we can free ourselves from dependency on a system that has never, and will never, serve us well. So for the New Year, I offer this list of specific actions individuals and communities can adopt, and if we follow it and work together to build on it, we can finally move the crowd...to freedom. One love.

One God! One Aim! One Destiny! – Marcus Garvey and the UNIA

Someday at Christmas, there'll be no wars....When we have learned what Christmas is for...When we have found what life's really worth, there'll be peace on Earth – Stevie Wonder

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