

Subject: Hip Hop's Soul

Momma's Hip Hop Kitchen

This past Saturday, Feb. 16, 2008, Lah Tere from the hip hop group Rebel Diaz and Fordham University student Kathleen Adams organized a free event called Momma's Hip Hop Kitchen: The Soup Kitchen for the Hip Hop Soul. Held at the O. Henry Learning Center School on W. 17th St. in Manhattan, the event demonstrated the social and political power of Hip Hop.

I stopped by the event at just before 5pm to find the school's auditorium filled with about 100 to 150 people including men and women, many young children and teenagers. There were tables set up with literature on health issues relevant to young women and artists working on a mural depicting women's interaction with hip hop. Artists had flown in from as far as Chicago for the event, which showcased talented and well-known MCs, spoken word poets and community organizations. There were hand-made signs on the walls with phrases such as "Hey George, Get Outta My Bush!" I was lucky enough to catch a sketch by a group of adolescents from Sisters on the Rise, an organization for teenage mothers. The young women's sketch engaged with the popular misconceptions surrounding teenage mothers and demanded that the audience "Know their stories before judging them." When the sketch was met with loud applause, I realized these young mothers were preaching to the converted.

MC Patty Dukes brought the house to its feet with a remarkable, energetic performance. She electrified the room and got everyone responding with a rousing call of "When I say 'Momma's' you say 'Kitchen'!!" And although we are physically in Manhattan, she defied geography, reminding the crowd that the Bronx was "in the house!"

It was a victorious event. Lah Tere and Kathleen have to be commended for reminding everyone in attendance of hip hop's critical role in social justice movements. Hip hop can be utilized as a vehicle for demonstrating women's talents and for bringing attention to political issues relevant to urban women—issues that in turn affect all of us. The event was an example of how Hip Hop can be used not only to move young people in the sense of getting them up on their feet and dancing, but also in the sense of claiming their bodies and their minds as their own. The event showed that hip hop's soul is feminine, it's generous and it's politically powerful.

--Oneka LaBennett, Research Director, BAAHP