

## The Role Hip Hop Organizations and Groups Play in Politics

Written by Davey D ID4471

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During the recently held Hip Hop Political Convention we had an explosive panel that addressed the issue of Electoral Politics and how they intersect with Hip Hop music and Culture. We wound talking specifically about the impact or lack of impact Hip Hop organizations have on the voting process.

Sitting on this panel were the following people;

Rev lennox Yearwood of the Hip Hop Caucus, Professor Lamont Hill of Fox news and Temple University, Tony Cani- Young Democrats,

Honorable George Martinez of H2Ed and former elected Official & emcee, Rosa Clemente-Vice presidential candidate of the Green Party

This panel started off tame enough but then erupted and got somewhat contentious as the panelists started addressing some very hard and oftentimes difficult questions around the role Hip Hop organizations play in mobilizing people around electoral politics.

A spirited discussion emerged about how we go about getting people politically engaged. Do we follow the model of having a high profile celebrity standing before the people hawking a cause or do we push for people to empower themselves by organizing block by block. There was enlightening back and forth between George Martinez and Rev Yearwood.

Yearwood heads up the Hip Hop Caucus and recently enlisted the aid of T.I. and Keyisha Coles to do a big register and Get out the Vote Campaign. Yearwood was also behind the Vote or Die campaign with P-Diddy. Yearwood talked about those campaigns and admitted that he had been approached about why he had not included lesser known artists who do the community work day in and day out..

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George Martinez challenged the practicality of Rev Yearwood's methods. He called it a sham and said it was misleading. He said people need to be empowering themselves and that such methods are good for getting funding but not necessarily good or even needed to get someone into office.

Martinez noted that he was elected before there were any of these organizations came into existence. he said it's all about going block to block and locking things down that way. He insisted that if you aren't known on your block then you essentially aren't putting in work. he warned the audience to be wary of self appointed leaders who claim to rep for us while not putting in the work.

Yearwood felt it was unfortunate he and his organization was mischaracterized and that he was tired of hearing revolutionary rhetoric with no follow up from the people espousing it. He went on to emphasize that people are still dying in the streets and we have to reach them. He said he was about trying to reach his people to politicize them by any means necessary even it included using T.I.

He said it was important that a felon like T.I. speak to the issue of voting because there are so many of us in our community who can relate.

Questions were raised about the impact funding has in allowing people to move forward or whether it compromised people to the wishes and agenda of the Democratic Party. This question was specifically addressed around the members of Gen Vote and money from the Tide Foundation and its ties to the Democratic Party.

This led to deeper discussions around why so many within Hip Hop activism still dependent upon funding from foundations and why haven't business plans been hatched that would lead to true independence.

Another touchy issue that popped up was the lack of support from Hip Hop organizations for the Rosa Clemente's Vice Presidential candidacy. She pointed out that after years of complaining about not having our agenda being addressed and how the two political parties have all but

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abandoned our communities except when it comes to siphoning off votes, she was said there has been lack of support from the leadership of some of these Hip Hop organizations. She noted that this is not about Rosa Clemente but about the vessel she represents. She felt money and resources needs to be directed toward highlighting the 10 point platform of the Greens which includes Social Justice. That's an issue the two parties dare not touch.

Rosa also brought home the point about the unwillingness for many including those in progressive circles to accept female leadership. She pointed out how disappointing it was for her to be apart of the NHHPC for over 5 years and show up at a panel as important as this that only had one female. That scenario has got to change quick.

Lamont Hill talked about how easy it is to dismiss Obama if you are a progressive and permanently position him as a tool of larger political interests. He said its real easy to dismiss voting for the Greens as a throwaway vote for MCcain. he stated that for the first time we have millions of people excited about an election and looking at issues. He said we can't afford to throw that away and that we should find ways to engage those folks who have come to politics through the Obama campaign.

He talked about the challenges many of us are facing in terms of raising money and being completely independent.

Tony Canti talked about the dissatisfaction his group had with the democratic Party and how they broke off specifically so they can address key issues. However, he talked about how the electoral political process is a numbers game and that the game has got to be played in such a way that you make those numbers if the desired goal is to get someone into office where they can make key decisions.

Audience members like NY rap star NY Oil noted that part of the challenge we have is getting people to do diligence. he said far too many people go home after hearing all this information and never ever do their part. Less

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