

## Why Hip Hop's Davey D Disagrees with Russell Simmons

Written by Davey D ID3163

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### Bad Blood, Blood Diamonds and Why I Disagree w/ Russell by Davey D

I watched Russell Simmons on CNN the other day and saw what many may have considered a strange sight. He was on there basically slamming the new movie "Blood Diamonds" and demanding that its parent company Warner Brothers be responsible with what they put out there because it could unduly influence the public.

When I heard that, I said to myself, I will forever quote Russell whenever I engage some of these industry types about the type of material they are releasing to the public. After all if a big time music mogul like Simmons is calling for restraint and balance because he see the potential for undue effect, then its time for the industry to clean itself up. After all, who would know better?

But pushing that aside, this is not what that's about. In this CNN interview Russell said it's important that all of us know our history. It is with that sentiment in mind that I found it strange to hear Simmons defending the diamond trade in South Africa and Botswana, which were the two countries he recently visited on a "fact-finding" mission.

Please note that the horrific bloodshed and genocide of the early 90s which the movie "Blood Diamonds" focuses on took place in countries like Sierra Leone and Angola. In my opinion those conflict zones should've been included in any sort of fact finding mission. By only going to Botswana and South Africa and defending their diamond trade Simmons by default wound up defending the De Beers Company which for years had a worldwide monopoly and brutally ruled the diamond business in those two countries.

<http://www.ewtn.com/library/BUSINESS/ANTDEBRS.HTM>

For folks who aren't old enough to remember, De Beers was set up by a colonizer named Cecil Rhodes (yes the same Cecil Rhodes who the prestigious Rhodes Scholarship is named after). He took over what we now call Zimbawee and called it Rhodesia. His De Beers diamond company was and will forever be in many people's minds associated with the brutal Apartheid regime of South Africa.

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I recall as a kid hearing all sorts of horror stories about how the Black majority population in South Africa were forced to work in diamond mines in subhuman conditions for pennies a day by the De Beers owners with the military backing and blessings of the white Apartheid government. Many Blacks were killed or crippled by cruel De Beer bosses and Afrikaner police when they went on strike to demand better work conditions. It was more than troubling to see how these workers were forced to mine diamonds off their own land and have these colonizers sell them all over the world thus making both the De Beers company and the White South African government rich and powerful.

It's interesting to note that we didn't call those South African diamonds "blood diamonds" back in the 80s when many of us in the Hip Hop generation first became aware of all the atrocities, but in many ways they really were. The blood of Black south Africans were on many of those De Beer stones.

If that wasn't bad enough, De Beer had a nasty practice of keeping diamonds off the market so they could artificially raise prices and create an illusion of scarcity. This practice was highlighted the "Blood Diamonds" movie.

The brutality of Apartheid along with the horrors of the diamond trade was what motivated many of us as young college to become involved in the Anti-Apartheid Movement where we demanded that our colleges and other US businesses divest any and all funds from South African businesses.

Many compared "Apartheid" was said in the same breath as "Holocaust" because of how harshly whites treated the Black majority. Sadly we had in people in power like then president Ronald Regan, Senator Dick Cheney, and later President George Bush Sr. along with Israel all staunchly supporting this white terrorist Apartheid government every step of the way.

They refused to go along with and vetoed every single UN proposed sanctions. They called then incarcerated Nelson Mandela and his organization the African National Congress (ANC), terrorists who were to be feared. There was even a point where right wing knuckleheads in this country advocated that we actually purchase South African diamonds as a way to oppose the ANC who were considered terrorist because they were getting help from Fidel Castro and communist organizations. Remember the folks in power who guarded our beloved Democracy

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here in the US were doing very little to end Apartheid. This is "history", as Russell Simmons pointed out we should always remember and never downplay or conveniently overlook.

Now during his CNN interview Simmons noted that he understood De Beers had a bad history, but times have changed and that this once notorious diamond company had also changed for the better. Simmons noted that up to 80% of De Beers diamond profits now go back to South Africans and that the money generated from diamond sales now allow Africans an opportunity to get a stronger economic foothold.

As I listened to him run all this down, I kept saying to myself "Fuck That! De Beers shouldn't own any of those diamond mines. In the backdrop of all the brutality that occurred over the years, there should be NO splitting of any profits. It should be a full 100% controlled and owned by Africans. Hearing Simmons somehow defend the diamond trade while including De Beers company representatives at his press conference in NY last week, would be like Jewish leaders inviting the representatives of a company once owned Adolf Hitler to a meeting where they explain how and why it make sense to split profits with a company with a people that built a business around them being slaughter and their natural resources stolen.

I know in South Africa, they have this "Truth and Reconciliation" thing jumping off where a lot of the atrocities of the past have been overlooked and forgiven. But for many of us here in the US there was no truth and reconciliation process. Many of us have vivid memories where we emotionally bled and emphasized with the plight of our South African brethren. The memory of De Beers being a stalwart of the White Apartheid regime is still firmly etched in many of our minds.

The money that De Beers and others have sunk into launching today's PR campaign to counteract the overriding message of the movie "Blood Diamonds" was never used to by them to go around the world, apologize and try and make right the role they played in keeping the Apartheid regime running. In fact, the folks from De Beers hanging with Russell and explaining that things are now somehow different is the first time many of us have heard from them since Apartheid Days 15-20 years ago.

Heck, I don't even recall seeing or hearing any mass media PR campaigns from this company when all that horrific bloodshed and genocide was taking place in Sierra Leone. De Beers wasn't running around showing up on BET or CNN back in the early 90s explaining that they had nothing to do with Blood Diamond conflict in that region.

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With respect to Russell Simmons, he said that on his fact finding mission he was asked by leaders of Botswana and South Africa to come back and deliver a message about the "real facts" surrounding diamonds. First he pointed out that he went to the diamond minds in Botswana and everything he witnesses seemed up to speed and that there were no abuses taking place.

Next, he pointed out that blood diamonds are only 1% of the diamonds being purchased worldwide. He also noted that the diamonds we buy today go and directly help Africans. He then cited Nelson Mandela as one of the leaders who asked him to pass this message along to counteract the message many would be getting in the movie "Blood Diamonds".

Now a couple of things need to be kept in mind. A good friend and fellow writer Nida Khan of the Source raised the question at Russell's press conference if he would've really been exposed to the harsh conditions and unsavory behavior that still goes on in many of these diamond minds? Would the governments of Botswana or South Africa really show such a high profile figure with media access the dirt that goes on behind the scenes and off camera?

The second thing to keep in mind, if Russell is delivering a message from Nelson Mandela, why didn't Mandela himself, a Noble Peace Prize winner who is admired and recognized all around the world, issue his own statement and hold his own press conference? No disrespect to Russell, but why speak for a guy like Mandela on such a volatile subject? Now perhaps I missed something, but I searched Google, Yahoo and a number of South African newspapers. I couldn't find anything about Mandela speaking on this issue. I did see a couple of articles with Noble laureate Bishop Desmond Tutu coming out against the Botswanian government and De Beers sister company bushing the Bushmen off their native land. In fact as I am writing this I'm going to do one last search. I

Thus far I checked the following papers in South Africa

<http://www.bday.co.za/>

Business Day (Johannesburg)

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<http://www.mg.co.za/>

Mail and Guardian (Johannesburg)

<http://www.suntimes.co.za/>

Sun Times (Johannesburg)

<http://www.sundayindependent.co.za/>

Sunday Independent (Johannesburg)

In all these papers I did not see one mention of Nelson Mandela talking about how us buying diamond encrusted pieces from Jacob the Jeweler or any other diamond dealer here in the US was somehow going to saving Africans. Folks are welcome to do the search themselves. I'm not perfect, so maybe I overlooked something.

Most of the articles I read spoke about the connection and partial ownership De Beers has with the main diamond company in Botswana called Debswana. Many of the articles focused on how the Bushmen in Botswana have been tricked and forced to get off their native land so De Beers and everyone else can mine diamonds. Most importantly many of the articles focus on how the average person in Africa is not seeing the benefits of all those diamond sales. The whole scenario reminds me of how we been tricked into going along with the lottery. Everybody buys lottery tickets to help get much needed money to improve our school systems however; public schools from NY to Cali are still in shambles.

In the Capetown Daily News I did come across an interesting story that talks about how the United States state department is making all sorts of moves to counter the message of Blood

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Diamonds. They feel the movie can have adverse effect on the economy. It's a story I haven't seen here in local papers out here in Cali.

As I read the story I could only shake my head because when it comes to the people in power they are all too familiar with how influential pop culture can be. They understand the power of image and lyrics and all that. They clearly understand that this stuff is "not just entertainment" as many would like to believe. So it's not just Russell running around defending the diamond industry it's our own government. Go figure. I guess some things never change. It's the same government that defended De Beers during Apartheid. It's the same Government defending De Beers now that movie "Blood Diamonds" is out. Here's that article.

<http://www.dailynews.co.za/index.php?fArticleId=3580999>

The only positive article I saw regarding how diamonds are somehow helping out Africans was in South Africa's Business Day newspaper. It's an opinion piece that was published in August 2006. I saw no other articles supporting this claim or remotely touching upon this in recent months and weeks leading up to and now that "Blood Diamonds" is out. We should also note the recent so called studies that some are citing about the benefits of the diamond trade are financed by the diamond industry.

<http://www.businessday.co.za/articles/topstories.aspx?ID=BD4A252341>

One thing Russell did say on CNN which I agree with is that Hollywood and many others had never given a damn about Blood Diamonds. He rhetorically asked where were all the movies and films when genocide was taking place in the early 90s? It's a good question that many will have to wrestle with. That would include then President Bill Clinton, The NAACP and dozens of other organizations and churches.

Sadly many of us within Hip Hop around the time of this bloodshed had suddenly abandoned our leather African Medallions and started blinging out with platinum and diamonds. This would include some of the artists that Russell himself worked with. If you recall when all this slaughter was going on in Sierra Leone, many of us were watching Biggie and 2Pac (Tupac) videos talking about how jiggy we were. We all have to own up to our collective silence and ignorance on one of Africa's most devastating periods.

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But with all that being said, the debate is being raised now and it's important that we both understand history and the politics of the day. One thing that I find especially troubling is that while De Beers is launching an all out PR campaign and Russell is telling us to go buy diamonds to support Africa, I still have yet to go to a diamond district in NY, LA or here in the Bay Area and see some cats from Botswana or Black South Africans selling me some diamonds wholesale in store they own 100%.

I see commercials everyday from diamond retailers like Zales, Tiffanys and the Paul from the Diamond Center, but I never see us a Black folks. Heck, even when half the rap community goes out to purchase diamond encrusted grillz to make their mouths look like a "disco balls", its usually purchased from fellow rap star Paul Wall. Is the money he's charging for all those 30 thousand dollar plus grillz going to help Africans build a clinic to fight AIDs in Botswana? Is Lil Wayne, Nelly, Jermaine Dupri and other grill wearers sporting those gaudy mouth pieces with the intent of helping impoverished Africans?

I can't call it, but stuff don't seem right. As for me I'm not buying any diamonds especially if they're from De Beers or any other company connected to them. If we really wanna help out Africa how about making sure the debts they incurred from first world nations when they got rid of colonizers is forgiven and forever erased. How about us demanding that they be allowed to use generic drugs to fight the scorch of HIV and Aids and not be caught up in some super rich drug company lobbying our government to put the screws to Africa because they violated some trade agreement. How about we look at the insidious ways in which countries like Belgium manipulated things to help cause some of the wars that led to genocide over diamonds. Lets bring those people to justice.

Anyway in 2006 I'd rather buy some damn property before I buy diamonds. If you're really about blinging hold a land deed not a stupid diamond chain.

Something to think about...

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Visit Hip Hop Historian and Activist at Davey D's Hip Hop Corner - <http://www.daveyd.com>