

Hip Hop's Black Political Activism

Written by Jay Woodson ID2673

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it is generally within the culture that we find the seed of opposition, which leads

to the structuring and development of the liberation movement.

Amilcar Cabral, National Liberation and Culture

Hip Hop's contribution in the Black Liberation Movement will come from revolutionary activists leading a grassroots current within the broader Black Liberation and social justice/progressive movements. Hip Hop's political activism will be known for adding electoral organizing tactics and strategies to the Black Liberation Movement.

Power is an entity's ability to force its will upon another entity despite the other entity's resistance. Politics is the acquisition, retention, and exercise of power. Black power is the ability of Black communities to be self-sustaining and to determine their own destiny significantly.

Hip Hop is predominately consists of a medium which corporations use to market goods, services and one of the world's most popular genre of music. For many, Hip Hop has been a virtual place which we identify and validate ourselves. Hip Hop is a social construct and has political implications. Talking about Hip Hop is a conversation about social issues and politics. Hip Hop has always been a hyper verbal; it is a space to express thoughts, feelings, dreams, inspiration and teach lessons.

Hip Hop came from the conditions of working class Black and Puerto Rican youth that were marginalized from mainstream American culture, disco clubs and decent job opportunities. Hip Hop reaffirmed young people's humanity, became a place have fun, a vehicle to express oneself and to here the expression of other people coming from similar situations, which gave them a sense of belongingness.

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Public Enemy front man Chuck D's identification of rap as "the black CNN." And, as has always been the case with Black music, hip-hop articulated something so universal and revelatory that white kids wanted (to listen) in. Some even began to question the skin privilege into which they had been born. Hip Hop was beginning to break down the doors barring access to the mainstream, exploding onto radio, television and records with its race and cultural implications.

"When [Public Enemy] hit in '89, they focused a lot of issues that were urgent, from ethnic studies to racism in education to affirmative action to college admissions," says Jeff Chang. "It seemed like an incredibly energized period to me. Intellectually, it was all of a piece, from "Fight the Power" down to how to actualize that in activism and journalism. And if you shift the details, the context is still there for a lot of folks."

"we must also be sure to remember that the pool of socially/politically-conscious artists is larger than those who are most visible." Clifton Watson

Political Context

There are two major models for Black Liberation that many times cause Black radicals and Black Nationalists from conversing and collaborating efforts. Those two models are radical intergrationism and national and/or Pan-African separatism. These models have been debated by W.E.B. Dubois & Marcus Garvey to the US organization & the Black Panther Party. A new theory and/or a charismatic spokesperson must arise to synthesize the two models. The separatist model reaffirms African heritage pride and self-determination. The ability of the separatism to capture Black people's faith can not be underestimated. The reality that Black people are 1/8 of the U.S. population and political implications must be realized. The self-determination of Black leadership in a diverse and broad social movement must be articulated and practiced.

The ideological divide between the progressive integration and nationalist models has a class dynamic model to it. There are significantly more Hip Hop Headz who graduated from college in the progressive integration and significantly more Hip Hop Headz who have not experienced college in the nationalist camp. The nationalist camp uses Hip Hop as a medium to teach "knowledge of self", and issues dealing with racism. In 2004 the SLAM Bush contest and album is a good example of artists and organizers from both camps working together on a successful

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project. The Slam Bush project's mission was to raise awareness on the opposition to Presidential Bush in his re-selection year. This was one project that led to an 11% increase in voting amongst 18-24 year olds.

The mission of social justice organizations is to develop a social justice movement when there isn't one. Social justice organizations can not solely build a social movement but, a critical mass of people have to exercise an impulse to a crisis. Social justice organizations provide the network and beginning infrastructure for a social movement. Without a network and infrastructure it would be difficult for that critical mass to sustain itself to evolve into a social movement.

It is highly unlikely that there can be a Black Liberation Movement without a broad social movement that is diverse and includes the working class as an area of concentration. By area of concentration I am specifically talking about raising the standard of living for the under and working classes with regard to employment, healthcare, education and housing.

The Hip Hop community can not be the exclusive critical mass of the Black communities in a broad and diverse social movement. Hip Hop can not become a movement on its own. For Hip Hop communities to make a significant contribution to the larger political arena Hip Hop must achieve internal political goals. People who belong to the Hip Hop community and the community at-large will not take Hip Hop potential seriously unless it accomplishes an internal political goal.

Activist and public speaker Rosa Clemente states, "sexism is Hip Hop's biggest problem." Hip Hop must deal with its own sexism before it can make a significant contribution to the larger political arena. Clemente observes that Hip Hop is repelling women of color and "can't be losing people" to manifest its potential. Clemente says it must begin with the sexism of male Hip Hop activists, journalists and academics.

The Congress can not be a majority conservative for a social justice movement to gain victories. Many Hip Hop formations have facilitated the increase in the election process. Hip Hop communities continue to increase their participation to ensure our leadership in the social justice movement.

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The Infrastructure

It's the educated field nigga, trained in guerilla

Warfare plus equipped wit mental hardware

Manifesting organizational skills

Cuz organizational skills kills more devils than bullets

Jeru the Damaja, The Frustrated Nigga

As people who have been influenced by Hip Hop have grown into adulthood and active citizens of the world we have formed two important organizations built to engage in politics. These two organizations are the National Hip Hop Political Convention and the Hip Hop Caucus.

There are two major aspects to the NHHPC. The first is the event and second is the organization. A couple of thousand people participated in the '04 Convention and several thousand in the Convention along with the shows. The mission of the '04 Convention was to develop a community Agenda for the Hip Hop Generation. The secondary mission of the '04 mission was to develop the infrastructure amongst the Hip Hop community to coordinate political activity. the organization is focused so, it does not have as many members as the Convention drew, but continues to grow every week. the '06 Convention will be taking place this July in Chicago. The '06 Convention will attract a broad group of Hip Hop preservationists. Hip Hop activists, journalists, artist and academics will have equal status in the '06 Convention as the leadership of the Convention. All these sectors of Hip Hop communities will develop the Agenda. The organization increases political engagement, gives voice to the Hip Hop Generation and does some advocacy.

The Hip Hop Caucus was founded in December 2004 by Jeff Johnson and Reverend

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Yearwood. The Hip Hop Caucus has a strong civil rights bend and has developed a strategic partnership with the Congressional Black Caucus. For the past few months they have been doing relief work with Katrina survivors and agitating the government for more relief and fighting for the rights of Katrina survivors. "Katrina is our lunch counter moment", says Rev. Yearwood. The Caucus has been successful in influencing FEMA to push the evacuation of Katrina survivors from temporary housing from October of 2005 to March 14th of 2006. In the middle of March the Caucus hosted successful concert in opposition to the war on the campus of the University of Maryland featuring artists Immortal Technique and Headrock.

Tanya Price recently became the President of the Hip Hop Caucus and Rev. Yearwood has become the Chair of the Board for the Caucus. Rev. Yearwood expressed the importance and content with a woman leading one of the political hip hop organizations. In the next coming months the Caucus will be participating in the '06 National Hip Hop Political Convention, lobbying Congresspersons to support H.R. 4197 and 676, bills to support Katrina victims and national healthcare, develop a working relationship with the Hispanic Caucus of the U.S. Congress, support the April 29th anti-war demonstration in New York City.

Other than the Convention and the Caucus, Hip Hop media, academia, artists and entertainers play a critical role in the development of a Hip Hop political current. Established opportunities are The Ave magazine, The Hip Hop journal, several Hip Hop oriented websites, and socio-politically just artists. Several liberal, progressive and radical organizations are providing space for politicized Hip Hop voices not only as artists but as panelists. Organizations People for the American Way and the Center for American Progress are including Hip Hop politicians as fellows, spokespersons and organizers.

Projection

The study of Hip Hop has exploded on college and university campuses. This increase in critical analysis and dialogue on Hip Hop along with the growth political Hip Hop organizations is fundamental to securing Hip Hop's participation and contribution to the progressive/social justice movement.

The future of Hip Hop's political activism is no easy path. Social and Politically Conscious Headz and organizers challenge the subgenre of hypersexualization, materialism, misogyny, violent content and violence practiced, distributed and projected to the young and the world. The primary struggle of the Hip Hop activism is transforming our own from displaying symptoms

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of oppression to becoming agents of progressive social change.

More and more young people influenced by Hip Hop are reaching the age where they become eligible to vote. Exacerbated by the heart disease, diabetes and cancer older Black voters are dying. Hip Hop communities are increasingly becoming a part of the Black vote. The '08 Presidential campaigns will concentrate more on registering and mobilizing young people to vote than ever before. If, Hip Hop communities along with young liberals, progressives and radicals develop and practice operational unity we can influence not only the platform of Democratic Party Presidential candidates, but have the potential to significantly influence who the winner of the primary election is. For that to happen, those organizations must launch voter bloc field campaigns in the spring of '08 in Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina.

The Convention is focused on building bridges from the Nationalist tendencies identified as the grassroots and the integrationists identified as the electoral organizers. The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement membership has tripled in the last two years.

Many Hip Hop activists realize social justice can not exist under capitalism. If and when Hip Hop contributes to social justice victories in the prevention of the possible U.S. invasion of Iran, establishing universal healthcare, ending payola etc., then the revolutionary Hip Hop activists can advance the consciousness of Hip Hop's political critical mass towards socialism and Black Liberation.