

Politics Hip-Hop and Oakland's Mayoral Race

Written by Davey D ID2677

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Oakland's Race for Mayor Brings Hip-Hop into Politics by Davey D

Last week, a who's who of Bay Area hip-hoppers gathered for a news conference in front of the popular Oakland hangout Lucky's Barbershop to announce plans for "Vote Fa Sheezy," a campaign encouraging fans to take part in next week's primary election.

Among those participating were Messy Marv, Mistah F.A.B., Tajai of Hieroglyphics, Zion I, Shake Da Mayor and Planet Asia, to name just a few.

There was particular interest in Oakland's spirited mayoral contest, involving Arnie L. Fields, Ronald V. Dellums, Ron ``Oz`` Oznowicz, Ignacio De La Fuente, Hector ``Reno`` Reyna and Nancy J. Nadel.

According to TV host Chuck Johnson, who organized the gathering, Bay Area hip-hop artists have gotten the entire nation to wear stunner shades, to ``Get Hyphy`` and to ``Go Dumb``. So why shouldn't they be able to get people into the voting booth?

This point was also emphasized by Piper, who's touring with his group, Flipsyde. He said the words of today's hip-hop artists are heard around the city, the country and the world, and it's important for the hip-hop community to be involved in shaping the political landscape, rather than leaving that to others.

He also stressed the importance of making hip-hop's political well-being part of everyday conversation, insisting that Bay Area artists are in a great position to encourage that. Piper announced that he is throwing his weight behind Dellums.

Lead rapper Steve of the popular group Zion I agreed with Piper's points, though he hasn't yet backed any candidate. He said he is closely watching the mayoral race and reading up on contenders to see which show a real commitment to the school system. He also argued that no candidate has addressed the issues important to young adults ages 18 to 25.

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Popular artist Mistah F.A.B. said musicians can help break down political messages in the language of the streets. He stressed that wearing hats to the side and sporting gold teeth, as he and others like to do, does not signal a lack of intelligence. But not enough hip-hoppers go to the polls, and not enough elected officials reach out to them.

F.A.B., who has been a vocal supporter of Dellums", said he heard the former congressman speak at a rally, met with him and pledged his support. But F.A.B. also made crystal clear that he stays informed about issues, and many of his fans do, too. He wanted a commitment that, if Dellums gets into office, he will continue to work with Oakland's hip-hop community.

F.A.B. said he intends to help make politicians accountable to the community, adding that on his Friday-night show on KYLD-FM (94.9), he isn't just playing the latest hyphy jams but is also informing listeners about Bay Area issues.

Former Coup member T-Kash, who has just released the solo album ``Turf War Syndrome,'" said he's glad Bay Area artists are joining together to support a heavy voter turnout, but he stressed the need for the electoral system to erase the stigma attached to the 2000 and 2004 presidential votes. He said too many people believe their ballots won't be counted, while those at the opposite end of the spectrum believe voting is the only thing needed to bring change.

T-Kash, whose Friday-night show airs on KPFA-FM (94.1), said it's important to take the politics of social change beyond the voting booth, a constant theme on his award-winning show. As for the mayoral contest, he said he isn't satisfied with any of the candidates and so, unlike Mistah F.A.B., will not make an endorsement.

Kash also noted that it's good for rappers to engage in spirited debate about who and what we should be voting for, instead of just who has the hottest record or brightest bling.

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