

Liberator reflects breadth of hip hop culture



The Liberator hit the streets two and a half years ago.

Photo by Jeremy O'Kasick

By Jeremy O'Kasick
Contributing Writer

Pick up the most recent issue of *The Minneapolis Liberator* and you'll experience the raw spirit of street-level publishing, cultural theory on gangster rap, a piece on lust next to a short guide to an ancient Indian spiritual and dietary tradition, a letter-to-the-editor from the vice president of the Minneapolis Police Federation, an interview with a former crack cocaine dealer, historical analysis of American exploitation in the Congo, and a review of a recent Grand Master Flash show.

The upstart rag, which first hit the streets some two and a half years ago, bills itself as a publication of art, culture, education, politics and truth, and it reflects all the vibrancy and the rough edges of zine-like journalism.

"Informally, I call *The Liberator* an urban journal," said Editor-in-Chief Brian Kasoro. "They have journals for everything: the journal of natural medicine, journals for law, journals for science. *The Liberator* is trying to be a journal like that of our community, the people, their ideas. You have urban scholars out there who have intricate cultures, opinions and ideas. Black, White, Yellow, Red, old, young, whatever."

Now a junior at Howard University in Washington, D.C., Kasoro began working on a new community publication in 2001 when he was a senior in high school, also

taking some courses at the former Minneapolis charter school Cedar Hill. It was there that he teamed up with Gayle Smaller, the old school's former principal, and others who would give rise to *The Liberator*.

Smaller is the journal's publisher, who also runs his own small media and publishing company, Three Branch Press. He said that they have grown frustrated with only being able to put out five issues over the past two years or so. For now, they will publish every other month.

"You know, we've been selling furniture, doing whatever we can to get out the next issue," said Smaller. "I've sold a tutor, I sold one of my b-boy rings. We are putting everything we have into it, and maybe the people out there will pick it up."

Smaller also explained that *The Liberator* grew out of their collective love for hip-hop, pointing out the journal's cultural and musical emphasis.

Calling himself an old-school b-boy, Smaller said that at near 30 years of age he is perhaps the oldest person involved in the paper and that many of those involved are not yet 21. He added that Kasoro, who is now 20 years old, was the one who pulled the vision and the drive of *The Liberator* together.

Despite the journal's Pan-African spirit and political angle, both Smaller and Kasoro bristle at being labeled community activists.

"I don't see myself as a community

activist," Kasoro said. "It's crazy because there is a title for that, a position, like some kind of job. When do you become a person? We have to be careful not to give ourselves titles like that just because we work in a school with kids, or have been in a protest, or even organized one for that matter. I know, though, that the media uses that word a lot just because a person being a good, giving person doesn't qualify as news in today's world."

For his part, Kasoro said that although being a scholar at Howard and an editor at *The Liberator* takes up a lot of time, his priority is still building and taking care of loving relationships and making sure that he has "that last bit of energy to talk to God at the end of the day."

For more information on *The Minneapolis Liberator*, call 612-627-3733 or email info@minneapolisliberator.com. You can also check it out online at www.minneapolisliberator.com.

Jeremy O'Kasick sometimes writes responses at jokasick.blogspot.com.