

## Lil Kim is Free - Will She Fight For Other Prisoners

Written by Davey D ID2805

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Now that Lil Kim is Free Will She Fight For Other Prisoners? by Davey D

Last week during the BET Awards, Lil Kim's mother and brother came into the press gallery to field questions about her incarceration. They emphasized how unfair it was for her to be locked up and how the justice system is screwed up.

I think it was her brother who pointed out how all sorts of people who have committed heinous crimes do very little time, while Lil Kim got locked down for perjury. It was also pointed out how there are many who done more egregious white collar crimes and have gotten off the hook.

When the BET press monitors finally called on me, I asked them what sort of plans they or Lil Kim had to do work with prisoner advocacy groups now that they've seen first hand how jacked up the system is. Could you imagine the type of attention some one like Lil Kim could bring to the plight of political prisoners like Mumia Abu Jamal, Herman Bell or 2Pac's (Tupac Shakur) father Matulu Shakur just to name a few of the many? Can you imagine the type of attention that she could bring to the plight of the legions of Black and Brown folks who routinely get railroaded by the system?

Lil Kim's mother said she was not aware of any plans Lil Kim had in the works and they moved onto the next question. Granted things are still early and the Queen Bee is probably still recovering from her 10 month bid. However, it's an idea that should be seriously considered. After all, her incarceration was highlighted with a BET reality TV show which netted high ratings.

Many big time celebrities ranging from comedian Kat Williams on down to celebrity gossip reporter and former MTV host Ananda Lewis have spoken out about how the system was unjust and was railroading Lil Kim. Very few of us within the community who have family and friends who have done time, would argue with the assessment. Ideally it would be nice if the spotlight to the criminal justice system doesn't start and end with Lil Kim.

Now that she's out she has a great opportunity to bring attention to those who don't have a celebratory rap career. Hopefully she wont follow in the footsteps of Martha Stewart, who talked

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about how unfair the system was and how she lived alongside women who were unfairly locked up, but once she left she went back to being the media diva and multi-millionaire business woman she was prior to going in.

If Kim speaks up, she would not be alone in terms of speaking out. In the past there have been a few rappers who have done prison advocacy work including Hip Hop pioneer Afrika Bambaataa who back in the early days of his career routinely took a lot of brothers who were getting out the pen and put them to work. Many of them went on the road with him as he attempted to stir them away from their troubled environments. Later on artists like Ice T and MC Hammer did similar things. One of the reasons Hammer went bankrupt was because he had employed scores of people with nice paying jobs who were fresh out the pen. This was in addition to paying for cats lawyer fees and related expenses.

Of course we cannot overlook some of Hip Hops biggest champions of prison advocacy work, The Geto Boys, Michael Franti and Spearhead, Boots of the Coup and dead prez stand out. Many people don't realize that over the years the Geto Boys along with Rap-A-Lot CEO James Prince have sunk hundreds of thousands of dollars paying for legal expenses in their attempt to get brothers out of prison. While their advocacy work hasn't been well publicized, it was and is well known by folks in power who have grown angry with the group for reaching out.

A couple of years ago I spoke with Bushwick Bill about this and he speculated that the groups willingness to underwrite legal fees and try and prove the innocence of those railroaded into Texas jails may be one of the reasons that Rap-A-Lot found itself being aggressively investigated by the feds several years ago. Things got so heated for them that Scarface launched a song putting them on blast and naming one of the chief haters within the FBI who was pursuing them. The song was called Look Into My Eyes. Later on Congress woman Maxine Waters intervened on their behalf to help turn the tide, but not before it set off a storm of controversy that landed on the feet of former Vice President Al Gore. But as Bushwick confidently pointed out their decision to help out folks behind bars is not one they regret or would change if they could do it all over again. What the Geto Boys was doing is ideally what more artists in their position should do, especially when you consider how out of the 2.5 million people on lock down damn near half come from our community.

A couple of years ago when Suge Knight was on lockdown he actually took out ads in several magazines offering to pay lawyer fees and related expenses to help get cats out of jail. In his ad he had noted that there were way too many innocent people on lock down who needed help and he was throwing his hat into the ring.

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Michael Franti has not only dedicated entire albums to addressing the Prison Industrial Complex, but for the past 8 years he has done a 9-11 Festival which includes a free concert at Golden Gate Park in San Francisco which draws more than 40 thousand people. The festival started off as a way to bring attention to the plight of political prisoner Mumia Abu Jamal and has since expanded in both concept and sheer number of people who show up. Over the years everyone from Digital Underground to Talib Kweli to KRS-One have all graced the stages of Franti's 9-11 festival.

The work of groups like the Coup and Dead Prez's is more than obvious and speaks for itself. Over the years Boots has not only done concerts to raise money for Prison advocacy groups, but he himself was known for doing his own political education classes to help bring people up to speed on impending legislation like California's harsh 3 strikes law and later Prop 21-the juvenile justice bill, which allows for the incarceration of 14 year olds in adult prisons.

In the case of Dead Prez, their songs as well as their direct involvement and membership in organizations like the POCC (Prisoners of Conscience Committee) have set the standard for the type of work artists like Lil Kim can either support or be involved in. Both M-1 and Boots are quick to point out that they are organizers first and artists second. In fact during a recent Hip Hop conference at Stanford University, Boots noted that if Hip Hop wasn't the platform being embraced by people hood, he would be doing another genre of music, as long as he could reach the people that need him most.

Now granted Lil Kim may not be ready to do the type of work we associate with groups like Dead Prez or the Coup. However, it would be ideal if someone like her who has such high visibility and is now having the spotlight put on her because of her situation would consider taking things a step further by aligning herself with those who fight the prison industrial complex and criminal "injustice" system everyday.

What do you think?

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