

Bling'd Blood Diamonds and Hip Hop

Written by Robert ID3334

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A new documentary under VH1's Rock Docs franchise, "Bling'd: Blood, Diamonds and Hip Hop," will take a hard-hitting look at the diamond trade in Sierra Leone, West Africa and the discovery by the "diamond-obsessed" hip-hop community that they may have unintentionally played a role in the country's war.

This past summer, VH1, Article 19 Films, Djali Rancher Productions and the United Nations Development Program were in Sierra Leone, along with hip-hop artists Paul Wall, Raekwon (of the hip hop rap click Wu Tang Clan), and reggaeton king Tego Calderon, to film this documentary which premieres on VH1 Thursday, February 22 at 8 PM*.

In the U.S., Kanye West, Jadakiss, Big Daddy Kane, Juelz Santana, Chris Aire, Mr. T and others will weigh in on the evolution of "bling," what it means to wear diamonds in Hip-Hop America, as well as the issues surrounding conflict diamonds and poverty in mining communities. Along with their insight, the film will be interspersed with testimonials, factoids and graphic images of those directly affected by the diamond trade. These artists are representative of the hip-hop community coming to terms with its obsession with "bling" and the discovery of the effect it has on the impoverished people in Sierra Leone.

Kanye West captures this realization quite simply, "It's just ironic that what made black people feel so empowered was completely demoralizing and destroying other black people."

The 11-year war was largely perpetuated by the revolutionary united front and other genocidal rebels and primarily funded through the illegal trading of conflict or "blood" diamonds in exchange for drugs, food and guns. The rebels sought to control the country's diamond mines and forced civilians including women, the elderly and children to mine these stones or risk losing life or limb. Blood diamonds are a challenge not only in Sierra Leone, but in several West African countries where miners often earn less than a dollar a day and peace and security remain elusive.

In Sierra Leone, Wall, Raekwon and Calderon not only heard first-hand accounts of the atrocities suffered during this time but they witnessed how these citizens are trying to rise from the ruins of conflict and improve their living conditions. The rappers met with local musicians, amputees, refugees and former child soldiers living in the country.

Viewers will meet Ishmael Beah, a New-York based former child soldier who went back home to

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Sierra Leone for the first time in ten years to thank the people who helped rehabilitate him when he was just fifteen years old.

The artists got a first hand look at the country's main source of diamond mines when they took a helicopter from Freetown to the Kono district in the northeastern section of the country and visited an alluvial and industrial mine as well as the villages that rely on the diamond trade.

"Bling'd: Blood, Diamonds and Hip Hop," will capture hip-hop's reaction to the human violations, bring global awareness to this issue, and educate Americans about how they can play a role in eradicating the smuggling of blood diamonds and become conscious consumers.

VSPOT, VH1's broadband channel (<http://vspot.vh1.com>) will feature exclusive scenes and commentary not in the on-air version. For more information on "Bling'd: Blood, Diamonds and Hip Hop," visit

http://www.vh1.com/shows/dyn/vh1_rock_docs/series.jhtml

"Bling'd: Blood, Diamonds and Hip Hop," is produced by Article 19 Films in co-production with Raquel Cepeda, director, for Djali Rancher Productions and in association with VH1 and UNDP. Rebecca Chaiklin (Article 19 films), Filippo Bozotti (Article 19 films) and Raquel Cepeda (Djali Rancher Productions) serve as producers. Serving as executive producers are Irena Mihova for the United Nations Development Program and Brad Abramson, Shelly Tatro, and

Michael Hirschorn for VH1 with Warren Cohen serving as supervising producer.