

How the Image of the Female Hip-Hop Journalist Brought the 'Hood to Mainstream America

By Kimberly Wynne

“Just throw your hands in the air/ And wave 'em like you just don't care/And if you're ready to party/ On the count of three/ Everybody say 'Oh yeah,'” commands the performer.

“Oh yeah,” replies a screaming crowd of nameless faces.

This scene is typical of any hip-hop concert—an overcrowded, smoke-filled room filled with screaming fans, a sweaty performer writhing to a pulsating beat, and members of his entourage belting out song lyrics and commands for an audience to follow. While this scene may excite the average person, for a hip-hop journalist, this is work.

The life of a hip-hop journalist seems glamorous. In popular culture, it is portrayed as endless nights of club-hopping, schmoozing with rappers and big-name celebrities, and doing interviews in stretch limousines while drinking bottles of expensive champagne. But this isn't so, especially for a female hip-hop journalist.

In the TV series *Living Single* which aired from 1993 to 1998 and in the movie *Brown Sugar* which debuted in movie theaters in 2002, the image of the female hip-hop journalist is turned upside down. Her nights are spent alone, pining away for an unavailable, male best friend who only sees her as his “sister.” To gain credibility in the male-dominated industry of hip-hop, the female reporters trade in their femininity for baseball caps, baggy jeans, and sneakers. They are the constant subject of sexual

advances and male chauvinism—a chauvinism that women in hip-hop call standard in a musical genre where women are objectified and treated as shiny, new accessories to be hung like jewelry from a performer's neck.

Hip-Hop Journalism

Today, hip-hop music is a multi-billion dollar industry. It infiltrates popular culture on almost every level from commercials to clothing to completely dominating such music networks as MTV, BET, and VH1. Hip-hop music can be heard not only on the radio, but also in films, retail stores, cafes, and cell phone ring tones.¹ Hip-hop can be simply defined as rap music or rhymed lyrics that are mainly rapped, rather than sung, over sampled beats.²

Unlike the flashy images shown in many of today's music videos—expensive cars, scantily clad women, and gaudy jewels commonly referred to as “bling bling”—hip-hop evolved from humble beginnings. It began from four basic elements: the graffiti artist, the break dancer, the deejay, and the MC (known today as the rapper).³ Hip-hop was born from New York City's concrete jungles in the 1970s to become the ultimate expression of black youth resistance to poverty and oppression. It began in the South Bronx and then spread throughout each of New York's five boroughs and beyond.⁴

Out of this new art form came its scribe—the hip hop journalist. This journalist was responsible for “archiving and reporting the history, present and undoubtedly the future of hip hop. They were a new breed of historians, chronicling the culture, defining the tenets that made this genre become such a powerful voice.”⁵

Introduction: *Brown Sugar*

“So, when did you first fall in love with hip hop?”⁶ *Brown Sugar*’s Sidney Shaw robotically begins her interviews with this question. It becomes her routine, along with pulling out her outdated tape recorder and shoving her hair into two braided ponytails.

She has just become the new editor of hip hop magazine *XXL* after years of being a hip hop columnist at the *Los Angeles Times*. Despite her flourishing career, like the classic sob sister,⁷ she is plagued by loneliness. Throughout the course of the movie, she pines away for her childhood best friend who is getting married. To ease the lonely nights, she uses a Brookstone vibrating “massager” to assist in what her friends call her eternal dry spell.

Brown Sugar debuted in movie theaters on October 11, 2002, grossing more than \$10 million at the box office its opening weekend.⁸ The romantic comedy tells the story of how journalist Sidney Shaw played by Sanaa Lathan falls in love with hip hop and with her best friend Dre, a music producer, played by Taye Diggs.

Many of Shaw’s narrations during the film are excerpts from her book, *I Used to Love Him*, which she finishes writing by the end of the movie, describing it as “a love letter to hip hop.”⁹ Adding to the film’s hip hop credibility are side characters Francine, Sidney’s overbearing cousin played by rapper/actress Queen Latifah, and Cabbie, a new artist on Dre’s record label played by rapper/actor Mos Def.

Introduction: *Living Single*

In the hit Fox TV series *Living Single* which aired on Sundays at 8:30 p.m., Khadijah James, played by rapper/actress Queen Latifah, similarly struggles with her personal life due to her obsession with her career as the creator and editor of hip hop magazine *Flavor*. In a conversation with her therapist, she reveals this struggle to find balance between work and family saying, “I’ve been thinking about how much I’ve given up to focus on this magazine—time away from my family and friends and a few fine men. Girl, I mean real fine. Lately, I haven’t even enjoyed working on *Flavor*.”¹⁰

Living Single became the number one show among African-American viewers during its third season.¹¹ The show became an instant classic among viewers due to its positive portrayal of African-Americans during prime-time TV.

The show revolved around the lives of six successful friends—four women, two men—in their mid to late twenties trying to find the balance between love and success in a fast-paced New York City setting. Three of the women share a brownstone in Brooklyn: Khadijah James, the levelheaded but no-nonsense founder of *Flavor* magazine; Synclaire James played by Kim Coles, Khadijah’s naïve cousin and assistant, and Khadijah’s childhood friend, Regine played by Kim Fields, a beautiful and determined social climber.¹²

Often dressed in typical hip hop gear—baggy jeans, loose-fitting tops, and sneakers—Khadijah is no feminine beauty queen. She is quick witted, sharp tongued and speaks the street slang of any of her hard-ass sources.

***Brown Sugar’s* Sidney Shaw**

“I remember the exact day I fell in love with hip hop. It was July 18, 1984.”¹³

This is the first line of Sidney Shaw's book dedicated to hip hop, *I Used to Love Him*. She is a well-respected hip hop journalist who moves back to New York to take over as editor-in-chief of *XXL* magazine.

After earning her B.A. in journalism from Columbia University, she moved to Los Angeles where she wrote the music column "Up Close" for the *Los Angeles Times* under her pen name, Sid Shaw.

Rappers and aspiring artists constantly approach Shaw at an industry party thrown by music mogul Russell Simmons. They all hand her their demo tapes and albums, hoping that she will give them a good review in the magazine.¹⁴

Noticing that all the men who approach her are only talking to her because of her status as a journalist, she complains to her cousin Francine, "This is why I don't date. All the guys I ever meet are always in the industry, and they ain't never got their shit together."¹⁵

Shaw often uses her career as an excuse for her chronic loneliness. While moving into her new brownstone, her cousin unpacks a box in which she finds Sidney's vibrator—an object which she claims is a neck massager.

"So, where does this go?" Francine asks while turning the vibrator on.

"It's not what you think," Shaw defends while snatching the vibrator away. "It's a massager from Brookstone."

"Come on, Sid, don't act like I don't know what a—" her cousin says laughing.

"It's a massager." Shaw snaps back. "Men take up too much of your time. Time I don't have."¹⁶

Shaw embodies the characteristics of a typical career-obsessed reporter who struggles between the age-old dilemma of a career in journalism vs. a private life with family.¹⁷

In the essay *Sob Sisters*, Joe Saltzman writes, “Most successful journalists find that the only way to be a success is to work at it 24 hours a day, leaving little to no time for personal relationships, marriage, parenting, or anything else that takes time from the seemingly unending professional work.”¹⁸

After a full day’s work, Shaw comes home to an empty house much like the ambitious TV reporter Kimberly Wells, played by Jane Fonda, in the 1979 film *The China Syndrome*. “When Kimberly comes home at night, it is to a pet turtle and her mother’s voice on the telephone answering machine. She has no boyfriend or, for that matter, close friends of any kind. The film can’t illustrate the intensity of her work ethic without simultaneously illustrating the depth of her loneliness.”¹⁹

Shaw has a tomboyish quality about her that often works against her. She casually dresses in jeans and sneakers. Her hair—if not shoved underneath a men’s hat—is split into two ponytails.

Before going on an interview with New Jersey Nets basketball player and aspiring rapper Kelby Dawson, played by Boris Kodjoe, Shaw succumbs to Francine’s pressure to get a make over.

“Look, you need to catch a man, but you’re not dangling the right bait,” Francine advises Shaw.

“I look fine,” Shaw says wearing a baseball cap, a sweatshirt, and baggy jeans. “You dangle enough for the both of us.”

“I know you don’t want to make that little friend of yours jealous,” Francine says with a laugh. “But you need the real thing.”

“It’s a massager from Brookstone,” Shaw defends, folding her arms against her chest.

“You’re going to go in there and let Katrina hook your hair up,” Francine says while pushing her cousin into the beauty parlor. “We’re gonna get you into some real clothes so you look incredible for your date with Kelby Dawson tonight.”

“It’s not a date,” Shaw argues. “It’s just an interview.”²⁰

As a woman in a high position at a top hip-hop magazine, Shaw’s appearance mirrors her mostly male environment. Like many sob sisters, she “underwent a form of masculinization, adopting male-associated names and ways of dressing designed to downplay their femininity that made them look more like one of the boys.”²¹

That boyish appearance causes the journalist to cry “long and hard when the man she loved treated her more like a sister than a lover.”²² That man, Dre, announces his engagement to an ultra-feminine and refined lawyer named Reese, played by Nicole Ari Parker.

Shaw pretends to be happy for her “best friend” Dre’s engagement as he describes why he thinks his fiancée is the one.

“You know we’re all looking for wife material: a woman that’s fine, smart, classy but not a snob,” Dre tells Shaw. “Hella, hella sexy but not a ho. That’s brown sugar.”

Shaw is similar to female reporter Gallagher in the film *Platinum Blonde* where she’s “dressed in an inexpensive tailored suit, considered by the male reporters to be one of the guys and always called ‘pal’ by ace reporter Stew Smith, with whom she is

hopelessly in love.”²³ Although Gallagher is in love with Smith, he is in love with someone else—a platinum blonde he’s just met and obsesses about with Gallagher “as if he’s talking to a male best friend.”²⁴

***Living Single’s* Khadijah James**

“I’ve always had a lot to say,” Khadijah James says to an aspiring writer. “I was the editor of my high school paper, college paper—I guess there’s no shutting me up.”²⁵

James is the tough-talking, self-employed creator and owner of *Flavor* magazine. She places her dedication to her magazine above everything and everyone else in her life, often sacrificing her own happiness.

“To you, this may be something you read in the bathroom, but to me this magazine is my life,” she tells her roommates.²⁶

James embodies many masculine traits—wearing little makeup, baggy jeans, and men’s hats. She plays pool and is a fierce competitor on the basketball court where she earned the nickname, “All chain James.”²⁷

Like Shaw and many women journalists, James, too, adopted the sob sister fashion code—dressing like a male.²⁸

Her mannerisms parallel those of reporter Megan Carter, played by Sally Field, in the movie *Absence of Malice*.²⁹ Carter is unladylike. “She swears like a man, drinks like a man, initiates sex like a man.”³⁰

James’ strong independence and self-reliance make her the rock that her three roommates lean on during times of crisis. That independence often becomes her downfall, as she always helps others but refuses their help in return.

When James finds out that she owes \$2,000 to *Flavor*'s printer and may not be able to put out the next issue, she refuses to accept any money from her friends who offer to help.³¹

"I've always had to hold things together," James tells her best friend Max who writes her a check for the \$2,000. "I always had to be the strong one. This is who I am," she says, ripping up the check.³²

Instead of taking the money, James decides to make cutbacks around the office. She tells her employees that they can no longer use disposable cups, make personal phone calls, and must use the copy machine as a source of light and heat.

Later in the season, James' cheapness ultimately causes her employees to strike after equipment around the office break down, and she refuses to replace them.³³ To make ends meet, James puts coin boxes on the bathroom doors.

"These are the type of conditions that force people to strike," Synclaire, her cousin and secretary, warns.³⁴

The employees get the idea of going on strike after their new sportswriter, Bobby Bonilla from the New York Mets, writes an article about the team going on strike against their owners after a salary cap.

Showing her usual stubbornness, James tells her employees who decide to walk out, "Strike or no strike, *Flavor* will not shut down. I'll run this magazine myself if I have to."³⁵

In a later episode, her willingness to do everything herself makes her micromanage the magazine from home while she is out sick with the flu.³⁶ Paranoid about landing a big advertising deal with the sneaker company Shoe La La, she instructs

Synclaire to run the office for her but tells her to turn on the speakerphone so that she can hear everything going on.

Much like a sob sister, James becomes an “isolated super-professional journalist able to do any job perfectly.”³⁷

That isolation ultimately causes her to seek the advice of a therapist.³⁸

To beat out the competition of a rival, copycat magazine named *Savor*, James offers readers new giveaways and promotions. She pays for the additional promotion by taking a night job as a security guard at a retirement home. This ultimately leads to her breakdown and a diagnosis of bipolar depression.³⁹

In the end, the quality of her magazine stomps out its competitor. Critics write, “... readers should look to *Flavor*—the cutting edge magazine *Savor* tries to be.”⁴⁰

James’ stubbornness about protecting the integrity of her magazine becomes evident when a major corporate entity, Majestic Publishing, tries to buy *Flavor*.⁴¹ Even though James owes the government \$1,000 on top of her other debts, she refuses to sell part of the magazine.

After selling the copy machine and other things around the office, she realizes that she needs the money and sells a fourth of her magazine to Majestic.

She tells Jeremy Mills, Majestic’s liaison, “If I give you static, it’s because *Flavor* is more than a magazine. I created it. It’s my baby.”⁴²

“*Flavor* has a voice this community needs to hear,” Mills tells her.

Always the control freak, she replies, “Just remember, I’m the boss.”

James’ reluctance to partner with a major corporation may be caused by the negative images that popular culture holds of media conglomerates. They are often

portrayed as the “ones who create the moral chaos in which reporters and editors struggle to survive.”⁴³

In many films of the 1930s, “the unrepentant scoundrels end up being the media tycoons, the publishers, the men or women with all the power to manipulate public opinion for their personal benefit. Evil publishers destroy the public trust and put their own political or financial gain above all else.”⁴⁴

Putting the needs of her readers first is part of James’ deep-rooted journalistic integrity and loyalty to *Flavor*. This integrity surfaces when she decides not to endorse her best friend Max, who is running for city alderwoman, in the magazine.⁴⁵ During the interview, Max answers all the questions using clichés and superficial, catchy phrases.

James decides to endorse another candidate telling her friend, “I have an obligation to my readers to endorse the best candidate, not someone who just spits out clichés.”⁴⁶

Her actions are similar to that of managing editor Henry Connell, played by James Gleason, in the film *Meet John Doe*.⁴⁷ By refusing to print a hoax story and standing up to his demanding publisher, his actions reiterate the adage that, “a journalist’s first job is to do the right thing by protecting the public interest. Betraying the public trust is, for the journalist both in and out the movies, the greatest sin of all.”⁴⁸

Although James shares many characteristics of a sob sister, she also defies the stereotype of the female reporter only being successful under the supervision of an older, male reporter. For example, in the movie *Up Close and Personal*, reporter Tally Atwater, played by Michelle Pfeiffer, relies on her news director Warren Justice, played by Robert Redford, for her stardom.⁴⁹

Critics write, “Tally isn’t entirely—or even largely responsible for her own success. She owes most of it to Warren Justice (Redford), a former network star, now news director at Channel 9 in Miami.”⁵⁰

James is the sole creator and owner of *Flavor*—an accomplishment attained without being under the constant supervision of any male.

Unlucky in Love

Despite their high positions at well-respected hip hop publications, both James and Shaw are most challenged in the area of finding and keeping a man.

Like the sob sister who was too “independent and feisty for the times...these self-sufficient females would succumb to love, longing for what 1930s audiences were sure every woman really wanted—a man, marriage, and children. No matter how strong the female reporter was throughout the film, she, like Torchy Blake, the most dominant female reporter in one movie after another, would opt for the hope of matrimony with the most available man.”⁵¹

Throughout the series, James has an off and on relationship with music producer and childhood friend Terrence “Scooter” Williams, played by Cress Williams.⁵²

Her relationship with Scooter is vague as he often leaves for months at a time on business. James, like Shaw, is plagued by loneliness, pining away for her lover, whom she rarely sees.

She scores most of her dates through her encounters with men as a hip-hop journalist.

During an interview with basketball star Grant Hill, James and the player share a passionate kiss in her apartment.⁵³ Her roommates walk in, stopping the two from going any further.

“Your lips just compromised your journalistic integrity,” Synclaire warns her.⁵⁴

Hill and James begin dating, but she shortly ends the affair not because of her journalistic integrity but because Hill is leaving town.

On an interview with accomplished inner-city teacher Alonzo Forde, played by Adam Lazarre-White, James asks the teacher about his after-school program which he says is designed in two parts.⁵⁵ The first part involves the kids, the second involving dinner, dancing, and her.

“Are you asking me out on a date, because it’s on the record,” she says pushing her tape recorder forward.⁵⁶

“Are you saying ‘yes,’ because the public has a right to know,” he responds, sliding the tape recorder back toward her.⁵⁷

“They don’t have to know everything,” she says, turning it off.

Happy to finally find love, James begins neglecting her friends and things around the office. The two ultimately break up after a reappearance from Scooter.⁵⁸

Shaw also scores dates with her sources in *Brown Sugar*. During her interview with New Jersey Nets basketball player and aspiring rapper Kelby Dawson, Shaw wears a low-cut red dress, shows cleavage, and is fully made up.⁵⁹

Shaw’s ability to transform her appearance from boyish to sexy parallels reporter Torchy Blane’s experience.⁶⁰ “In addition to rakish hats and man-tailored suits, she wore

makeup. Her Kewpie-doll looks were the result of eyebrow pencil, eye shadow, mascara, rouge, and lipstick, all deftly applied. The props and paint confirmed that Torchy well knew the traditional feminine role and was ready to play it.”⁶¹

The next day, Dawson sends her a room full of roses, asking for a date.

The two begin dating and shortly after become engaged.

Shaw later realizes that she doesn't know much about Dawson when she asks him to give his opinion of her writing.

“Writing these articles here and there are one thing, but this book is different,” she says during an episode of writer's block.⁶² “I really want it to be good, and I don't know if I can write at that level. What did you think of the underground review I did on Cassius?” she asks him.

He scratches his head and mumbles, “It was good.”⁶³

She realizes that he has never read any of articles, unlike her best friend Dre whom she is in love with and who is able to quote all of her writings.

“‘Simplicity provides a fine line between eloquence and plainness,’ Dre recites during one of their conversations. “That's a dope line.”⁶⁴

“That was my first published article,” she tells him.

Despite her engagement and his marriage, the two sleep together, causing major tension in their friendship and in Sidney's work.

When the album of Dre's new artist, Cabbie, is sent to her for review, she meets him at his hotel room and throws it at him.

“Guess what demo tape landed in my hand for this month’s underground review?” she asks him.⁶⁵ “Don’t act like you didn’t plan this. You know the editor does the unsigned artist reviews.”

She tells him that she couldn’t do the review because it went against her journalistic integrity.

“Doesn’t the conflict of interest seem obvious?” she scolds him.

At the end of the movie, the two declare their love for each other in the studio at Hot 97, the number one hip hop radio station in the country. He holds up a piece of paper outside the studio’s window asking her if she wants to go out with him. He rushes inside studio, and they share a passionate kiss.⁶⁶

This kind of declaration of love between the sob sister and the man she pines away for appeared 71 years ago in *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*. In a dramatic scene, Longfellow Deeds played by Gary Cooper scoops up female reporter Babe Bennett, played by Jean Arthur, in his arms.⁶⁷ “Finally, he kisses her back, and the crowd cheers. The tough sob sister gets what every woman in 1930s America seems to want above everything else: marriage to the man she loves.”⁶⁸

Misogyny

Sexual tension has been an underlying factor for many female hip hop journalists. As women in journalism and in hip hop, both Shaw and James often face unwanted sexual advances from interviewees. In some instances, the flirtations are reciprocated. To show emotion or to show discomfort at what may be a sexist comment or even

harassment for many women in this field may result in a loss of credibility and authoritativeness.

One female reporter for *XXL* magazine writes, “There is no denying that hip hop is massively sexist and not in a ‘my boss gave me an inappropriate look’ kind of way. Hip-hop is sexist more in that ‘so and so grabbed your ass, talked about porn, and suggested your meeting be continued at a strip joint’ kind of way”⁶⁹

This was the case for Kim Osario, former editor-in-chief of *The Source* magazine.⁷⁰ In 2002, Osario became the first female promoted to that position in the publication. In 2005, she filed a lawsuit against the owners of the magazine for sexual harassment after being fired, claiming that she and other female executives “would hide in their offices and avoid walking through the corridors in fear of being harassed.”⁷¹

In an article, hip hop journalist Dream Hampton says that, “Female reporters sometimes feel that they have to choose between Doing the Right Thing—uncovering misogyny in hip-hop culture—and Doing the Professional Thing: sticking to the assigned angle.”⁷²

The writer recalls being told in an interview with notorious record executive Marion “Suge” Knight that she had a pretty face and shouldn’t say anything in print that would “get her face all fucked up.”⁷³

In a less extreme display of sexual harassment, James faces similar displays.

In a financial crunch, she contemplates partnering with sleazy advertiser Elmo Savor,⁷⁴ who wants to run a malt-liquor advertising campaign in *Flavor* using images of women dressed in leopard-print G-strings kissing a bottle of the product.

“Let me propose a solution: you and me in a case of our brew, spending the evening in a tub of suds.” He tells her while placing his arm around her neck. “Would that make the ad a little more tasteful?”⁷⁵

In a later episode, James becomes the accused in a sexual-harassment complaint.⁷⁶ She hires handsome new writer Xavier St. John, played by Richard Whiten, without thoroughly looking at his resume or any of his writing samples.

The two share a cab ride home where they flirt and stare into each other’s eyes. When he reaches his destination, he reaches over for his umbrella, and she leans in for a kiss, which he rejects. She later reads his article which is full of grammatical errors and typos and tells him that she can’t publish it yet. He tells her that he’s suing for sexual harassment.

“The problem is you don’t need a journalist, you need a man,” he says.⁷⁷

“I need someone who knows there are two “O’s” in “Brooklyn,” she fires back.

She later tells him, “If a judge was to read your writing, he would sentence you to remedial English class.”⁷⁸

He ultimately drops the charge.

Male Reporters

Men who aren’t used as love interests or to evoke sexual tension appear as actual reporters at *Flavor* or other competing magazines.

When James decides to do an exposé about a boxing promoter who fixes fights, her only source for the story is snatched by the arrogant Marcus Hughes, played by Kadeem Hardison.⁷⁹

At the gym, James spots a man in a sweatshirt and boxing gear. He asks her if she's a reporter.

"Yes," she says extending her hand. "Khadijah James from *Flavor* magazine. I'm doing a story on King Davis. You mind if I ask you a few questions?"⁸⁰

"Fire away," he says.

She asks him a few questions before realizing that she's talking to Hughes. He flirts with her and compliments her on her work. He later invites himself on a date with her, finds her address, and shows up at her door. James goes out with him in an attempt to pick his brain for information.

While Hughes is in the bathroom, she gets a page from one of her sources and has to leave. She meets her source (a boxer) at a hotel room where she gets the full story about how the promoter King Davis fixes boxing matches. Happy that she outwitted Hughes, she begins writing her story when Hughes comes out of the hotel bathroom, having heard the entire interview.⁸¹

When he walks out the room, she calls her secretary and has the story put in the magazine that night so that it hits the stands a day earlier than Hughes' piece.⁸²

Hughes embodies the stereotypical image of the cutthroat male reporter described as a "tough, fast-talking cynic who prowls about unchecked in a corrupt world, continually on the lookout for trouble and a good story, [and who] moves with speed and assurance—immediately on the scene of a news event to scoop the other papers, furiously typing his story amidst the hustle and bustle of the newsroom."⁸³

James has a similar experience when she hires reporter Ty Richardson, played by Duane Martin, as a new writer.⁸⁴ Richardson is arrogant and cocky, walking into the

office with tales of celebrity interviews and giving “foot massages to supermodel Naomi Campbell.”⁸⁵

Richardson is supposed to be working on an expose about the embezzling of public-school funds— a story that James had already began reporting but gave to him after he refuses to share his byline.⁸⁶

“If I take your notes, that means I have to share the byline,” he tells her. “Tyronne Richardson flies solo, baby.”⁸⁷

Rather than covering the story, Richardson gets arrested for getting into a fight at a bar, leaving James to finish writing the story. Days later, he comes in with the story on a disc, saying that he got arrested on purpose to get information from a source in jail. The two finally compromise and share the story.⁸⁸

James exemplifies the image of editors in popular culture who “...are contemptuous of reporters who can’t make deadlines or miss stories because of booze or incompetence. The story is always more important than the people involved.”⁸⁹

Conclusion

“Hip-hop journalism built on the tradition of hip hop as a societal reflector,” writes journalist and author Raquel Cepeda.⁹⁰ “The hip hop journalists not only understood, but were themselves participants also aching to be understood.”

The female hip hop journalist helps break down doors once closed to women. Images of women like Khadijah James and Sidney Shaw—these without being under male tutelage—are not only reporters but creators and editors of their publications.

Living Single's creator and executive producer Yvette Lee Browser says the purpose of the series was to open the eyes of mainstream America to a "real slice" of urban life.⁹¹

"It was time for networks to realize that there was a voice out there that people wanted to hear—a black, female voice."⁹²

Endnotes

¹ Chang, Juliana, "Keeping It Real: Interpreting Hip Hop," *College English*. May 2006. p.545.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 546.

⁴ Cepeda, Raquel, *And It Don't Stop: The Best American Hip Hop Journalism Of The Last 25 Years* (Faber and Faber, Inc., New York, 2004) p. 27.

⁵ Ibid., p.28.

⁶ *Brown Sugar*, 2002 (running time 109 minutes), Twentieth Century Fox Films. Directed by Rick Famuyiwa. Script by Michael Elliot.

⁷ Saltzman, Joe, *Sob Sisters: The Image of the Female Journalist in Popular Culture*, (www.IJPC.org, 2003), p.7. <http://www.ijpc.org/sobsmaster.htm>, accessed April 10, 2007.

⁸ Box office/ business for *Brown Sugar*, <http://imdb.com/title/tt0297037/business>, accessed April 21, 2007.

⁹ *Brown Sugar*.

¹⁰ Episode 73: "Shrink to Fit," *Living Single*. First aired February 15, 1996, Fox, SisterLee Productions. Directed by Ellen Gittelsohn. Written by Roger S.H. Schulman.

¹¹ Collins, Aldore D, "Behind the Scenes of 'Living Single'—Black Sitcom starring Queen Latifah, Kim Coles, Kim Fields, and Erika Alexander," *Ebony*, February 1996, pg 54.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *Brown Sugar*.

¹⁴ At the party, Shaw is approached by actual rap artists Beanie Siegel and Fabulous. Hip Hop heavyweights Russell Simmons and his wife, Kimora Lee Simmons, make a cameo appearance after Shaw walks in. Russell Simmons is one of the creators of Def Jam Records and Phat Farm clothing. Kimora is the creator of the woman's line Baby Phat clothing.

¹⁵ *Brown Sugar*.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Joe Saltzman, p. 7.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Good, Howard, *Girl Reporter: Gender, Journalism, and the Movies* (Scarecrow Press, Inc., Maryland, 1998), p. 129.

²⁰ *Brown Sugar*.

²¹ Joe Saltzman, p.4.

²² Ibid.

²³ Saltzman, Joe, *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film* (Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture, a Project of the Norman Lear Center, Annenberg School for Communication, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, 2002), p. 57.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Episode 16: "Fatal Distraction," *Living Single*. First aired January 9, 1994, Fox, SisterLee Productions. Directed by Henry Chan. Written by David Wyatt.

²⁶ Episode 5: "In the Black Is Beautiful," *Living Single*. First aired September 19, 1993. Fox, SisterLee Productions. Directed by Tony Singletary. Written by David Cohen and Roger S.H. Schulman.

²⁷ Episode 57: "On the Rebound," *Living Single*. First aired September 14, 1995. Fox. SisterLee Productions. Directed by Ellen Gittelsohn. Written by Eunetta T. Boone.

²⁸ Joe Saltzman, *Sob Sisters: The Image of the Female Journalist in Popular Culture*, p.4.

²⁹ Howard Good, p. 118.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 120.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Episode 43: "Play Ball," *Living Single*. First aired January 12, 1995. Fox. SisterLee Productions. Directed by Ellen Gittelsohn. Written Eunetta T. Boone.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Episode 22: "Who's the Boss?" *Living Single*. First aired March 13, 1994. Fox. SisterLee Productions. Directed by Terri McCoy. Written by Nastaran Dibai and Jeffrey B. Hodes.

³⁷ Joe Saltzman, *Sob Sisters: The Image of the Female Journalist in Popular Culture*, p.4.

³⁸ Episode 73: "Shrink to Fit," *Living Single*.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Episode 85: "Not So Silent Partner," *Living Single*. First aired September 12, 1996, Fox, SisterLee Productions. Directed by Rae Kraus. Written by Chuck Tatham.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Joe Saltzman, *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film*, p. 110.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.111.

⁴⁵ Episode 83: "Ride the Maverick," *Living Single*. First aired August 29, 1996, Fox. SisterLee Productions. Directed by Gil Junger. Written by Bill Fuller and Jim Pond.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Joe Saltzman, *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film*, p. 97.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 102.

⁴⁹ Howard Good, p. 136.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Joe Saltzman, *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film*, p. 56.

⁵² Episode 9: "Just Friends," *Living Single*. First aired October 17, 1993, Fox. SisterLee Productions. Directed by Ellen Falcon. Written by Bernadette Luckett.

⁵³ Episode 57: "On the Rebound," *Living Single*.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Episode 24: "Love Is a Many Splintered Thing," *Living Single*. First aired April 17, 1994, Fox. SisterLee Productions. Directed by Henry Chan. Written by Lore Kimbrough.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ *Brown Sugar*.

⁶⁰ Howard Good, p. 67.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² *Brown Sugar*.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Joe Saltzman, *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film*, p. 73.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Henley, Tara, "A Woman's Real Place in Hip Hop," *XXL Mag.Com* (2006).
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⁷⁰ Brew-Hammond, Nana. "Conscience Rap," *The Village Voice*. October 2006.
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⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Morris, Angela. "Hip Hop Journalism Roundtable," *Bullpen*. (October 2004).
http://journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/bullpen/hiphop_journalism_roundtable (accessed March 2007).

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Episode 5: "In the Black Is Beautiful," *Living Single*.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Episode 16: "Fatal Distraction," *Living Single*. First aired January 9, 1994, Fox, SisterLee Productions. Directed by Henry Chan. Written by David Wyatt.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Episode 50: "Who's Scooping Who?" *Living Single*. First aired April 13, 1995, Fox, SisterLee Productions. Directed by Ellen Gittelsohn. Written by Nastaran Dibai and Jeffrey B. Hodes.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Joe Saltzman, *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film*, p. 8.

⁸⁴ Episode 101: "Living Single Undercover," *Living Single*. First aired April 10, 1997, Fox. SisterLee Productions. Directed by Kim Fields. Written by David M. Matthews.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Joe Saltzman, *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film*, p. 84.

⁹⁰ Raquel Cepeda, p. 19.

⁹¹ Aldore D. Collins, p. 54.

⁹² Ibid.

Appendix: Episode Summaries

Living Single Episodes

* SOURCE: TV.com (<http://www.tv.com/living-single>)

Season 1

Episode #5: “In the Black Is Beautiful,” September 19, 1993

The printer refuses to produce the latest issue of *Flavor* unless Khadijah can make a \$2,000 payment. Max offers her the money, but she flatly refuses. After Synclaire tells her that the printer has threatened to see to it that *Flavor* is never published again, Khadijah accepts Max's check. She becomes so obsessed with paying off her debt that she begins selling appliances and turns into a tyrant at the office. When Max assures her that she doesn't care about getting the money back, Khadijah takes offense. She decides to get the money by selling ad space to a sleazy malt liquor company. Khadijah relents after Synclaire accuses her of being a sell-out. She accepts Max's loan in exchange for a two percent share in *Flavor*.

Episode #9: “Just Friends?” October 17, 1993

Khadijah's old friend Scooter comes to town, and the two begin spending a lot of time together. Although Khadijah insists that they are only friends, she ends up spending the night with him. When Scooter asks her to come out to his Los Angeles home for the weekend, Khadijah's friends offer conflicting advice. Max believes she should go for it, while Regine warns that she could destroy her friendship. Khadijah decides that she isn't ready to take such a big step, and asks for time to reevaluate the relationship.

Episode #16: “Fatal Distraction,” January 9, 1994

Khadijah hires a handsome and charming man named Xavier St. John as her new writer without bothering to read his articles or check his references. Xavier constantly compliments Khadijah and seeks her attention, so her friends suggest that he is attracted to her. When Khadijah and Xavier share a cab, he seems to be coming on to her. Khadijah leans in to kiss him, but he pulls away and says that he is not interested. When Xavier turns in his first article, Khadijah is stunned to discover that he cannot write. He claims that she is punishing him for rejecting her advances, and threatens to sue her for sexual harassment. Khadijah decides that the quality of her magazine should not suffer because of her error in judgment. She fires Xavier and dares him to sue her, noting that any judge who read his work would sentence him to remedial English class. Xavier announces that a suit wouldn't be worth the trouble.

Episode #22: “Who’s the Boss,” March 13, 1994

When Khadijah is stricken by the flu, she reluctantly allows Synclaire to take charge of the office. However, she enlists Regine (who is on a paid vacation while the boutique undergoes remodeling) to go into the office to keep an eye on Synclaire. Russell, the music editor, is furious when his column is cut (although it was Khadijah's decision). He quits, and announces that he will not return as long as Synclaire is running the magazine. While the office is in chaos, an important prospective client arrives, as Synclaire had forgotten to reschedule the appointment. Synclaire calls Khadijah to ask for help, but Khadijah is too drowsy from the medicine that Max had given her. Synclaire improvises, offering to refund the man's money if the ad does not increase sales at his Brooklyn shoe stores. Khadijah is impressed by Synclaire's work, and admits that she also makes things up as she goes along.

Episode #24: “Love Is a Many Splintered Thing,” April 17, 1994

Khadijah interviews fourth-grade teacher Alonzo Ford for an article honoring his selection as Teacher of the Year. They hit it off, and Alonzo quickly asks her out. They spend nearly every free moment together for three weeks. After Max, Regine and Synclaire complain that Khadijah is neglecting them, she invites them to have dinner with Alonzo and her, but the couple doesn't show up. They reschedule, but Alonzo and Khadijah ignore the girls and spend the entire evening babbling and kissing. Khadijah is confused by her friends' anger, as she believes that they should be happy that she has found a good man. When Alonzo's friends interrupt a date to complain that he has forgotten their basketball game, Khadijah realizes that they have become wrapped up in their own world. They resolve to spend more time with their friends, and the girls allow Khadijah to come miniature golfing with them.

Season 2**Episode #43: “Play Ball,” January 12, 1995**

Khadijah hires Bobby Bonilla of the New York Mets to pen a weekly column for *Flavor*, just as her employees are poised to walk out over low salaries and poor working conditions. Bobby defends Khadijah, until he interprets her request for a hold on salaries as a salary cap (a major sticking point in the baseball labor dispute) and supports the strike. Khadijah insists that money is too tight to give raises, but Max warns her that she is on the verge of losing *Flavor*. Khadijah rearranges her finances and agrees to give a modest salary increase.

Episode #50: “Who’s Scooping Who?” April 15, 1995

Khadijah vies with Marcus Hughes, a pompous reporter from the *Village Voice*, to break a story about a promoter who fixes fights. Khadijah appears to have the upper hand when she coaxes one of the fighters into granting an interview and providing details of the scandal. Marcus tricks the maid into letting him into Khadijah's hotel room, where he hides in the bathroom and records her interview. However, Khadijah has one more trick

up her sleeve: she arranges for *Flavor* to hit the newsstands a day earlier than usual. She taunts Marcus by noting that he may work for a big magazine, but Khadijah calls the shots at *Flavor*.

Season 3

Episode #57: "On the Rebound," September 14, 1995

NBA star Grant Hill comes to town for a Basketball/Piano Camp, and agrees to an interview for *Flavor*. While playing a game of one-on-one against Khadijah, he injures his knee in a midair collision. Khadijah feels guilty, but the injury is not serious. Grant comes over to the apartment, and he and Khadijah end up kissing (much to Regine's horror). Although Grant sweeps Khadijah off her feet and is interested in a relationship, Khadijah feels that the distance between them and their busy schedules would make this impossible. She breaks up with him, as she doesn't want to get hurt. Synclaire and Max suggest that she still hasn't gotten over Scooter.

Episode #73: "Shrink to Fit," February 15, 1996

Khadijah takes a second job as a night security guard at an old-folks home to pay for improvements in *Flavor*, which faces stiff competition from a copycat magazine called *Savor*. These worries are compounded when she learns that Scooter is dating another woman. Khadijah develops insomnia, and behaves extremely erratically. She follows her mother's advice and begins seeing a psychiatrist, Dr. Bryce. She shows up at the office in a wig because she fears that her friends would treat her like a mental patient if they knew about her session (which proves to be true). Dr. Bryce notes that Khadijah seems to put everyone else's needs ahead of her own, and believes that she is suffering from a mild form of depression. Even when *Savor* flops, Khadijah's mood does not improve. She admits that she has begun to think about all she has sacrificed for her magazine, and wonders if it is worth it. She agrees to continue to see Dr. Bryce, but the doctor first instructs her to take a one-week vacation.

Season 4

Episode #83: "Ride the Maverick," August 29, 1996

Khadijah reconsiders *Flavor*'s endorsement of Max when she insists on spouting clichés, rather than discussing the issues. She instead backs a little-known high school teacher named William Perez. Max claims that Khadijah is jealous and does not want her friends to outshine her. Max runs into Perez at a public park (where he is cleaning up graffiti with his civics class), and realizes that her reasons for seeking office are entirely selfish. She withdraws from the election, and tells everyone to vote for Perez. The voters are so moved by her honesty that she receives enough write-in votes to win. Max apologizes to Khadijah, who is impressed by her integrity.

Episode #85: “Not So Silent Partner,” September 12, 1996

Khadijah is approached by Jeremy Mills, a corporate liaison whose employer, Majestic Publishing, would like to purchase a share of *Flavor*. Khadijah turns him down, noting that they are only interested because their copycat magazine failed. After the employees express the need for a medical plan and an issue is scuttled by a flood at the print shop, Khadijah finally decides to "sell her soul" by allowing Majestic to buy a 25 percent share. Khadijah does not take kindly to Jeremy's efforts to make himself the hero of the employees. When he fails to come through with the promised health plan, he tries to make Khadijah break the news to the staff. She goes to the head of the corporation and threatens to quit if the health plan is not granted. Jeremy lashes out at her for usurping his authority, so she challenges him to stay for the duration of one of the staff's all-night work sessions. He grows to realize how much work is put into the magazine.

Episode 101: “Living Single Undercover,” April 10, 1997

Max enlists Khadijah's help in exposing an embezzlement scheme at City Hall. Ty Richardson, *Flavor's* cocky new reporter, demands the story, but is arrested in a barroom brawl. With the deadline approaching, Khadijah and Max decide to handle things themselves. They break into the office of a woman who had taken a suspicious vacation, and discover that she has created phony computer records. Ty shows up at the office with a completed story, and explains that his arrest was staged so that he could get to the guilty party's jailed partner. Khadijah forces him to agree to a collaborative story.

Brown Sugar

* SOURCE: Imdb.com (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0297037/plotsummary>)

Brown Sugar is a romantic comedy, described as an African-American *When Harry Met Sally*. It centers on a romance between an A&R exec, Dre (Diggs), at a hip-hop label and a magazine editor, Sidney (Lathan), who have known each other since childhood. Latifah plays Lathan's best friend. They find themselves drifting towards being more than friends, even as Dre is engaged (to Parker), and Sidney starts being wooed by a handsome basketball player (Kodjoe).

Sidney is a writer who's just left her *L.A. Times* music review gig to edit New York hip-hop magazine *XXL*. Dre is an executive with a hip-hop record company based in New York. They've known each other since childhood, when both discovered hip-hop for the first time. Now that they're back together, they should be perfect for each other, except that Dre's about to marry lawyer Reese and Sidney claims not to be interested in Dre romantically.

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