INSIGHT NEWS e EDITIONS
THE JOURNAL FOR COMMUNITY NEWS, BUSINESS & THE ARTS • WWW.INSIGHTNEWS.COM
Reprint News Feature of July 21, 2003

Photo/Tobechi Tobechukwu

Pictured from left to right: Johari Moten, Richard "DJ Spank" Strong, Marcus Manning, and James Cheatham.

BLAME IT ON HIP-HOP

By Shawna Tobechukwu
Contributing Writer

Five young enterprising Black men in the Twin Cities have taken the powerful energy of hip hop and turned it into a new clothing line and company called

"Blame it on Hip Hop," otherwise known as "BIOHH"(pronounced B-O). Focusing on the positive aspects and influences of hip hop, the five have taken their own passion for the music and created a joint business venture with a slick message.

Blame it on Hip Hop just launched their new clothing line this summer with men and women's apparel. While their long-term plan is much broader, they have started with several designs of bold colored t-shirts for men in reds, blues, blacks, oranges, and more, and a variety of tank top and cap sleeve shirts for women in blacks, whites, and pastels. Over the next year, they plan to add jeans, dress clothes, children's apparel, and more.

The company consists of Marcus Manning, founder and COO; Michael Livingston, CEO; Richard "DJ Spank" Strong, executive president for marketing and information technology; Johari Moten, Director of Creative Services and Promotions, and James Cheatham, Manager of Marketing.

All of the men are in their late 20s, early 30s and each brings a unique set of talents to the venture. While they are all entrepreneurs in one way or the other, the mix includes a businessman, a computer technician, a pharmaceutical representative, a mortgage banker specialist/voice over actor, and an entrepreneur with a previous clothing line. They bring strength to the company through their love of hip hop and diversity of skills.

All five are working hard to make sure that "Blame it On Hip Hop" becomes a well-known and well-respected company. They have a solid business plan and established goals for the future. One of their first steps was to trademark the name and logo and to get incorporated. It is exactly this kind of opportunity and business venture that they are "blaming on hip hop." The group has seen how the music has opened the doors for a lot of young, enterprising Black people.

"I was looking at how things have changed in Minnesota because of hip hop," said Marcus Manning, founder and COO who came up with the name. "Everywhere you turn you see the influences of hip hop—across all cultures."

"Hip hop has helped keep a lot of cats out of jail," said Strong, who says his musical background helped shape who he is today. "It has produced a lot of jobs and new opportunities for people. It has also helped eliminate some of the barriers between the different races."

The five owners have put their own time and money into the venture to get it off the ground. While they are in negotiations with some large retail companies, they have begun by selling their apparel at the street level. While on vacation in Oakland, CA., Strong, said he sold shirts out of his trunk in the first week the shirts came out.

With a variety of colors, designs, and sizes—and a great logo (designed by Melvin "DJ IXL" Green)—the shirts are sure to sell fast.

Over the next few years the company plans to expand its clothing line, and help promote and attract hip hop groups to the Twin Cities. Also, as they start to turn a profit, a percentage of the earnings will be donated to help strengthen the inner-city schools.

In the near future, customers will be able to view and order t-shirts on-line at *www.blameiton-hiphop.com*. To order clothing now, or for more information, please call 1-866-99-BLAME.

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Dwight Hobbes
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Photography
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Insight News, Inc.
1815 Bryant Ave. N.
Minneapolis, MN 55411

Phone: (612)588-1313
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