

[Breakdown FM-Straight from ATX-Meet Public Offenders](#)

Posted on May 7, 2009 by Davey D



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Straight from the ATX-meet Public Offenders

by Davey D

When many of us who don't live in the South, think of rap music coming from that area we sadly associate the music as being less than conscious or socially uplifting. And while it is true there are some artists who may just spit lyrics around the topics of bling, fancy rims and their pimping abilities, such topics were not created by Southern rappers nor are those topics their exclusive domain.

To the degree that one might label such topics as ignorance, bear in mind ignorance is everywhere. Its in New York-the birthplace of Hip Hop. It's in Cali-home to numerous socially conscious movements and organizations. Its found in mainstream rap and its found in the underground. Let's not get it twisted.

With that being said, it's important that we take time out and focus on those who are challenging our perceptions and more importantly doing the work. Deep in the heart of Texas are 5 individuals **Black Prophet, Yoli, Lyricist, Phenom** and **Gator** who is no longer in the group,- collectively are known as **Public Offenders**. They've broken the stereotype of southern rap and then some by not only coming to the table with something meaningful to say, but by also walking the walk as activists.

Their latest album '**Drop Jewels**' has the foursome hitting us all upside the dome as the tackle the issue of domestic violence from every angle imagineable. They didn't rush off to the studio and record a couple of songs when word of the violent incident centering around singers **Chris Brown** and **Rihanna** first surfaced. The group has been rapping about domestic violence and doing community work around the issue for almost 10 years.

It's not the only issue they have rapped about over the years, but last year they decided to do an entire album addressing this topic as a way to reach their peers and leave little to no stones unturned. The group was impacted by 2 heavily publicized domestic violence incidents including the killing of a high school classmate named **Trella Mosley** by an estranged boyfriend. Group member Yoli found herself in an abusive situation before she joined the group and as she explained in our interview her fellow band members played a pivotal role in helping who pulled her through. The group clearly understands that domestic violence is not a trendy news story that gets resolved when some famous superstar sits on Oprah's couch and talks about it.

Public Offenders wanted to take awareness of this issue to the next level. Hence, they teamed up with domestic violence organization '**A Call to Men**' to do this album and in many ways set a good example for others to follow as to how artists can work with community organizations. We talked about the groups activism during our interview. They explained that they will be participating in a national conference on domestic violence later this month (May 2009) in NY and that they had already done so the year before in New Orleans. The album Drop Jewels provides information on domestic violence orgs including Call to me who are listed as the presenters.

In our interview we spoke with the group members about a number of things.

We started off talking about the dynamics of being in a group and how each member creates space for themselves while simultaneously creating synergy and cohesiveness. Far too often, we have groups that look like several individuals on stage rapping but there's very little word play and exchange. PO tries to go beyond that.

We got a run down of Austin's Hip Hop scene as group members explained that while they are just a two hour drive from Houston, they have a different sound and overall swagger. They were influenced heavily by H-Town's independent scene which is why the group is indy now.

We spoke with Yoli about the importance of the female voice and if she thought there was a fear of female emcees. We talked about how the industry has not aggressively gotten behind intelligent women and how PO was committed to breaking that mold.

We dug a bit deeper with Yoli and spoke to her about the challenge she had as a victim of domestic violence and what lessons she would pass down to young women to help them avoid similar pitfalls. She talked about looking for an array of signs indicating that one may be a cry for help. They included the way one dresses, how they are being isolated from friends and being withdrawn. She also talked about how we as a community should be careful not to start blaming the victim which has been a disturbing trend with the Chris Brown/Rihanna situation.

We spoke with former Austin Slam champ Black prophet about the intersection between emceeing and spoken word. We talked at length about Austin's rich spoken word scene and the role that artists like **Zel Miller**, **Blacklisted** and former PO member **Gator** (Black Prophet's brother) played in getting the group to elevate their lyrical craft. We also talked about the importance of writing vs. freestyling.

In conclusion-Public Offenders is a breath of fresh air and a solid indicator as to what's to come as the younger generation of Emcees come to the mic and represent to the fullest.