

BY EMAIL AND REGISTERED MAIL

August 11, 2005

Mr. Keith Norton  
Chief Commissioner  
Ontario Human Rights Commission  
180 Dundas Street West, 8<sup>th</sup> floor  
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2R9

Dear Mr. Norton:

**Re: Complaint against Bell Mobility for Sale of "PimpTones"**

I would like to file a complaint against Bell Mobility, 5099 Creebank Road, Mississauga, Ontario L4W 5N2, under Section 1 of the Ontario *Human Rights Code*:

Every person has a right to equal treatment with respect to services, goods and facilities, without discrimination because of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, family status or handicap.

Bell Mobility, a company with its head office in Ontario, has been selling cellphone ringtones that contain abusive and sexist language, products that I hope are prohibited under the *Human Rights Code* of Ontario. If they aren't, then clearly the *Code* needs to be amended.

**Background**

On July 30, 2005, CanWest News Service published an article about ring tones offered for sale by Bell Mobility. Excerpts from this article are reproduced below, with the complete article enclosed as Exhibit A:

*Bell Mobility is selling a series of cellphone ringtones called PimpTones that make light of prostitution and refer to women as "bitches," "skanks" and "hoes."*

*The short messages can be downloaded from the Bell website for a \$2.50 fee and programmed to sound whenever the cellphone rings.*

*Unlike conventional ringtones that play melodies or short clips of popular songs, the PimpTones are voice recordings of actors speaking in a street vernacular about "players" and "hoes" (whores).*

*Some of the explicit language in the ringtones is beeped out but can still be easily understood.*

*Bell pulled two of the ringtones off its website on Friday after the Ottawa Citizen called to ask why it would sell a product that seems focused, however satirically, on a profession that exploits women.*

*The company removed a clip entitled "No Love For Hoes," in which a receptionist is heard saying there are "skanks" and "hoes" calling on line one, and another in which a female voice says, "Money, clothes and hoes is all a player cares about."*

*But Bell continues to offer others in the same PimpTones series, including a clip with angry male voice saying, "Bi-(BEEP)-ch, do I look like a motherfu-(BEEP)-ing track suit?" A track suit is urban slang for a low-class person who wears athletic gear.*

*"Well, no," a young female voice replies. "Well, quit sweating me, ho!" the man says. In one clip, a young woman's voice says, "So, Mack-a-ho, your escorts for the Las Vegas Gentleman's Ball have arrived." Mack is slang for pimp or, in verb form, means to seduce or have sex with.*

*Other clips use the word bitch and humorously threaten slaps or kicks if the phone isn't answered.*

*A Bell Canada spokesperson said the clips were offered in response to customer demand. "We have a lot of different consumers out there who are looking for different things," said Nessa Prendergast...*

*The PimpTones do suggest abusive behaviour, however humorous the intent. In one clip, an actor speaking in a deep baritone says, "You have an incoming message from Master Silk Macktastic's hand to your face," which is followed by a slapping sound and a muffled cry.*

*"Answer the phone, bi-(BEEP)-ch, before I come down and introduce these croc skins to your fat ass," says an angry male voice in another clip. Croc skins refers to shoes or boots made of crocodile.*

*The same voice appears in clip saying "Screw this, bi-(BEEP)-ch, give me my baby powder!" -- a reference to cocaine.*

*Bell says it did not create the content for the PimpTones and instead acquired it from a supplier.<sup>1</sup>*

### **Rationale for this complaint under the Human Rights Code**

Section 1 of the Ontario *Human Rights Code* states that every person has a right to equal treatment with respect to goods without discrimination because of sex. Cellphone PimpTones are a "good" offered for sale by Bell Mobility. The OHRC *Policy on Sexual Harassment and Inappropriate Gender-Related Comments and Conduct* (the "Policy") says:

Discrimination based on sex **includes what is commonly referred to as sexual harassment or inappropriate comments** and actions of a sexual nature. (emphasis added)

Examples of sexual harassment within the meaning of the *Code* include "offensive remarks, gender-related verbal abuse, rough and vulgar humour or language related to gender"<sup>2</sup>. All of these are

<sup>1</sup> *Bell Mobility's 'PimpTones' feature explicit language*, CanWest News Service, July 30, 2005

<sup>2</sup> *Policy on Sexual Harassment and Inappropriate Gender-Related Comments and Conduct*, Ontario Human Rights Commission, September 10, 1996

present in the Bell Mobility PimpTones. By offering such goods for sale in Ontario and throughout Canada, the company was discriminating against women.

The OHRC web site states:

**Sexual Harassment and a "Poisoned Environment:**

Sexual harassment can have a bad effect on, or "poison" the places where you live, work or receive services. Even if the harassment is not directed at you, it can still poison the environment for you or others.

Because cellphones ring in public places frequented by women, i.e., on transit, in restaurants, malls, sidewalks, etc., these verbally abusive products distributed by Bell will contribute to the creation of a poisoned environment. For instance, I take the GO train to work every day and cellphones with a variety of ringtones are constantly going off all around me. Being exposed to PimpTones would definitely create a poisoned environment for me.

**Response from Bell Mobility**

After CanWest News Service publicized the sale of PimpTones, Bell withdrew the product and CanWest published this information in a follow up article on August 4, 2005 (enclosed as Exhibit B). I sent an email to Nessa Prendergast, Bell Canada Media Relations, and asked her how long Bell had been selling PimpTones, and how many had been sold. This is her response (complete email enclosed as Exhibit C):

"We unfortunately don't provide a detailed breakout of our data content downloads, so I'm unable to provide you with the number of tones sold."

I would make several points here about Bell's response.

1. When contacted by a reporter, Bell defended the product and has not, to my knowledge, admitted any error in judgement or issued an apology for their conduct. Certainly, there is nothing like that in the email Ms Prendergast sent me.
2. Bell withdrew the PimpTones only after the situation was revealed in the news media. In other words, they would still be selling this product if they hadn't been exposed to public scrutiny.
3. Some PimpTones have been sold, although Bell won't reveal how many.
4. A corporate mentality exists at Bell Mobility that supported the purchase of these abusive products for resale, which means a similar situation could arise in future. Also, the spokesperson who defended this product, Nessa Prendergast, identifies herself as "Bell Canada Media Relations", so this corporate mentality extends beyond Bell Mobility.

Indeed, in December 2001, Bell ExpressVu, another Bell company, broadcast the XXX-rated video, Doggystyle, performed by rapper Snoop Dogg. Published reports indicate it featured abusive language (bitch and whore).<sup>3</sup> Previous to that, Bell ExpressVu's broadcast of violent

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<sup>3</sup> *We can stop porn's proliferation*, National Post, January 4, 2002

and degrading pornography was revealed by the CBC's Fifth Estate in March 2001.<sup>4</sup> So, Bell has a history that is somewhat less than stellar.

5. Bell (probably) didn't have an intention to discriminate against women by selling these products -- their motive was profit not ideology -- but the *Policy* specifies that conduct does not have to be "made with the intention to discriminate to be in violation of the *Code*".

### **Spread of pimp culture - the social cost**

In justifying PimpTones, Nessa Prendergast told the reporter:

The motif that PimpTones use is a "huge phenomenon," in pop culture... "There are mainstream TV shows and products that use that language. It's a big part of the culture these days."<sup>5</sup>

She is absolutely right. Pimp language originated in rap music, but, over the past several years, has crossed over into other areas of popular culture -- television, movies, video games, etc. Now, industries outside of pop culture, like Bell Mobility, are spreading this disastrous trend even further.

The harm caused by this genre of music, particularly to the black community, was recognized many years ago by the National Congress of Black Women (NCBW). Speaking to an American Senate sub-committee on the social impact of music violence in 1997, Dr. Delores Tucker, Chair of the NCBW, said:

"Those malicious lyrics grossly malign black women, degrade the unthinking young black artists who create it, pander pornography to our innocent young children, hold black people (especially young black males) universally up to ridicule and contempt, and corrupt its vast audience of listeners, white and black, throughout the world."<sup>6</sup>

The NCBW continues their opposition, as indicated in the following excerpt from their web site ([www.npcbw.org](http://www.npcbw.org)):

"NCBW continues its high-visibility campaign against the entertainment industry's glorification of violence, misogyny, drugs and pornography. Dr. Tucker and the NCBW's Entertainment Commission have taken the battle from the retail level into the boardrooms of giant corporate backers like Seagrams and Time-Warner -- with tangible results.

"After NCBW's sidewalk protest, Time-Warner canceled its planned release of "Smack my B-- Up." Last year, Time-Warner's CEO cited "dramatic changes in the music industry as a result of the concerns of Dr. C. DeLores Tucker and others" in telling his stockholders the company would no longer market music that "glorifies violence, promotes race hatred, denigrates women and encourages drug abuse."

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<sup>4</sup> *The Pious Pornographers*, The Fifth Estate, March 28, 2001

<sup>5</sup> *Bell Mobility's 'PimpTones' feature explicit language*, CanWest News Service, July 30, 2005

<sup>6</sup> Testimony of C. Delores Tucker, National Chair, National Political Council of Black Women, Inc., before the Senate Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, Restructuring, and the District of Columbia hearing on the Social Impact of Music Violence, November 6, 1997

"... Now the fight continues against Interscope's new French owner, Vivendi, and against today's even worse lyrics typified by gansta/porno rapper Eminem, whose recent Grammy awards were denounced by NCBW."<sup>7</sup>

At an appearance in Toronto in March of this year, influential director Spike Lee spoke about the harmful influence of pimp rap:

"Somehow intelligence is being defined with being white and ignorance with being black," he said, blaming the imagery and lyrics of hip-hop music. "It's not even gangsta rap, it's about pimp rap. When artists talk about 'Ho this' and 'Bitch this' and 'Skank this', they're talking about our mothers, our sisters, our daughters.

"You have to have knowledge of self and knowledge of history. Because if you had that, you would not use that terminology. You would not even be in that mindset.

"And we're in a time when young black boys and girls want to be pimps and strippers, because that is what they see ... Something is definitely wrong."<sup>8</sup>

In speaking about the controversy over Pepsi's use of rapper Ludacris in commercials, American commentator Bill O'Reilly said:

I believe Ludacris is dangerous. Scores of grammar school teachers in the inner cities of America have written to me detailing horror stories spurred on, they say, by rap music. One fifth-grade teacher told me that it is common in her class for 10-year-old boys to call little girls "bitches." And those little boys can quote the lyrics of Ludacris with amazing accuracy.

Another teacher, who works in a Los Angeles ghetto, has a once-a-week "real talk" half hour in her classroom. She told me that some eighth-grade girls now say they want to become strippers and some boys pimps. When asked why, the kids say it looks like fun in the rap videos.<sup>9</sup>

In July 2003, rapper Jay-Z performed at the Molson Amphitheatre in Toronto, along with 50 Cent. A Toronto Star review of the concert said the audience -- which included children as young as 10 -- was mesmerized by Jay-Z, nodding their heads and reciting his lyrics about pimping, and that it was unnerving to hear 15-year-old girls respond loudly in the affirmative when he called for his bitches.<sup>1</sup>

In the United States, child advocates are worried by the increasing numbers of middle-class teenage girls turning to prostitution, with some pointing the finger at pimp culture. An article in Newsweek said:

Some activists put the blame at least in part on a culture that glorifies pimping. The new song by superstar rapper 50 Cent—"P.I.M.P."—is about as subtle as the title suggests. Sample lyric: "Bitch choose with me, I'll have you stripping in the street/Put my other hoes down, you get your ass beat." Rapper Jay-Z's hit song "Big Pimpin'" goes like this: "I thug 'em, f—k 'em, love 'em, leave 'em/Cause I don't f—kin' need 'em/Take em out the hood, keep 'em lookin' good/But I don't f—kin' feed 'em."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> National Congress of Black Women web site as at August 11, 2005

<sup>8</sup> *Spike Lee's usual rap, about music and more*, Toronto Star, March 16, 2005

<sup>9</sup> *Singing a different tune*, Bill O'Reilly, WorldNetDaily, September 12, 2002

<sup>10</sup> *'This could be your kid'*, Newsweek, August 18, 2003

The fact that some girls and women have embraced verbal abuse, or may be turning to prostitution because of the mainstreaming of pimp culture, is a testament to the power of the media to alter attitudes and bring about profoundly negative social changes.

### **Ontario political action against misogynist rap**

In October 2000, when violent rapper Eminem was scheduled to appear at Toronto's SkyDome, Ontario M.P.P. Michael Bryant, currently the Attorney General of Ontario, held a press conference denouncing Eminem's lyrics and urging the provincial government to "crack down on music that advocates violence and hate"<sup>11</sup> (news release enclosed as Exhibit D).

He identified steps that could be taken by then Attorney General, Jim Flaherty, to deal with Eminem's scheduled appearance, such as:

- bringing an injunction to stop the rapper's show on the basis that he would be violating the *Criminal Code* by going ahead and performing; and
- prosecuting the rapper under the hate crime provisions of the *Criminal Code* or the indecency or obscenity provisions

To his credit, Attorney General Flaherty took the unprecedented and highly controversial step of trying to have this international superstar prevented from entering Canada specifically because of the violence against women Eminem promotes in his lyrics. Unfortunately, Mr. Flaherty was unsuccessful because women are **excluded** from the protection of the *Criminal Code* hate propaganda law, a situation that contravenes Section 15 of the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The federal government refuses to change the law to add gender, although they recently amended it to extend protection to those identified by their sexual orientation.

### **Additional information**

Attached as Exhibit E is a section on misogynist rap/hip hop taken from the *Action Agenda: A Strategic Blueprint for Reducing Exposure to Media Violence in Canada*, published by Ontario's Office for Victims of Crime, that provides more information on the exceedingly violent and hateful content of this music. More information can be found on my web site at [www.fradical.com](http://www.fradical.com) in the Music and Hate Propaganda sections.

### **Conclusion**

It is obvious that Bell Mobility has a corporate attitude that supported the purchase of sexist and abusive products. The company's executive needs to be told, in no uncertain terms by the Commission, that this corporate climate must change, and that similar products will not be tolerated in Ontario. They should also be ordered to recall the PimpTones already sold.

Should the Commission feel this complaint against Bell Mobility falls outside the reach of the *Human Rights Code*, then other steps must be taken by the Commission to address this disastrous undermining of women's rights and safety.

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<sup>11</sup> *Bryant raps rapper's violent message*, Michael Bryant MPP, news release, October 25, 2000

As the OHRC states on its website:

**Silence or doing nothing will not typically make harassment go away and sometimes such behaviour can lead to violence.**

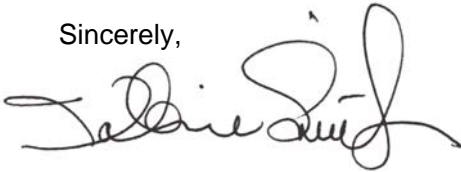
Individuals do not, obviously, have the resources to combat sexist attacks from huge corporations like Bell, or the multi-billion dollar international entertainment conglomerates that promote performers like Eminem, Ludacris, Jay-Z, etc. It is therefore essential that the OHRC take on this issue of systemic sexism, in the same way it has tackled systemic racism.

For example, the Commission could:

1. Hold public consultations to examine the impact sexist entertainment is having on society
2. Create a public education campaign about the harm caused by sexist language
3. Suggest changes to the *Code* to address the shortfall in legislative protection for women and girls
4. Demand that the federal government change the hate propaganda law to include gender so that the law conforms to Section 15 of the *Charter*, and offers women and girls the same protection as other vulnerable groups

I look forward to a positive response from the Commission on this important issue.

Sincerely,



Valerie Smith

cc: The Hon. Michael Bryant, Attorney General of Ontario  
Joseph Tascona, MPP, Conservative critic, Attorney General  
Peter Kormos, MPP, NDP critic, Attorney General  
The Hon. Sandra Pupatello, Minister Responsible for Women's Issues  
Marilyn Churley, MPP, NDP critic, Women's Issues  
The Hon. Mary Anne Chambers, Minister of Children and Youth Services  
Hate Crimes Community Working Group, Ministry of the Attorney General  
Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF)  
Ontario Women's Directorate  
MediaWatch, METRAC

**Exhibits**

- A Article: *Bell Mobility's 'PimpTones' feature explicit language*, CanWest News Service, July 30, 2005
- B Article: *No mo ho: Bell Mobility quietly ditches PimpTones*, The Ottawa Citizen, August 4, 2005
- C Email from Nessa Prendergast, Bell Canada Media Relations, August 9, 2005
- D Bryant raps rapper's violent message, Michael Bryant MPP, news release, October 25, 2000
- E Violent/Misogynist Rap/Hip Hop, *Action Agenda: A Strategic Blueprint for Reducing Exposure to Media Violence in Canada*, November 2004, Office for Victims of Crime



## Bell Mobility's 'PimpTones' feature explicit language

Clips suggest abusive behaviour, talk about sex trade; Warning: Some readers might find content offensive

**Glen McGregor**

CanWest News Service

*July 30, 2005*

OTTAWA -- Bell Mobility is selling a series of cellphone ringtones called PimpTones that make light of prostitution and refer to women as "bitches," "skanks" and "hoes."

The short messages can be downloaded from the Bell website for a \$2.50 fee and programmed to sound whenever the cellphone rings.

Unlike conventional ringtones that play melodies or short clips of popular songs, the PimpTones are voice recordings of actors speaking in a street vernacular about "players" and "hoes" (whores).

Some of the explicit language in the ringtones is beeped out but can still be easily understood.

Bell pulled two of the ringtones off its website on Friday after the Ottawa Citizen called to ask why it would sell a product that seems focused, however satirically, on a profession that exploits women.

The company removed a clip entitled "No Love For Hoes," in which a receptionist is heard saying there are "skanks" and "hoes" calling on line one, and another in which a female voice says, "Money, clothes and hoers is all a player cares about."

But Bell continues to offer others in the same PimpTones series, including a clip with angry male voice saying, "Bi-(BEEP)-ch, do I look like a motherfu-(BEEP)-ing track suit?"

A track suit is urban slang for a low-class person who wears athletic gear.

"Well, no," a young female voice replies. "Well, quit sweating me, ho!" the man says.

In one clip, a young woman's voice says, "So, Mack-a-ho, your escorts for the Las Vegas Gentleman's Ball have arrived."

Mack is slang for pimp or, in verb form, means to seduce or have sex with.



Other clips use the word bitch and humorously threaten slaps or kicks if the phone isn't answered.

A Bell Canada spokesperson said the clips were offered in response to customer demand.

"We have a lot of different consumers out there who are looking for different things," said Nessa Prendergast. The motif that PimpTones use is "a huge phenomenon," in pop culture, she said. "There are mainstream TV shows and products that use that language. It's big part of the culture these days."

She cited as examples the automobile makeover show, Pimp My Ride, and the energy drink Pimp Juice, marketed by hip-hop star Nelly.

The PimpTones clips evoke stereotypes that emerged from the Blaxploitation films of the 1970s, such as *The Mack* and *SuperFly*. They featured African-American pimps who dressed in garish clothes and jewelry, drove big cars and commanded stables of "hoes."

The genre has made a comeback, with a remake of 1971's *Shaft* released in 2000 and a new version of *SuperFly* in the works.

While the term pimp has lost some of its negative connotations with its heavy usage in hip-hop culture, it can still be a loaded term, says Anastasia Kuzyk, a spokesperson for the Sex Workers Association of Toronto.

"I think most people in sex work and most people out of sex work would find it offensive," she said. "You don't have to be a prostitute to be degraded by a man's words."

She said she is more concerned the mainstream culture continues to stigmatize sex workers, pointing to the portrayal of pimps and prostitutes in the video game *Grand Theft Auto*, in which players can machine-gun or run down prostitutes.

"Considering that I've friends (who were) murdered in this business, I'm not a great fan of that video game."

The PimpTones do suggest abusive behaviour, however humorous the intent. In one clip, an actor speaking in a deep baritone says, "You have an incoming message from Master Silk Macktastic's hand to your face," which is followed by a slapping sound and a muffled cry.

"Answer the phone, bi-(BEEP)-ch, before I come down and introduce these croc skins to your fat ass," says an angry male voice in another clip.

Croc skins refers to shoes or boots made of crocodile.

The same voice appears in clip saying "Screw this, bi-(BEEP)-ch, give me my baby powder!" -- a reference to cocaine.

Bells says it did not create the content for the PimpTones and instead acquired it from a supplier.

(Ottawa Citizen)

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## Bell Mobility pulls demeaning PimpTones ringers

Clips were titled No Love For Hoes, Pimp Juice, and Money, Clothes, Hoes

**GLEN MCGREGOR**

CanWest News Service

*August 4, 2005*

Wireless provider Bell Mobility has stopped selling a contentious series of cellphone ringtones that referred to women as "bitches" and "hoes" and offered a satirical take on the culture of prostitution.

The company removed its PimpTones ringers from its Web site after a CanWest News Service report on the downloadable audio clips, which feature actors talking about "skanks" and "players" in the vernacular of a street pimp.

Like conventional musical ringtones, the PimpTones can be loaded onto Bell cellphones and programmed to sound whenever the phone rings.

They use urban jargon like "baby powder" (cocaine) and some suggested abusive behaviour, with a character named Macktastic - "Mack" is a street word for pimp - heard threatening slaps if the phone isn't answered, followed by a cry and a slapping sound.

The clips carried titles such as No Love For Hoes, Pimp Juice, and Money, Clothes, Hoes.

The company initially removed two of the more explicit PimpTones from its Web site, but by Monday had pulled all the remaining tones. Bell initially insisted there was nothing wrong with the PimpTones.

A spokesperson claimed last week the ringtones were marketed in response to customer demand and the need for consumers to personalize their phones. They were part of "a huge phenomenon" in pop culture, she said, citing the TV program Pimp My Ride.

Ottawa Citizen

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**Inbox: FW: Bell Mobility PimpTones (7 of 38)** 

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**Date:** Tue, 9 Aug 2005 10:24:06 -0400 [09:24:06 AM CDT]

**From:** nessa.prendergast@bell.ca  

**To:** valsmith@fradical.com 

**Subject:** FW: Bell Mobility PimpTones

**Headers:** [Show All Headers](#)

Hi Valerie,

Thanks for your note; I returned from holiday yesterday and am just getting caught up on email now.

The mailing address for Bell Mobility head office is:

5099 Creekbank Road  
Mississauga, ON  
L4W 5N2

Bell is continuously updating its content for ringtones, voicetones and caller ring back tunes, so the mix of what we offer to customers is always changing.

We unfortunately don't provide a detailed breakout of our data content downloads, so I'm unable to provide you with the number of tones sold.

Kind regards,  
Nessa

Nessa Prendergast  
Bell Canada Media Relations  
T. 416-581-4253  
C. 416-931-8928

-----Original Message-----

**From:** Valerie Smith [mailto:valsmith@fradical.com]  
**Sent:** August 9, 2005 7:28 AM  
**To:** Prendergast, Nessa (6005149)  
**Subject:** Bell Mobility PimpTones

Dear Ms Prendergast:

Further to my previous email, I read that Bell has stopped selling PimpTones. However, I still require the following information please:

- Mailing address for Bell Mobility head office
- How long was Bell selling Pimptones?
- How many Pimptones were sold?

If you could send me this information today, it would be most appreciated.

Thank you.

Valerie Smith  
P.O. Box 90598  
Markham Eglinton Post Office  
Toronto, ON M1J 3N7  
Email: valsmith@fradical.com

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**THE ATTORNEY GENERAL CRITIC**



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 25, 2000

**MPP RAPS RAPPER'S VIOLENT MESSAGE**

*Crack down on artists who advocate violence and hate - Bryant*

**Queen's Park:** - Liberal Attorney General Critic Michael Bryant is urging the Harris government to crack down on recording artists who advocate violence and hate. The M.P.P. for St. Paul's is referring to the arrival in Toronto of the notorious rapper Eminem, who is set to perform Thursday evening at SkyDome.

"Nobody wants to curb free speech but some of this rapper's songs cross the line. Some of the lyrics suggest that violence against women is 'cool' - even funny. It's time for the Attorney General to investigate and if necessary, prevent Eminem's concert on Thursday, or prosecute if any crimes take place." says Bryant.

Bryant is suggesting a number of steps that the A-G could take in dealing with the appearance of Eminem, including bringing an injunction to stop the rapper's show on the basis that his performance would be violating the *Criminal Code* and prosecuting the rapper under the hate crime, indecency or obscenity provisions of the *Criminal Code* if necessary.

Valerie Smith, who brought her complaint against Eminem to the Toronto Hate Crimes Unit, says "this guy is advocating hatred and violence against women. It's time for the Harris government to stop talking tough about cracking down on domestic violence and start *doing* something about it."

Bryant is also calling for preventive measures to ensure that parents have a say in what their kids listen to. Right now in Ontario, a child of any age can purchase whatever CD they want - no matter how violent or offensive. "I doubt that parents would want some of these songs in their kids' hands, so let's leave it up to them to decide. We need to start regulating music the same way we do movies. If you're not old enough, you can't buy it without a parent," Bryant says.

Bryant is asking the Harris government to regulate the sale of CDs and tapes in Ontario. For products labelled "Parental Advisory Explicit Content," Bryant suggests they be sold only to those 18 years of age or older with proof of ID. The Liberal Attorney General Critic also wants the Tories to consider mandatory criteria through joint regulation of movies, video games, and music products. Currently in Ontario, CDs and tapes are self-regulated by the industry.

-30-

Contact:

Michael Bryant, M.P.P. St. Paul's  
416-325-7292

Debora Steggles  
416-325-7292



# Action Agenda

A Strategic Blueprint for  
Reducing Exposure to  
Media Violence in Canada

Action Agenda:  
A Strategic Blueprint for Reducing Exposure to Media  
Violence in Canada

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Funding for this Project is provided by the Government of Ontario  
Ministry of the Attorney General  
Office for Victims of Crime Research/Revictimization Prevention  
Grant Program  
From the Victims' Justice Fund

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## 12.2. Violent/Misogynist Rap/Hip Hop

The violent/misogynist version of rap music ("gangsta rap") began with a performer called Ice-T in 1987, and has continued to grow in influence and popularity to the point that it is now completely mainstream.<sup>448</sup> C. Delores Tucker, Chair of the National Political Congress of Black Women, has been at the forefront of protests against gangsta rap music since its inception because of the degradation of women, promotion of drug use and violence contained in the lyrics. Ms Tucker believes that the performers promote "Negative, stereotypical images calling their mothers, grandmothers, all the women in their community whores, bitches and sluts".<sup>449</sup> In appearing before a U.S. Senate subcommittee hearing on the Social Impact of Music Violence in 1997, she said:

*Those malicious lyrics grossly malign black women, degrade the unthinking young black artists who create it, pander pornography to our innocent young children, hold black people (especially young black males) universally up to ridicule and contempt, and corrupt its vast audience of listeners, white and black, throughout the world.*<sup>450</sup>

Ms Tucker condemned the corporations that "promote and distribute music that teaches kids that it's cool to kill, use drugs, gang rape girls and denigrate women in the most vulgar and violent ways". In commenting on a rash of murders in Toronto, Dudley Laws of the Black Action Defence Committee cited the negative influence of rap music that glamorizes a criminal lifestyle. "The music culture is awful now," Mr. Laws said. "They have to regulate what young people are looking at."<sup>451</sup>

American studies indicate that rap is "the dominant favorite among adolescent African American males (as many as 75% list it as their favorite), with many white adolescents, especially suburban white boys, listing it as one of their preferred music genres".<sup>452</sup> However, because of rap's concentration on the most negative aspects of the inner-city experience, some believe it may function more to cultivate racial stereotypes than to cultivate cross-cultural understanding.<sup>453</sup> At a conference in Chicago in October 2003, rapper Angela Zone criticized the state of the genre, saying, "Right now it's raising a generation of pimps and ho's and we've got to stop that."<sup>454</sup>

An Associated Press article in July 2003 reported on the promotion of the pimp lifestyle in rap and hip hop music:

*Ten years ago, it seemed as if every rapper wanted to be a gangsta. Now, everyone wants to be a pimp. 50 Cent and Snoop Dogg strut in full pimp regalia, surrounded by a bevy of beauties, in their new video P.I.M.P... Even old-school soul veteran Ronald Isley personifies the pimp style with his alter-ego, Mr. Biggs, right down to his elaborate cane.*

*... the self-proclaimed king of pimps, Bishop Don Magic Juan, would disagree with the sentiment that pimping is a bad thing. Although he's given up the pimp business for preaching -- he's an ordained minister -- he's still a proud playa who sticks up mightily for his former profession. "It's been portrayed negatively through movies and television," says Juan, who despite his new profession has not forsaken his pimp wardrobe. "Now people are seeing it for what it is."*

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<sup>448</sup> *Gangsta Misogyny: A Content Analysis of the Portrayals of Violence Against Women in Rap Music, 1987-1993*, by Edward G. Armstrong, Murray State University, *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, 2001

<sup>449</sup> *Gangsta Warfare*, Boston Globe, March 10, 1996

<sup>450</sup> Testimony of Dr. C. Delores Tucker, National Chair, National Political Council of Black Women, Inc., before the Senate Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, Restructuring, and The District of Columbia hearing on the Social Impact of Music Violence, November 6, 1997

<sup>451</sup> *Blacks dance to deadly beat in Toronto's clubs*, Globe and Mail, November 2, 2002

<sup>452</sup> Testimony of Donald F. Roberts, Ph.D., Department of Communication, Stanford University, before the Senate Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, Restructuring, and The District of Columbia hearing on the Social Impact of Music Violence, November 6, 1997

<sup>453</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>454</sup> *The worse it gets, the better it sells*, Toronto Star, October 26, 2003

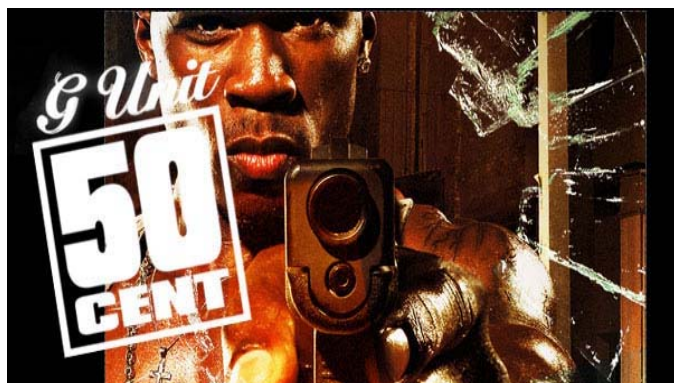
*Snoop Dogg, perhaps the biggest pimp purveyor in today's rap game, agrees. "It's cool to look good, it's cool to have girls on your arm, and get money from them, and that's a good feeling, you dig? There ain't nothing wrong with it," he said in a recent interview.*

*The pimp game has been rapped about for more than 20 years. Oakland native Too Short and Los Angeles pioneer Ice-T celebrated it in the early '80s. Brooklyn's Big Daddy Kane talked about it in the late '80s. In the '90s, the Notorious B.I.G. rapped: "Pimpin' ain't easy but it sure is fun." And one of Jay-Z's most popular songs remains the 2000 anthem Big Pimpin'.*

*No major rapper embodies pimp style more than Snoop. When he first emerged a decade ago, his style was L.A. gangsta Crip-- baggy jeans, blue flannel shirts and sneakers.*

*Snoop says pimp culture showed him how to carry himself with style and pride.*

*"I wanted to look good and feel good about myself," he says. "Those are qualities that you get from a pimp that everybody's not really understanding."<sup>455</sup>*



**Figure 12 - Promotion for CD**

Despite the denigration of women practiced by Snoop Dogg, his XXX-rated music video, *Doggystyle*, was broadcast in Canada by Bell ExpressVu as a New Year's Eve special on December 31, 2001.

Rapper 50 Cent, another pimp proponent, spent his early years as a crack dealer, an occupation that landed him in jail numerous times. Despite his prison record and the fact that he had a weapons charge outstanding, Canadian Immigration officials allowed him across the border in July 2003 to perform at the Molson Amphitheatre in Toronto, along with Jay-Z. A review of the concert noted that

"the multi-racial crowd, equally male and female, as young as 10, were mesmerized by him, nodding their heads and reciting his lyrics about pimping, dealing and smoking weed." The reviewer commented that it was "unnerving to hear 15-year-old girls respond loudly in the affirmative when he call[ed] for his bitches".<sup>456</sup>

American commentator Bill O'Reilly started a controversy over the rapper Ludacris appearing in Pepsi Cola commercials because of the content of his lyrics. Writing about the situation, Mr. O'Reilly said:

*I believe Ludacris is dangerous. Scores of grammar school teachers in the inner cities of America have written to me detailing horror stories spurred on, they say, by rap music. One fifth-grade teacher told me that it is common in her class for 10-year-old boys to call little girls "bitches." And those little boys can quote the lyrics of Ludacris with amazing accuracy.*

*Another teacher, who works in a Los Angeles ghetto, has a once-a-week "real talk" half hour in her classroom. She told me that some eighth-grade girls now say they want to become strippers and some boys pimps. When asked why, the kids say it looks like fun in the rap videos.<sup>457</sup>*

<sup>455</sup> *Rappers go for new 'costume'*, Associated Press, July 29, 2003

<sup>456</sup> *Gangstas mine the mainstream*, Toronto Star, July 3, 2003

<sup>457</sup> *Singing a different tune*, Bill O'Reilly, WorldNetDaily, September 12, 2002

## Content Analysis

Professor Edward Armstrong of Murray State University did a content analysis of 490 songs produced by 13 rappers during the period 1987 to 1993, selecting material from those identified as being the "ruling class" of the genre. The results are appalling. Following are excerpts from his analysis describing lyrics on rape, murder, rape/murder and assault. (Text has been edited for brevity and to eliminate obscene lyrics. The entire article is available at <http://www.albany.edu/scj/jcipc/vol8is2/armstrong.html>:

### Rape

Willie D and Too \$hort advocate raping women who do not submit to their sexual advances. Another rape narrative has Too \$hort beating his victim's "ass with a billy-club." In "She Swallowed It," N.W.A recommend specific procedures for attacking a fourteen-year-old.

Ice-T (Body Count) proposes sex "with Tipper Gore's two twelve-year-old nieces." This is a clear case of seeking revenge against one of the founders of the Parents' Music Resources Center.

Eazy-E, Snoop Doggy Dogg, and Too \$hort casually mention gang rapes. MC Ren tells of "ten niggas" who rape a child and then violate her with a broomstick. In Ice Cube's "Givin' Up The Nappy Dug Out," "fourteen niggas" line up to take turns placing themselves "two on top, one on the bottom" of an underage girl. Too \$hort conceives of an array of alternatives in his consideration of the pluses and minuses of statutory rape. In "She's A Bitch" (1987c), he adapts a crude aphorism... He recites similar words in "Hoes".

### Murder

M.C Ren shoots a woman who set him up to be robbed. In "To Kill A Hooker," N.W.A drag a streetwalker into a car and kill her because she demanded money in exchange for sex. Women are also murdered for choosing the wrong companion (Eazy-E), becoming nosy (Geto Boys), and for remaining silent. Ice Cube fed a girl to the wolves because the "little ho had no words." Three other personal traits stimulate violent and misogynist lyrics. N.W.A's Eazy-E tied to kill a "fat girl" with an elephant gun. When that didn't work, he "grabbed a harpoon" and left the woman on the avenue "like a beached whale." MC Ren mulls over shooting and burying a "bitch"... Rappers plan murders to pay back women who, in their opinion, did something wrong. Transgressions include telling a lie (Scarface), failing to make bail (Eazy-E), transmitting a venereal disease (Geto Boys, N.W.A), calling the cops (N.W.A), and cheating.

Two Too \$hort songs tell of killing women but never offer a hint at what precipitated the acts. Bushwick Bill simply brags that he is the "neighborhood bitch slayer." The Geto Boys recommend putting "a ho in front of a trigger." Without supplying any explanation, N.W.A mention taking the life of a wife and daughter. N.W.A also recollect "bitches" that they have shot and announce their plans to "smother" someone's mother. The Geto Boys kill a person's wife "for kicks" and pump anonymous women "full of lead". Scarface recounts the same senseless killings. Songs combining murder and mutilation exemplify a virulent positioning of women as objects of violence. The Geto Boys attack someone's nieces and cut the girls' heads into "88 pieces." Bushwick Bill recalls this incident in a song where his breakfast menu is "bacon and legs." Ice-T (Body Count) sets his mother on fire, beats her to death with a baseball bat, and cuts up her body. In a Geto Boys' act of murder, the weapon of choice is a machete: "I sliced her up until her guts were like spaghetti."

### Rape and Murder

Too Much Trouble kill an elderly rape victim whom they caught crawling for the telephone. First, they hit her on the head with a hammer, and the sound of a hammer hitting someone's head

accompany the lyrics. Too \$hort slaps a young girl to convince her to perform oral sex after which the child dies. In "One Less Bitch," N.W.A tie a woman to a bed, rape, and then shoot her. The Geto Boys produced two versions of their signature song, "Mind Of A Lunatic." Both begin by noting the identical initial actions of a peeping tom turned rapist. In one, the perpetrator cuts the victim's throat and watches her "shake like on TV." The second version heightens the macabre as the killer has "sex with the corpse." Another Geto Boys' song depicts a similar rape/murder, only this time they slit the woman "like a pig."

## Assault

In "6 'N The Mornin'", Ice-T batters a woman, heretofore a stranger, because she called him a name. "Boyz-N-The-Hood" suggests corporal punishment for women who "talk shit." Dr. Dre presents the identical message in "Nuthin' But A 'G' Thang," the No. 1 rap song of all time. Talking back (Ice-T, Too \$hort ) and showing disrespect (dissin') (N.W.A) cause men to react violently. Rejecting a proposition provokes a physical attack (Eazy-E). Too \$hort hurled this tirade:

You f--k with us, bitch, something gettin' broken  
Your leg, arm, jaw, nose, pick a part.

In N.W.A's "A Bitch Iz A Bitch," money-hungry or stuck-up women are subsumed under the same solution: "Slam her ass in a ditch." Responses to mental slowness are equally harsh. Bushwick Bill kicks a woman's ass if her "brain don't click." By choosing the wrong friends, "bitches" either "need stitches" (Willie D) or get drop-kicked (Ice-T). Personal characteristics also induce violence. In "Punk Bitch," Too \$hort expresses his desire to slap all bald-headed women. Ice-T pushes a woman to the floor because "she looked like Godzilla."

Intimate relationships are also riddled with violence. When one's "lady," as opposed to one's "bitch," talks to another man, she gets physically punished (Geto Boys). Tardy breakfasts are hard to handle. Violence accompanies the command to put some "eggs in the goddamn skillet" (Too Much Trouble). Identification of rappers as putative parents generates physical responses. Ice Cube plans to end a pregnancy by kicking a woman "in the tummy". The Geto Boys handle a false accusation of paternity by trying to break the woman's neck. Too \$hort deals with a similar situation by surprising the woman "like a mack" and then dropping "her ass off at Kaiser [hospital]." Women are hit (Ice Cube), slapped (Too \$hort), tossed (Eazy-E), thrown into a trunk (Too \$hort), smacked (Too Much Trouble; Too \$hort) and kicked (Too \$hort), all for no apparent reason. For instance, Too Much Trouble mention only that "a bitch is just like glass – easy to break."<sup>458</sup>

## Violence Against Police Officers

Police officers are also targeted for violence in this genre of music, and in the United States murders of police officers have been linked to rap music:

- April 1992: Ronald Howard shot Officer Bill Davidson, a Jackson County, Texas state trooper. At the time of the shooting, Howard was listening to a copy of *2Pacalypse Now* by Tupac Shakur. One song on the recording describes shooting police officers, and Howard claimed that listening to it caused him to shoot Officer Davidson.<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>458</sup> *Gangsta Misogyny: A Content Analysis of the Portrayals of Violence Against Women in Rap Music, 1987-1993*, by Edward G. Armstrong, Murray State University, *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, 2001. Research reproduced with permission of the author.

<sup>459</sup> *Natural Born Copycat Killers and the Law of Shock Torts*, John Charles Kunich, *Washington University Law Quarterly*, Winter 2000

- July 1992: Two Las Vegas police officers were ambushed and shot by four juveniles who claimed to have been moved to commit the crime by the song *Cop Killer* by Ice-T. Even after their arrest, the juveniles continued to chant the lyrics:

Die, die, die, pig, die!  
F--k the police!  
Die, die, die, pig, die!

The conclusion of the song features Ice-T urging his listeners to sing along to the following lyrics:

F--k the police!  
I'm a mothaf--kin' cop killer!  
Cop killer!  
Cop killer!<sup>460</sup>

- September 1994: Two seventeen-year-olds shot and killed Milwaukee police officer, William Robertson, during a sniper attack on a police van, "because of a Tupac Shakur record that talks about killing the police". One of them, Curtis Lee Walker, told police that Shakur's lyrics on the *N Gatz We Truss* album inspired him to stalk and kill the officer.<sup>461</sup>

In September 2003 in Georgetown, Ontario, tactical police officers clashed with a large group of youths who reportedly were chanting "Kill the cops, kill the police" and "f--k the police". The latter comments were identified by teens from Georgetown District High as being from the N.W.A. album *Straight Outta Compton*. Police used pepper spray, rubber bullets and batons, while firefighters blasted the crowd with water hoses to quell what witnesses described as a rock and beer can throwing mob.<sup>462</sup>

## Eminem

*Then punch a bitch in the nose Until her whole face explodes There's three things I hate: girls, women and bitches...*

Eminem lyrics<sup>463</sup>

Professor Armstrong's content analysis of violent rap music predates the arrival on the scene of Eminem, a performer who has achieved international celebrity status. In October 2000, when Eminem was scheduled to appear at Toronto's SkyDome, provincial M.P.P. Michael Bryant held a press conference denouncing Eminem's misogynist lyrics, urging the provincial government to "crack down on music that advocates violence and hate",<sup>464</sup> and calling for a legislated classification system for music recordings. With regard to the latter, Mr. Bryant said, "Right now in Ontario, a child of any age can purchase whatever CD they want -- no matter how violent or offensive. This has got to stop. We need to start rating music the same way we rate movies. If you're not old enough, you can't buy it without a parent."

He also identified steps that could be taken by Ontario Attorney General Jim Flaherty to deal with the scheduled appearance of Eminem at SkyDome, such as:

- *bringing an injunction to stop the rapper's show on the basis that he would be violating the Criminal Code by going ahead and performing; and*

<sup>460</sup>Ibid

<sup>461</sup>Ibid

<sup>462</sup>*Teens' fairground riot shakes town*, Toronto Star, September 15, 2003

<sup>463</sup>*Confronting Eminem*, Globe and Mail editorial, October 27, 2000

<sup>464</sup>*Bryant Raps Rapper's Violent Message*, Michael Bryant news release, October 25, 2000

- *prosecuting the rapper under the hate crime provisions of the Criminal Code or the indecency or obscenity provisions*<sup>465</sup>

To his credit, Mr. Flaherty took the unprecedented and highly controversial step of trying to have Eminem stopped at the border and prevented from entering Canada, specifically because of the violence against women he promotes in his lyrics.<sup>466</sup> "Some of the lyrics shown to me yesterday advocate domestic violence and I think that's disgusting," Mr. Flaherty told reporters. "I personally don't want anyone coming to Canada who will come here advocating violence against women."<sup>467</sup> Unfortunately, Mr. Flaherty was unsuccessful because women are not protected under the *Criminal Code* hate propaganda law.

Other federal and municipal politicians condemned Eminem's appearance, and Toronto Police Chief Julian Fantino said Eminem's "glorifying violence is totally unacceptable... I don't think anybody should glorify it or make a profit out of it. If that's moralizing, then I'm moralizing. It's obscene."<sup>468</sup> Immigration spokesperson Derik Hodgson apparently found the situation amusing, and quipped to Canadian Press, "If all people who made bad music were kept out of Canada, we could have stopped disco",<sup>469</sup> and the concert went ahead as scheduled.

The performer's misogyny is widely acknowledged in the media, yet he continues to receive the highest honours the music industry can bestow, and sell millions of CDs internationally. A sampling of quotes from media commentators follows:

- *His lyrics are misogynist... Mathers' lyrics are sick-making; they express an odious hatred of women.* (Confronting Eminem, Globe and Mail editorial, October 27, 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.* (Girls just want to have angst, National Post, July 19, 2000)
- *Eminem may be the most violent, woman-hating, homophobic rapper ever. Why are critics giving him a pass?... But should the nation's tastemakers, the ones supposedly pondering the connection between art and society, align themselves with an artist as blatantly hateful, vengeful and violent as Eminem?... Instead, the rapper simply delivers 75 minutes of nearly nonstop hate.* (Invisible man, Salon.com, June 7, 2000)
- *The teens I talked to weren't the least bit excited about the misogyny or homophobia or incest or rape on the record.* (Time for some irony in hip-hop, Globe and Mail, June 27, 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.* (Eminem: Rap or Consequences?, PlanetOut News & Politics, June 20, 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.* (Province wants rapper kept out, National Post, October 26, 2000)
- *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.* (Controversial Eminem steals awards show, National Post, February 22, 2001)

<sup>465</sup> Ibid

<sup>466</sup> Province wants rapper kept out, National Post, October 26, 2000

<sup>467</sup> Ban Eminem from Canada: Minister, Ottawa Citizen, October 26, 2000

<sup>468</sup> Eminem plays despite outcry from politicians, National Post, October 27, 2000

<sup>469</sup> Rapper Eminem performs here despite protests, Toronto Star, October 27, 2000

- *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.* (Storm grows over Eminem’s Grammy nominations, National Post, January 12, 2001)

Interestingly, in August 2004, organizers announced the cancellation of Ontario concerts by Jamaican dancehall artist, Beenie Man, scheduled for London and Toronto, “due to ongoing concerns and pressures regarding Beenie Man’s controversial lyrical content”. Some of Beenie Man’s lyrics advocate violence against gays and lesbians, and, because of protests planned by gay rights groups, MTV removed him from the lineup of a concert associated with the MTV Video Music Awards.<sup>470</sup> The same month, Egale Canada issued a press release calling on Judy Sgro, Canada’s Immigration Minister to deny entry to another performer, Sizzla, because of similar concerns over his lyrics and citing the recently amended hate propaganda laws.<sup>471</sup>

### 12.3. Heavy Metal/Death Metal/Shock Rock

*Riding a blood-and-entrail-streaked reputation as the sickest of the sick on the crowded extreme death-metal trail, Florida’s Cannibal Corpse... brings the horrific noise to [Toronto] tonight.*

Toronto Star, August 10, 2000<sup>472</sup>

Heavy metal, death metal, nu metal and shock rock -- the names are varied, but the message is more or less the same: extreme violence, misogyny, deviance, suicide, nihilism, occasionally satanism. This destructive genre of music exists internationally with bands such as these scattered around the globe: Rotting Christ (Greece), Pentagram (Turkey), Rabies Caste (Israel), Massacre (Columbia), Mayhem (Norway), Massacre, Mayhem, Slayer, Cannibal Corpse, Insane Clown Posse, Slipknot, Marilyn Manson (United States).

The Norwegian version of the band, Mayhem, hacked up a sheep on stage during one of their shows, and a fan in the audience was injured when the animal's head flew off and struck him.<sup>473</sup> In October 2003, St. Petersburg, Florida, City Council had to pass an ordinance making it illegal to conduct a suicide for commercial or entertainment purposes after the band, Hell on Earth, announced plans to have a person commit suicide during a show, supposedly to promote right-to-die issues.<sup>474</sup>

The members of shock rock band Marilyn Manson name themselves after serial killers, while the lead singer has taken the name of mass murderer Charles Manson. Both this band and the group Nine Inch Nails recorded in a studio set up in the former residence of Sharon Tate, the same house where the Charles Manson "family" slaughtered several people and painted the walls with their blood.<sup>475</sup>

A National Post article on the nu metal band Slipknot describes the band as "notorious for their blend of nihilism, scatology and ultra-violence". The item relates that "during one stage show, members got into a fight using their own feces", and went on to say:

*They wear uniform black boiler suits with fascist-style red logos and grotesque masks of their own invention, creating the effect of an army of psychotic mutants.*

<sup>470</sup> *Beenie Man Shows Cancelled*, Toronto Sun, August 27, 2004

<sup>471</sup> *Songs of Hatred Not Welcome*, Egale Canada news release, August 25, 2004

<sup>472</sup> *Club Life*, Toronto Star, August 10, 2000

<sup>473</sup> *Sheep head bashes metal fan in the noggin*, Toronto Star, March 11, 2003

<sup>474</sup> *Judge blocks band's suicide show*, AP, October 2, 2003

<sup>475</sup> *Helter Skelter, The True Story of the Manson Murders*, 25th anniversary edition, Vincent Bugliosi, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York, 1994