"Can you feel the uncertainty in the air? How do you react when you are at a crossroads and there are no road signs? Do you ignore all possible consequences and randomly take the next step? Do you retreat back the way you came – only to repeat the missteps that will bring you back to the difficult choice?

Around the world, and especially in the United States, human beings have reached a crucial moment in our cultural history. The reactionary forces of tradition tremble in anticipation of a return to the times when women were women and the dark people knew their places. Radical thinkers of every philosophy are paralyzed by the array of choices they observe and miss the opportunity to craft new policies, institutions, currencies, and ideas. We, the majority of human beings, remain. Hip hop – the only social force to create an equitable, participatory, democratic, and global system of politics and economics over the last three decades – will vanish into history under a fascist backlash, consume the soul of our generation with consumerism, or evolve to inspire greater intelligence, creativity, and faith among ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren. The crossroads we face is no less than the choice about the direction of our species and our planet. This essay hopes to open a conversation about the tools of culture hip hop may provide for our uplift and empowerment.

In 2006, hip hop records sales decreased to their lowest levels since the late 1980s. The misogyny, anger, misanthropy, materialism, and vulgarity transcended the worst imagery and vocabulary of pornographic minstrelsy of the last two centuries. Radio, television, satellite, and motion picture conglomerates gleefully promoted this self-destructive content around the world, targeting children and young adults aged 8 to 25 years. Nearly an entire generation's value system reshaped towards the nihilism of empty sexuality and random death. The power to kill and to fuck became the only arbiters of social power among the legions of the future who could have (and may yet) redefined the boundaries of science, religion, architecture, finance, and reason.

Poverty, AIDS, warfare, starvation, and consumerism threaten the foundations of human identity – thought, discussion, compromise, and progress. These combined poisons revealed themselves in the expansive discussion of the words "ho," "bitch," and "nigga." Starting with Don Imus and moving to the lyrics of *Snoop Dogg*, *50 Cent*, *Nas*, and *T.I.*, a coalition of privileged Americans sought to transform the culture of violence and degradation that had become popular entertainment in early 2007. Their solutions came in the forms of censorship, labeling, boycotts, and public protests. The executives and artists responsible for the industry of commercial rap shuddered. More importantly, the possibilities of true democracy as explored by jazz, funk, disco, and hip hop all shrank away from the likelihood of centralized control and middle class respectability.

All moments of great crisis bring with them significant opportunities. Humanity can certainly choose to rely on the conglomerate infrastructure of rap to hold artists to a standard of content. Such a movement will likely mean the end of commercial hip hop and downward spiral of album sales from the 200 million transactions (not counting internet downloads) to less than 3 million transactions – akin to the devolution jazz has experienced since 1970. The movement away from global conglomerate control does not require the marginalization of the art of hip hop, however.

Branson, Missouri, has established itself as the heart of a continuing artistic culture of folk and country music. Billions of dollars in economic development are generated from its commitment to the art forms every year. Similar prosperity can be achieved for the successful preservation of underground hip hop – maximizing artist control and profits as well as satisfying the audience's desire for the hottest beats and wildest lyrics. In cities including Gary, Indiana; Detroit, Michigan; Louisville, Kentucky; Oakland, California; Newark, New Jersey; and Savannah, Georgia, commercial property and raw land are available for the extensive redevelopment of entertainment centers preserving, promoting, and expanding global hip hop. Cultural production centers (CPCs) in each of these cities would cost very little money (perhaps under $5000) to open and operate, but would easily produce hundreds of millions of dollars in gross income.

Using the internet for distribution in conjunction with direct artist sales through concerts and appearances in larger cities (not to mention, a concrete infrastructure that includes global hip hop centers like London, Paris, Rio de Janeiro, Johannesburg, Jakarta, Calcutta, Havana, and Tokyo) would provide enormous private earnings, tax benefits, employment, and health care to local residents. To bring this vision of a global, democratic, cooperative hip hop system to life, I pledge $100,000 over the next 10 years to construct and staff up to 50 CPCs around the world. *I challenge anyone who will earn at least $500,000 in gross income over that decade to contact me if they are interested in making a similar commitment and joining the effort to build a better world for our children*. By 2017, we can have more wealth, more jobs, better health, and more equality. I am willing to do the hard work and make the sacrifices. Are you?

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