

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Voleine Amilcar

415-356-8383 ex 244

voleine_amilcar@itvs.org

To view a trailer or for more information, visit <http://www.blackeningupmovie.com/the-film>

**PBS DOC, BLACKING UP: HIP-HOP'S REMIX OF RACE AND IDENTITY
EXAMINES RACIAL IDENTITY IN AMERICAN CULTURE TODAY**

*Doc Will Premiere on PBS
Stations Nationwide January 2010*

"This film gives arrestingly provocative insights into race and American culture, and the path from fringe to center."

Nell Minow, film critic and national columnist

(San Francisco, CA)—**BLACKING UP: Hip-Hop's Remix of Race and Identity** explores racial identity through the lens of hip-hop music and culture. The film focuses in particular on the tensions that surround white identification with hip-hop. Popularly referred to by derogatory terms such as "wannabe" or "wigger," the white person who identifies with hip-hop often invokes heated responses. For some, it is an example of cultural progress — a movement toward a color-blind America. For others, it's just another case of cultural theft and mockery — a repetition of a racist past.

BLACKING UP: Hip-Hop's Remix of Race and Identity probes these different responses, constructing a dialogue on race that draws parallels from American history and incorporates the perspectives of leading cultural critics, hip-hop industry pioneers, well-known rappers, an assortment of young fans, and hip-hop hopefuls. **BLACKING UP: Hip-Hop's Remix of Race and Identity** will premiere on PBS stations nationwide beginning in January 2010 (check local listings).

Against the unique backdrop of American popular music, **BLACKING UP: Hip-Hop's Remix of Race and Identity** explores racial identity: where it comes from, why certain personas are attractive to white suburban youth, and what authenticity means to the communities being emulated in hip-hop. In contrast to most popular discussions, the film puts questions of white identification with hip-hop in a historical context, which proves both educational and informative.

Showing the parallels between the figure of the white hip-hopper and previous incarnations of white identification with black culture, **BLACKING UP: Hip-Hop's Remix of Race and Identity** highlights a lineage that includes blackface performers such as Al Jolson, jazz figures like the "hipster" and the "white negro," and rock-and-roll icons like Elvis Presley. White participants in the film discuss where they see their place in hip-hop, reflecting earnestly on how they have been affected by the words "wigger" or "wannabe." Black participants debate what white adoption of hip-hop might mean today, considering past instances of appropriation and mockery of black cultural expression. All participants' praises and criticisms contribute to an understanding of how race functions in America today.

-More-

Notable entertainers, historians, and cultural critics also contribute to the discussion, including Amiri Baraka (cultural critic/author of *Blues People*), Russel Simmons (CEO Def Jam Records), Chuck D. (rapper for *Public Enemy*), Vanilla Ice (rapper), DJ Kool Herc (hip-hop's "founding father"), Paul Mooney (comedian/writer for *The Chappelle Show*, among others). **BLACKING UP: Hip-Hop's Remix of Race and Identity** examines race as something that we all experience — a shared part of American culture — and provides an inclusive, open dialogue that includes perspectives from multiple generational and racial vantage points. **BLACKING UP: Hip-Hop's Remix of Race and Identity** is a co-presentation by WTIU/Bloomington, IN and the Independent Television Service (ITVS).

About the Filmmaker

Robert A. Clift is a filmmaker from Washington, D.C., whose previous film *Stealing Home: The Case of Cuban Baseball* appeared nationally on PBS in 2001. He is currently writing his dissertation for the Department of Communication and Culture at Indiana University - Bloomington, where he also taught courses on documentary production and theory. He holds a master's degree from Indiana University and a bachelor's degree from Pomona College.

On-Air Participants

Amiri Baraka, formerly Leroi Jones, has authored more than 40 books of essays, poems, drama, and cultural history. Founder of The Black Arts Movement in Harlem in the 1960s — which became an aesthetic blueprint for a broader rethinking of American theater at the time — Baraka is one of America's best-known and most prolific cultural critics. His book *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, published in 1963, was one of the first efforts to examine American music through its relationship to race. Broad and opinionated, *Blues People* incited a number of controversies amongst historians of popular music that continue in various forms today.

Paul Mooney is a comedian, actor, and writer. Born in 1941, Mooney's professional start was as a writer for Richard Pryor. Mooney was co-writer on Pryor's *Live on the Sunset Strip*, *Bicentennial Nigger*, and *Is it Something I Said* albums, in addition to writing material for Pryor's *Saturday Night Live* appearance and the film *Jo Jo Dancer, Your Life is Calling*, which starred Pryor. Mooney also wrote for Red Foxx's *Sanford and Son*, and was head writer for the television shows *Good Times* and *In Living Color*. More recently, Mooney was both a writer and actor on *Chappelle's Show*.

Russell Simmons is co-founder *Def Jam Recordings*, a record label that was at the center of hip-hop's progression into a widely popular genre in the 1980s and 1990s. *Def Jam's* early catalogue included Public Enemy, LL Cool J., EPMD, and the Beastie Boys, amongst other artists.

Nelson George is an author, screenwriter, television producer, and cultural critic. In the 1980s and 1990s, George was a columnist for *Billboard* and *The Village Voice*. During that time, he also authored a series of books on black music, including *Hip-Hop America*, *The Death of Rhythm & Blues*, and *Where Did Our Love Go: The Rise and Fall of the Motown Sound*. Recently, George directed the HBO movie *Life Support* (2008), for which Queen Latifah won a Golden Globe. He was an executive producer on Jim McKay's *Everyday People*, which premiered at Sundance in 2004, and Todd Williams' documentary *The N Word*, which won a Peabody in 2004.

Chuck D. was the founding member and front man for the rap group *Public Enemy*. Known for its politically charged lyrics, Public Enemy's "Fight the Power" (1989) is widely regarded as one of the most influential and popular songs in hip-hop history

Greg Tate is a cultural critic and long-time staff writer for *The Village Voice*, and has published writings on art, music, and culture appearing in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Rolling Stone*, and *The Nation*, among others. He has authored a number of books, including *Flyboy in the Buttermilk*, *Everything But the Burden: What White People Are Taking From Black Culture*, and *Midnight Lighting: Jimi Hendrix and the Black Experience*.

Vanilla Ice (Robert Van Winkle) is a rapper best known for the song "Ice Ice Baby," the first hip-hop single to top the *Billboard* charts. His album *To the Extreme*, released by SBK Records in 1990, peaked at #1 on the *Billboard* 200 and sold over eleven million copies. Though "Ice Ice Baby" has been credited by some with diversifying and expanding hip-hop's audience to the white mainstream, Vanilla Ice himself has been the target of ridicule ever since it was revealed that the story of his upbringing in a ghetto of Miami turned out to be false — a marketing stunt fabricated by SBK.

Aesop Rock (Ian Bavitz) is a Long Island-born MC signed to Manhattan-based label Definitive Jux. Prior to his affiliation with Definitive Jux, he self-released two albums and released another with Mush Records. His most recent album, *None Shall Pass*, was released in 2007, with his next studio album expected in 2010. Fans describe his lyrics as poetic and complex.

M1 (Mutulu Olugabala) is a rapper, activist, author, and one half of the political hip-hop duo *Dead Prez*. The duo's lyrics focus on institutional racism, capitalism, governmental repression, education, police and prison systems, veganism, and corporate cultural influence.

-More-

About ITVS

The Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web, and the Emmy® Award–winning weekly series *Independent Lens*, shown Tuesday nights at 10 PM on PBS. ITVS is a miracle of public policy created by media activists, citizens, and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue, and provide for underserved audiences. Since ITVS’s inception in 1991, its programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television, bringing television audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people. For more information about ITVS, visit www.itvs.org.

###