

Hip Hop for the PEOPLE

Written by Robert ID578

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Hip Hop for the P.E.O.P.L.E. (Providing Education Opportunity, Prosperity and Life Eternally) is led by Newark Deputy Mayor Ras Baraka, a spoken-word artist and son of New Jersey's former state poet laureate.

Marshaling hip hop's influence on young listeners, Ras Baraka joined celebrities of the rap and mainstream entertainment worlds Wednesday in announcing a nationwide initiative to foster community service and curb gang violence.

The initiative, launched with the Newark-based Saving Ourselves grass roots organization, is an outgrowth of a peace agreement Baraka helped broker between factions of the Bloods and Crips street gangs earlier this year.

State officials say increased gang activity was at least partly responsible for last year's increase in homicides in New Jersey.

"The Hip Hop for the P.E.O.P.L.E. initiative was created in an attempt to save lives due to the recent increase of gang violence in the East Coast," said Baraka, 35, a popular figure among rappers and community activists, who is also vice principal of Newark's Weequahic High School.

In July, Baraka organized a conference bringing together members of the civil rights movement of the 1960's with counterparts from the so-called hip hop generation, a demographic loosely defined as people aged 18 to 35, mainly blacks and Hispanics in urban areas, bound by common styles of dress, speech and music that is typically beat-heavy with spoken, or rapped lyrics.

Elements of Baraka's new initiative include the release of a compilation CD early next year with interviews with gang members, political commentary, and music with a "positive" message. A feature-length documentary is also now in the works, focusing on particular problems of the hip hop generation, as is a Web site www.hiphopforthepeople.com.

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Other hip hop artists affiliated with the initiative include DJ Cutmaster Cool V, Black 45, Kandi Kain, Hahz the Rippa, Homicide Hass and Jerzey Mob.

Kenyatta Blake, 30, also known as Buckshot of the group Black Moon, urged members of his generation to act as entrepreneurial role models for children and teenagers. "Start in your neighborhood," Blake said, speaking before members of the music and mainstream media assembled at city hall. "We got to organize ourselves and set an example that we're going to get into the economic system."

Blake acknowledged that there is a lingering perception among many Americans that hip hop music not only chronicles urban violence, but fosters it. But for most rap artists, he said, the opposite is true.

In a statement released through Baraka, comedian Bill Cosby endorsed Hip Hop for the P.E.O.P.L.E. as "a vehicle to educate on anti-violence in all forms."

Cosby, a prodigious donor to educational institutions, alienated some fellow African Americans in May with remarks harshly critical of inner city blacks' grammar and speech. But rappers on hand Wednesday said they have the street credibility to connect with youth at risk of turning to gangs or those who already have; reports the [AP](#).

"We have enough respect where we can come out amongst them, but we have enough strength and mental power that we can resist being part of that," said Dupre Kelly, 33, of Newark, also known as DoltAll of the platinum-selling group Lords of the Underground. "We've been going into the schools, we've been talking to the youth. It might not be publicized, but we've been there".