

Rappers Hip Hop Songs Targeting Presidential Elections

Written by Davey D ID4181

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Rappers & Hip Hop Songs Targeting Presidential Elections By Hip Hop Historian Davey D

With Obamania sweeping the country, people are buzzing about "Yes We Can," the song and video by Black Eyed Peas front man will.i.am.

It cleverly pieces together excerpts from Barack Obama's speeches, with artists and celebrities such as John Legend, Common, Kate Walsh, Nicole Scherzinger, Herbie Hancock, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Scarlett Johansson repeating the senator's words and phrases. The main hook is the Obama catch phrase "Yes We Can."

Will.i.am said he was inspired to do the project by the speech Obama made just after losing the New Hampshire primary. I was present for that incredible oration, which made the crowd feel as if he actually had won. The will.i.am song is now displayed on the Obama campaign Web site.

"Yes We Can" has prompted a lot of comments about a rapper finally making a song for a presidential candidate. But while "Yes We Can" is nice, it was by no means the first.

During the current contest, Common, among others, has expressed his support for Obama in song lyrics, most notably in his hit song "The People".

In the Bay Area, D"Labrie, of the national grass-roots Hip Hop Congress, and Kev Choice, the Oakland-based keyboard phenom and rapper, have recorded political songs. D"Labrie's is a remake of Mims' smash hit, "This Is Why I'm Hot," from last summer. D"Labrie replaced the title phrase with "Vote for Barack." On Super Tuesday, CNN played it in the background while going over the voting stats.

Kev Choice reworked the Sam Cooke classic "A Change Is Gonna Come," skillfully weaving in excerpts from Obama speeches with his own raps and a sampled chorus.

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In earlier campaigns, numerous rappers got involved. In 2004, for example, Rappin" 4Tay teamed with Ohio candidate Dennis Kucinich, using excerpts from a Kucinich speech to record "Weapons of Mass Distraction."

In that same year, San Jose artist Ak-9ine released a popular song called "Let My Nine Ring" which was an audio letter to the President warning about explosive conditions on the streets for young Black males. The song starts off with a catchy refrain that went "Bush Gotta Go, Bush Gotta Go".

Ak-9ine's popular song hit the number one spot on Public Enemy front man Chuck D's syndicated Worldwide Hip Hop countdown show. Speaking of which Chuck's legendary group Public Enemy released a rock inspired song called 'son of a Bush" which they performed outside of the 2004 Democratic Convention in Boston.

Ak-9ine" song was also prominently featured on the Slam Bush CD which was a compilation album that featured over 25 songs dedicated to getting Bush out of office. That particular CD was the result of a nationwide rap contest and tour where artists stepped up and offered choice lyrics bashing our commander and chief.

In addition to Ak-9ine, Slam Bush featured artists like Verbal Tech "Dear Mr President", Wyclef Jean "If I Were President", Azeem "George Bush is a Gangsta", J Boogie, Zion I & Deuce Eclipse "You're a Murdera", Jadakiss w/ 2Pac "Why" rmx, The Perceptionists "Memorial Day", Vanessa German "Thank You" Saigon 'shok TV", Channel Live "Dear Mr President" Immortal Technique "Cause of Death" and Wordsworth 'slam Bush" which also had an accompanying video, just to name a few.

In the summer of 1992, Paris unveiled his infamous "Bush Killa," premiering the song before an audience of 22,000 at the KMEL Summer Jam. The Bay Area artist had hoped to put out a recorded version in time to influence that year's election and derail George H.W. Bush. But because of pressure exerted on his record label, the disc wasn't released until after the November election. Paris later received a visit from the Secret Service who had some questions about the content of the song. Paris went on record to note that "Bush Killer" which opens up depicting him assassinating Bush was only a "revenge fantasy".

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Paris" attempt to aggressively use his fan base to influence an election was on many levels in the same vein as a campaign his then label mates and fellow Bay Area rappers Digital Underground had been involved in two years prior.

After two people got stabbed at an under staffed KRS-One concert, the Berkeley City council put a moratorium on rap shows which was soon followed up by the city of Oakland. DU members along with other local rap artists came out to a contentious city council meeting. Group members promised that if the moratorium was not lifted that they would go back and record song advocating for fans to vote people out of office.

"We have over a million people doing the Humpty Dance, don't make us come out and record a song and get a million people to vote you out of office", were the parting words announced by group member and road manager Sleuth Pro toward the end of that contentious city council meeting. The rap ban was lifted with city council members stating that they would've done so without the political threat put forth by the group.

At a February 1995 press conference in Southern California with Snoop Dogg, MC Hammer and others, Tupac Shakur (2Pac) promised to unite fellow artists and their fans and create a voting bloc that would upset every national election until politicians became more accountable to the community. Sadly, he was killed a few months later.

Way back in 1984, when the Rev. Jesse Jackson became the second African-American to make a serious bid for the presidency, (Shirley Chisolm was the first) he bolstered his credentials by privately visiting Syria to help secure the release of a hostage, Navy Lt. Robert O. Goodman. Against all odds, Jackson succeeded, and even President Reagan was forced to acknowledge his achievement. Mele Mel, lead rapper of Grandmaster Flash, immortalized what Jackson had done in the song "Jesse."

It wasn't until much later, however, during an interview with Jackson, that I learned the former candidate didn't even hear Mele Mel's song until years after it was recorded, so it never played an official role in his campaign. Today, it seems hard to believe that the man at the pinnacle of the civil rights movement didn't cross paths with the band at the top of the hip-hop world.

As was mentioned earlier, over the years there have been a number of Hip Hop artists who

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have done songs aimed at the president during election time. In 04 we saw artists like Eminem ("Mosh") , Channel Live ("Mr President"), and famed San Jose producer Fredwreck who gathered together top recording artists like; Mobb Deep, KRS-One, Cypress Hill, tha Dogg Pound and Westside Connection among others to do a stinging song called "Dear Mr President". The jury is still out as to what sort of impact these songs have had or can have.

Interestingly, Obama has not only embraced some of the songs written about him but has reached out to certain groups, notably the Roots. Questlove will soon do fund-raising events for Obama.

By contrast, the hip-hop supporters of Hillary Clinton, who include Timbaland, 50 Cent and Lupe Fiasco, have yet to create songs for her campaign.