

## Hip-Hoppers Step Up Despite Losses

Written by Davey D ID1869

Tuesday, 06 September 2005 03:06 -

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Yesterday (9-1-05) in New York BET, The National Urban League, Russell Simmons, Ben Chavis and the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network, Chris Rock, Juvenile and Master P held a press conference and spoke to the devastation in New Orleans caused by Hurricane Katrina.

Juvenile who has already started relief efforts informed the audience that he has lost his home, but is determined to see New Orleans rebuilt. He also came armed with information and statistics to back up his points about the US being able to do all sorts of things all over the world including being over in Iraq but not doing as much as they could and should in impoverished communities here at home. Many folks were impressed that Juv was able to come off with well-researched information and that he was willing to throw down in spite of his losses.

Master P who also lost many of his homes and businesses also spoke and told the audience that he's always dreamed of being able to leave New Orleans to travel the world as a rapper and basketball player, but he never thought he's see a day when he could not come back home...

Sadly, Juvenile and Master P were not the only New Orleans based rappers to suffer major losses from Hurricane Katrina. We learned that Baby and his Cash Money Clique lost just about everything-from homes to studios. We heard that Baby managed to escape to Miami. We hope and pray that their families are ok.

We offer up our heartfelt condolences to former No Limit rapper Mia X. Long time Yo-Yo hit me up the other day to let me know that a devastated Mia was trying to reach out to folks because she may have lost more then half her family to this tragedy. I'm not up on all the details, but the loss of life for even one loved one is heartbreaking. One can only imagine what Mia must be going through if she lost many more. Again our hearts and prayers go out to her for her losses.

BET President Deborah Lee said that BET is putting together a huge telethon in conjunction with the Red Cross and The National Urban League on September 9th. Scores of artists and celebs are expected to take part as music mogul Russell Simmons promised to help deliver as many artists as he can to the events.

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Chris Rock kicked off his remarks by talking about how places like Biloxi, Mississippi needed our help like 3 weeks ago. He joked about the challenge people had when they got into the airport and tried to hail a cab to get somewhere. He then honed in on the serious nature behind his humorous remarks which basically centered around how our collective neglect for these poor areas are now manifesting in what we are seeing today in new Orleans and Mississippi.

Although not in attendance at the New York press conference, we have to acknowledge the relief efforts and losses of other Hip Hop icons. First up we have Mississippi's prodigal son, David Banner who has sparked off relief and repair efforts in his home state. He is currently planning to put together some sort of benefit concert when the time is right. He also has a Heal the Hood Foundation and last I heard he was trucking bottled water into impoverished areas in Mississippi

Jay-Z and P-Diddy have stepped up and have each donated one million dollars to the Red Cross. They have also donated large amounts of clothing from their companies Roc-a-Wear and Sean John.

Ludacris has stepped it up and is using funds from his Ludacris Foundation to help in the relief efforts.

James Prince who is the CEO of Rap-A-Lot records has done what most of these major labels have yet to do. He's stepped up and he opened up a shelter in Houston for refugees coming in from New Orleans and Mississippi. It's hard to believe that in the most affluent and technologically advanced nation on the planet that in 2005 we have refugees from this country. Say what you will, but in a country that has thousands of hotels, closed down army bases and other underused and unused facilities why do we have what we have in the wake of Katrina?

What also struck me about Prince, the CEO of Rap-A-Lot Records is how he as a label owner stepped up to contribute. He clearly recognizes that a good part of his label's success is because of the talent that has merged from many of those poor impoverished neighborhoods in the Gulf States. What I'm surprised to NOT hear are words from all those multi-national corporate owned major labels who have been relatively silent. One would think that when you consider the huge jazz and blues catalogues owned by some of these major label groups that they would be among the first to be helping out and making public declarations to help bring relief to this area that has made them billions not millions.

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What we've gotten from these major record labels in the form of their public representative the RIAA is an announcement in the mists of all this devastation, that they intend to sue 754 more 'illegal' music down-loaders. I checked the news clippings and even the RIAA website this Friday morning (Sept 2) and saw no mention of them helping or even giving a link to the Katrina relief efforts. (I took screen shots of all those websites if anyone wishes to see them or thinks I am lying). That includes all the big wigs like Interscope Records, which is home to 50 Cent and Eminem to J records, which is home to Alicia Keyes to Sony records. These labels spin millions a year for fancy parties and shindigs during the award shows. They spend lots of dough on music convention-many of them held in New Orleans. We all know that many of them spend crazy money on airplay and magazine ads. Will they bring that sort of spending power to the relief efforts?

The only major label that I saw with any sort of acknowledgement was Universal Records, which has a public service announcement from George Bush and a list of charities and links so one can donate. You cannot even go to the website without being asked to donate and learning about the disaster. I am almost certain Universal will be following up with donations and resources of their own, which is a good thing. Let us hope other major labels will follow suit or at the very least instruct the RIAA to chill on these ill-timed lawsuits.

Can you imagine how sad it would be if some of those RIAA lawsuits are for people who have been left homeless and their lives destroyed in that region? What would be good is they took the money from the 14 thousand they filed and settled with for an average of 3 thousand bucks a piece and donate that to the relief efforts.

Again my point is that while it's great that we can point to dozens of artists stepping it up and donating time money and resources, where are the real beneficiaries who have gleamed so much the people of that region? This was a point that Juvenile and Master P made at the conference. They emphasized how much the city of New Orleans alone has given to the world both culturally and musically. New Orleans would be more than just missed if it were not rebuilt. Maybe this will change in time, with respect to these major labels, we'll just wait and see...

Relief efforts have been in full swing by Hip Hop activists throughout the country since day one. Everyone from author/activist Kevin Powell to radio host Rosa Clemente to Erica Ford have all been on the ground sparking off organizing efforts from around the country. For example, next Thursday in New York, Powell is spearheaded a fundraiser benefit that is the same vein as his annual blanket relief events he does around the holidays.

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Clemente was on air at WBAI in New York the other night banging the drums to get more community folks active by donating to organizations and following through to make sure that what they give goes directly to the communities in need. Her along with organizations like the Malcolm X Grassroots Committee are compiling a list of charities who have good reputations in the region. What has been found in the past is that many charities do not always get resources to the people who need them the most.

Erica Ford who works closely with Ja Rule and his grassroots organization is getting a rally together where folks can donate this weekend in conjunction with the Millions More Movement.

In Chicago, Hip Hop author Hadji Williams (Don't Knock the Hustle) has been hard at work donating proceeds from his newly released book this weekend to Hurricane victims.

In Atlanta, Hip Hop publicist Shemia Miller who works with artist like Game, Jermaine Dupri and Kam to name a few has been on the grind getting relief underway in her neck of the woods.

Here in the Bay Area activists like Tony Coleman from Mindz Eye Collective and All of Us or None are preparing some sort of relief efforts. Katrina although was 3000 miles away, it really struck close to home because fellow activist Mike Molina has not been able to contact his family who live in New Orleans. Everyone fears for the worse because of the destruction in the area where they reside.

All that has been mentioned is just the tip of the iceberg. We asked the hard question earlier this week where is Hip Hop? One thing for sure many of the artists and their immediate associates are all stepping up and throwing down. All this should be encouragement for others to do the same, if for any reason because this is home and these are our people. Like I suggested earlier take a few of those diamonds off that watch or out that grill and help out. The other thing to keep in mind is that all this should be a lesson for us to start preparing so we can survive any other tragedy. The obvious poor planning and ill preparedness of the federal government has shown that the only folks we can rely on in times like this is ourselves and the strong networks of people we have built around us.

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Susan Taylor of Essence Magazine spoke to the biased media coverage. She asked the reporters that were on hand to go back to their newsrooms and insist that they stop trying to show the people as animalistic criminals who are looting. She talked about how many of the victims are getting what they need to survive and in many places; there are no store clerks to take money.

Taylor's points were underscored by some news agencies that have actually shown the coverage behind the looting, where you have people with babies who have been left alone for 2 or 3 days with no help at all. Fox News in LA has been very good at bringing this point to light. In addition, while you do have some lawlessness, it is in the minority compared to all those who have been pulling together and trying to make it through one of the worst disaster to ever hit the US.

From my own personal experience as a journalist, I too have seen how things get twisted. There are two glaring cases that come to mind. The first was in 1989 after the devastating earthquake in San Francisco. The national media went and tried to make the residents of West Oakland look like criminals who were looting cars and people trapped under the Cypress Freeway. You had many people doing the armchair thing about how terrible these people were until it was realized that what they thought was looting was actually local residents risking life and limb to try to rescue people still alive and buried under the rubble. Some people were going back bringing trapped people water and health supplies. Others were going back and grabbing purses and IDs for stricken and shocked family members. To this day people who saw the initial coverage still saw West Oaklanders as looters and not heroes. In addition, it was years after the earthquake before that, part of town were repaired.

The other incident was in London during the first bomb attacks. I was there and actually covered it. I gathered many interviews and have on tape person after person stating that the bombings were no big deal because they happen all the time and that the latest incident was the result of Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair's foreign policies. I was there with other reporters and I watched with my own eyes as some of my mainstream counterparts went out of their way to try and find somebody who was panicked by the attacks and willing to blame Al Qaeda. What was being aired on national news in no way reflected what we all experienced at the bombing sites. In fact, we wound up eating dinner at a packed restaurant right across the street from open of the bombing sites and even took the subway home. More importantly, Londoners were not running around panicked. I have all this on tape, which we aired.

These examples are cited to bring to light what we are seeing with some of this coverage in New Orleans in terms of bias. For example, there are hundreds of dead bodies floating in those

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floodwaters; they have not shown that on TV. In those flood waters are alligators, they have not shown that. There was one news report that I actually did see about an elderly couple being trapped in their cars and 8 alligators swimming around them waiting to eat them if they left the car.

In many places there are people who are without homes who have been outside enduring the harsh elements for 2-3 days. That story has not been fully told. People think that it was real easy for folks to bounce out of town when they got the evacuation orders. We're now finding out such activities were poorly executed and in many cases damn near impossible.

To underscore this point, folks may wanna check out a show they aired on the Discovery Channel a few month's ago about changing weather conditions. They focused on Hurricanes and described an impending scenario about Hurricane X striking New York City. Scientist believe it's only a matter of time before a catastrophic wind storm hits the big apple. During the show they showed how hard it would be for New Yorkers to leave the area and get out of harms way once the orders were given. The key words here are 'harm's way'.

What a lot of people fail to realize is that Katrina didn't directly hit New Orleans. The direct hits took place outside the city itself. It struck in many of the areas that people were running away to. Many of the homes destroyed are outside of New Orleans as well. In other words, with a storm this wide and so huge and planes grounded you were likely to get hit unless you were able to get to the center of the state and even then it didn't mean that you could do easily and quickly.

It's like telling folks in San Francisco to get out of town because an Earthquake is coming and they rush across the Bridge to Oakland. That ain't gonna do no good. During rush hour it takes 2 hours just to get 40 or 50 miles away from Frisco. Can you imagine what things would be like during an ill planned evacuation Where you gonna run to when earthquakes and their damage can be felt hundreds of miles away?

We also have to note that you have rampant price gauging and we're not talking about gas only. That's another story that hasn't been fully reported. Instead of giving supplies away you have people trying to charge top dollar in the some of the nation's most impoverished communities for badly needed supplies.

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You have scenarios where the police themselves have been looting. Lastly you don't see a lot of reports about George Bush refusing to tell his oil buddies to sacrifice and lower gas prices. He was asked this by Diane Sawyer earlier today.

This is not to say that everything is kosher and everyone is without fault in New Orleans, but this is a life or death situation for a lot of folks. It should also be a hard lesson for all of to learn from. Are we prepared for a disaster when it strikes us. Can I really leave the bay if a massive Earthquake hits? Do I have enough supplies on hand? What am I willing to do if my house which is on solid ground is left standing while nearby house on soft land are decimated? Having a 'tell them to go eat cake' attitude in the face of disaster don't cut it especially when people feel their survival is at stake...

Quote from Afrika Bambaataa-November 2004

Well, I see that people have really disrespected Mother Earth which is a living entity. If you disrespect Mother Earth, she will spit your ass out. We have become a cancer to her and with all this bombing and chemical warfare in different places and stuff like that; Mother Nature is going to put it on human's butts all over the planet. That movie 'The Day After' was a movie sent by the creator for all people to see, just like the Matrix. All this is definitely going on. If you notice right after they released that movie 'The Day After Tomorrow', it looked like some of the same stuff (bizarre, destructive weather conditions) was happening right over Florida and many other places. It's gonna get more serious as this millennium goes forth...