

Thoughts on the Crusade against Indecency in Hip Hop

Written by Tony Muhammad ID3681
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Politrax: My Thoughts on the Crusade against Indecency in Hip Hop By Tony Muhammad

For over a month now I've been patiently sitting back, observing the formation of this new moral crusade to sanitize Hip Hop music. These efforts have been largely concentrated on having artists stop using the notorious "N, B and H words" in their lyrics as well as put an end to violence and misogyny in the overall content of Hip Hop music. While it is expected that someone such as myself would automatically come out and express support for this movement, I have found it more beneficial to back up away from it and continue my work independently within Hip Hop as a teacher, journalist and community organizer just as I have been for the past 6 years. Here are my reasons for NOT supporting this movement:

1 – The Main Organizers – On one end you have Russell Simmons, the main proponent in the cause. According to sources, Simmons first came up with the concept of launching this movement during a closed door meeting at the Manhattan home of music executive Lyor Cohen on April 17th. The problem with this right off the bat is that Simmons and Cohen themselves have historically profited immensely from Hip Hop's commercialization and are responsible for its moral deterioration; if not directly, more so while looking the other way and making excuses for it. Simmons continues his profiteering ventures from the more negative aspects of Hip Hop culture by forming a jewelry company, thereby encouraging materialism. Until recently, it has been reported that Simmons' second favorite word in private circles is "nigga." But, don't take my word for it. Ask Founder and Co-Director of Project Islamic H.O.P.E, Najee Ali. Several years ago Ali called for a boycott against Simmons' companies (namely, Phat Farm, Baby Phat clothing, Def Jam, Def Poetry Jam and ONEWORLD magazine) after Lil' Kim appeared half nude on the cover of an issue of ONEWORLD wearing what was obviously female Islamic garb. In response to Ali's actions, Simmons reportedly said to the press, "What wrong with that nigga?" With this being said, is Simmons truly in a position to call for the banning of the word in the music. Regardless, there are already too many within the Hip Hop community that feel that Simmons has ulterior motives in this cause; that is, to appeal more strongly to the Black bourgeois class so that he could become a stronger power broker between Hip Hop and mainstream politics. Case and point, it was rumored when Kweisi Mfume stepped down as president of the NAACP, that Simmons was being highly considered to fill the vacancy. Are these Simmons' motives, especially with Bruce Gordon recently stepping down as NAACP president? Is it of any coincidence that the NAACP just happened to be one of the first organizations to publicly express support for Simmons' crusade?

On the other end, you have the Rev. Al Sharpton leading demonstrations in New York in front of the offices of major record labels demanding that they clean up their act. While I believe Sharpton's approach to all of this is authentic, the main problem in this situation is that Sharpton

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has not historically been paid much attention to within the Hip Hop community. This is shown fully with the reported lack of attendance on the part of Hip Hoppers themselves at Sharpton's demonstrations (read the open letter NY Oil made about Sharpton's demonstrations). A stronger candidate in this cause would have been someone such as Min. Louis Farrakhan, who has historically received much more attention and respect from Hip Hoppers. Yet and still, in the end, I do not believe demonstrating in front of the offices of major record labels will cause much change. These corporations have demonstrated a countless amount of times that they are NOT interested in our well being. They are interested in making a profit, even if it is at the expense of hurting or even killing the consumer ... little by little.

2 – Don Imus: The Roots of the Problem? – This crusade began in mid-April shortly after controversial radio personality Don Imus was put on the "hot seat" (and consequently lost his job) for making an on-air reference to the Rutgers women's basketball team as being a group of "nappy headed ho's." He blamed Hip Hop for his commentary, citing that Black women are referred to as ho's in Hip Hop music. To even pay this excuse any mind is in itself reactionary. To create a protest movement against indecency in response is worse. A racist such as Don Imus, who knows at best next to nothing about Hip Hop culture and probably does not care in the least bit about what Black people think (so long as his job is not threatened) should not be the catalyst to any movement surrounding Hip Hop. Change in the Hip Hop community must come from within through self-motivation and sincerity. There have been soldiers nationwide (and worldwide) that have already been working diligently in this cause for years. The best solution is that we continue to network with each other (i.e. through the internet, national conferences, etc.) and continue to provide alternative role modeling, events and outlets for the youth on the local level.

3 – Missing the Real Issues – Having major record labels censor artists' lyrics will probably do nothing but encourage already loyal fans who have acquired the thirst for violence and misogyny to look elsewhere for their brand of music. The violent and pervasively sexist messages and images in commercial Hip Hop have reinforced an addiction in the minds of many young people that has existed since this nation's birth. Yet, with the popularization of ignorance and irresponsibility in Hip Hop music, young people now believe more than ever before that it is normal to have several baby mamas and baby daddies out of wedlock, it's cool to be a "snow man" and sell drugs even if you don't have a real need to do so and you're considered "The Man" when you're living the lifestyle of a "pimp" with several non-committed relationships on the side.

On a cross-generational level, now more than ever before it is acceptable for grown adults to entice those that are significantly younger than they are to have sex with them in exchange for something "cool" like an ipod or jewelry. On a guidance (or misguidance) level, too many parents nowadays re trying too hard to relive their youth and "look good" rather than planting

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little seeds of wisdom on their children's minds. Consequently, too many parents nowadays are going to the same clubs, trying to fit into the same clothes, listening to the same music, drinking from the same liquor bottle and in some cases smoking from the same blunt as their children. In truth, just simply changing the lyrics to the music alone will not be enough to shift our culture in a more positive direction. Direct community intervention needs to be an integral part of any reform movement.

4 – What are the Limits to Censorship? – After the censoring of "indecent words" in the music, what is to follow? Indecent content? And if so, what content would be deemed as such? Would a content ban just be limited to violence and misogyny? In these undemocratic post-9-11 times these ideas are not just problematic, they are dangerous. This is especially considering that censorship is already taking place both on terrestrial radio and television. Just note that one of the last videos to be banned on MTV (in 2002) was Public Enemy's Gotta Give The Peeps What They Need, which called for the freeing of political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal. Truly, how far will this crusade against indecency go when corporations and major media outlets already treat music with strong social content as an indecent thing? Let us continue to expose the youth to the music we feel they need a fair balance of by introducing them to internet sites, underground (and college) radio stations, events and other outlets that support such music.

As this issue grows, I'm sure I'll have more to say ...

Peace and One Love for now.

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