

Hip-Hop Generation Meets Emmett Till at the UN

Written by Saeed Shabazz ID1888
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The red carpet was rolled out at the United Nations on August 15, for some of the biggest names in Hip-Hop and the 'Civil Rights Movement'. The occasion was an exclusive showing of the documentary film "The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till".

My agenda has always been to bridge the gap between the two groups," the film's producer Keith Beauchamp said after the historic showing. "I firmly believe that the hip hop generation is the civil rights movement of today, so to be in this public forum on an international level to discuss this case is history in the making in and of itself," Mr. Beauchamp added.

The young Brooklyn, New York filmmaker partnered with the Manhattan-based Hip-Hop Summit Action Network (HSAN), which is chaired by its founder Russell Simmons to bring the film to the UN and to the attention of the international community.

The audience was a rare mixture of past leaders and present leaders. Rev. Al Sharpton, radio talk show personality, Judge Bob Pickett, Attorney Barbara Muhammad, Rev. Herbert Daughtry; and the new Lumumba Carson, Guy Route, Jim Jones, Melyssa Ford and Hakim Green, just to name a few.

HSAN president and CEO, Dr. Benjamin Chavis Muhammad, who served as the host for the evening, said there is a hunger and thirst for a reality check in America. "What happened to Emmett Till was an assault on all Black people," the veteran civil rights leader stressed. He admitted that there has been discussion around the issue of a possible 'generation gap' between the civil rights camp and the hip-hop generation.

Guy Route, 37, is a consultant at SONY music, and runs his own company, Renegade Media, and he grew up on the same streets that spawned the Wu Tang Clan: "What you have to realize is that part of the generation gap is because of education. There are so many things that we have not been taught, and have no awareness of. So we grow up in a world that is different purposely because of their fight for justice. But we were never taught about the fight," Mr. Route said.

Mr. Beauchamp, according to his press packet, was 10-years old when he found the Jet

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magazine with the photo of Emmett Till on its cover; and after pestering his parents; they finally relented and told their young son the story. The Beauchamp family lived in Louisiana, and the future filmmaker grew up to attend Southern University of Baton Rouge where he studied Criminal Justice hoping to become a civil rights' lawyer – such was the impact of finding that Jet magazine.

One night while out for an evening of fun, Mr. Beauchamp was assaulted by an undercover police officer, because he was dancing with "a White girl". "After that I felt compelled to leave the South and pursue my dream of becoming a filmmaker," Mr. Beauchamp told the gathering. For 10 years he pursued the case of Emmett Till using the film as a catalyst. Finally, on May 10, 2004, the United States Department of Justice re-opened the 49-year-old murder case citing as a major factor in their decision Mr. Beauchamp's documentary "The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till."

"You are here tonight because you care," Mr. Beauchamp told the hip hop generation that packed the UN's cavernous Conference Room 4. "Lynching is still taking place in this country," he reminded the audience. "It is time to wake up and understand our history so we can go forward," Mr. Beauchamp stressed.

"I am tired of people talking about 'back-in-the-day' as if the problems have gone away. We are here tonight to stand up for our today," Rev. Sharpton said.

The film will begin an exclusive engagement at New York City's Film Forum beginning August 17, followed by a national roll-out in October.

"When it comes out on DVD every Black parent should buy it for the children and teenagers, to remind them of where the struggle has been and where it has to continue to grow," offered Judge Bob Pickett.

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