



HMV CANADA ACCUSED OF SELLING HATE RAP

Complaint filed with Ontario Human Rights Commission

Toronto, Ontario, October 2, 2005 - The abusive language of "hate rap" -- rap/hip hop music that denigrates women -- has crossed over into the mainstream of North American society and is poisoning attitudes towards women. In an effort to stem this trend, Toronto activist Valerie Smith has filed a complaint against HMV Canada Inc. (HMV) with the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) for selling hate rap CDs by performers Snoop Dogg, 50 Cent, Eminem, Ja Rule, Jay-Z and Webbie. These men routinely refer to women in their lyrics as "bitches" and "whores", often accompanied by violence or threats of violence.

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Canadian Human Rights Commission

The OHRC *Policy on Sexual Harassment and Inappropriate Gender-Related Comments and Conduct* (the "Policy") states that "Discrimination based on sex includes what is commonly referred to as sexual harassment or inappropriate comments and actions of a sexual

nature." And, according to this *Policy*, sexual harassment within the meaning of the Ontario *Human Rights Code* includes "**offensive remarks, gender-related verbal abuse, rough and vulgar humour or language related to gender**".

Anyone familiar with rap -- which would include management at HMV -- knows the lyrics of the above-noted performers are rife with all of those, and all are present in the CDs listed in Smith's complaint. Therefore, by offering such goods for sale in Ontario, Smith claims the company is discriminating against women in contravention of the Ontario *Human Rights Code* Section 1. The complete complaint can be viewed at www.fradical.com in the News Release section.

The misogynist content of rap is a matter of public record, and has been reported extensively in the press for well over a decade (see attached examples). It is not, therefore, possible for management at HMV to be ignorant of the content of the hate rap CDs they offer for sale. Since management is aware of the abusive content, but sells the goods anyway, they appear to be knowingly discriminating against women. However, the *Policy* specifies that conduct does not have to be "made with the intention to discriminate to be in violation of the *Code*", so their intent is irrelevant.

At a federal level, the Canadian Human Rights Commission states on their web site "*...if people are called insulting names... we all know that such behaviour is discriminatory and degrading.*"¹ Apparently, it needs to be pointed out that "women are people too". When we are called bitch and whore, we realize that such insults are *intended* to be discriminatory and degrading, and they are received as such.

¹ Canadian Human Rights Commission web site, How to Recognize Discrimination and Harassment

Previous Ontario action against hate rap: In October 2000, when Eminem was scheduled to appear at Toronto's SkyDome, 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"². He was responding to a complaint Smith filed with the Toronto Police Hate Crimes Unit in an attempt to block Eminem's concert under the *Criminal Code* hate propaganda law. To his credit, then Attorney General Jim Flaherty took the unprecedented step of trying to prevent Eminem from entering Canada because of the violence against women he promotes in his lyrics. Unfortunately, Mr. Flaherty was unsuccessful because women are *excluded* from the hate propaganda law. 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.

Women lack crucial protection granted to other groups: White power hate rock is prohibited in Canada because of our hate propaganda law, but hate rap is sold everywhere because federal politicians refuse to grant women the same rights and protections accorded to other vulnerable groups. Smith is therefore attempting to use human rights legislation, both provincial and federal, to curtail the sale of hate rap and some of its destructive spinoff products like Bell Mobility's PimpTones, cell phone ringtones that use the abusive language of pimps.

File complaints in other jurisdictions: As human rights legislation varies across the country, people are urged to investigate the option of filing complaints with their own Human Rights Commission against the vendors of hate rap and related products, as legislation in other provinces and territories may be more amenable to addressing this problem. (See the News Release section at www.fradical.com for examples of complaint letters.) However, if human rights legislation cannot be used against these products, then women appear to have no protection from those who promote violence and hate against us. Federal politicians of all parties need to be held accountable for this at election time.

ABOUT THE FREE RADICAL: The Free Radical web site (www.fradical.com) is operated by Toronto activist Valerie Smith to provide information on media violence, and strategies for combating it. 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 Victim's of Crime. The report is available for free download from the Free Radical web site.

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For further information, contact Valerie Smith at valsmith@fradical.com

² *Bryant raps rapper's violent message*, Michael Bryant MPP news release, October 25, 2000

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]".