

Hip Hop Davey D Where the Hell is Diddy During this Historic Election

Written by Davey D ID4155

Friday, 01 February 2008 02:06 -

I've spent the better part of this month on the road reporting on the presidential primaries. I attended the debates in South Carolina and two weeks before that I spent a few days up in New Hampshire. As we near February 5th's super Tuesday I will be down in LA which will compliment my forays in Washington DC for George Bush's last State of the Union speech and in the New York area where I attempted to get a pulse as to how things will unfold.

I been following elections since 1984 when **Jesse Jackson** made his historic bid and I have to be honest, the enthusiasm I get from people wherever I travel on many levels eclipses the feelings that Jackson brought to the forefront. History is in the making, with the strong possibility of us having our first woman or African American president. Whether you agree with the politics of Senator's

Barack Obama, Hillar

y Clinton

, Congressman

Ron Paul

or any of the other candidates, this race has peaked a heck of a lot of interests amongst those who normally wouldn't be voting. This is particularly true among young adults. The so called MTV/Hip Hop generation has been out in extraordinary high numbers. Whoever said young people are apolitical have not attended a Barack Obama rally. As we go into the 2008 election cycle political discussion has found a comfortable place amongst the young.

When I attended the South Carolina debates I saw pop culture icons all up in the building including comedians **Dave Chappell**, **Cornel West**, and **Chris Tucker** who sat in the row across the aisle from me. There were singers from

American Idol

as well as sports figures and of course members of Washington DC based

Hip Hop Caucus

Later that week BET was out and about as was

Sway

from MTV. Even during the State of the Union, BET was up in the building doing interviews with popular Congress people including members like

Sheila Jackson Lee

and members of the recently formed

30 Something club

which has amongst its membership young congress people who are dedicated to bringing forth issues that resonate with young adults.

If that's not enough we have the **League of Young Voters** distributing Voter Guides in a number of Super Tuesday cities.

Ru

ssell Simmons

and the

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Hip Hop Summit Action Network

recently penned a widely read Open Letter to all the presidential candidates asking them address key issues that pertain to young adults including "ending poverty, embracing diversity and ending global warming. He and HSAN recently teamed up with actress

Rosario Dawson

and her

Vote Latino

project to help bridge alliance between Black and Brown communities while simultaneously bringing attention to key issues impacting our respective communities.

Two tours focusing on the election and its intersection with Hip Hop and youth culture are set to start. They include the "**Hip Hop For President**" tour put together by longtime activist **Rosa Clemente**

and includes artists like

M-1

of

dead prez

,

Rebel Diaz

and former Green Party Presidential candidate

Jared Ball

. They will use this tour as a vehicle to bring attention to issues like;

Holding elected officials accountable

,

avoiding the trappings of "Vote or Die"

and

uniting Black and Brown communities

.

Author **Bakiri Kitwana** is also putting on a Hip Hop and Politics tour starting this spring which will include a number of scholars along with popular icons like

Cousin

Jeff

of

BET.

With all that being said, one of the glaring omissions from all this has been **Sean 'P-Diddy'**

Combs

. For the life

of me I can't figure out why the guy who sold lots of t-shirts, started an organization called

Citizen Change

and coined the catchy phrase

'Vote or Die'

has been MIA. I'm not raising this question to be funny or make light of things or even as a criticism, but its one of concern and deep curiosity. Why has Diddy been absent from the hoopla surrounding an election that may go down in history?

If you recall in 2004, Diddy was everywhere. He was on **Oprah**, he was on **CNN**, he was on the campaign trail sparking rallies that drew hundreds and thousands of youth in numerous cities.

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Many activist and politicians cringed when Diddy showed up. They accused his 'Vote or Die' campaign as being nothing but a marketing ploy. Others felt that by showing up on the campaign trail he was taking away from the important issues the candidates needed to discuss. Republicans felt like Diddy was a Democratic shield, while Democrats felt like his 'non partisan' Vote or Die message was actually inspiring GOP youth to go the polls.

Although his Citizen Change was non partisan, there are a few of us who recall him standing on stage at a **Rock the Vote Lippert Awards** ceremony in Los Angeles where he was being honored in February of 2004. There he promised to do everything he could in his power to 'Kick Bushes ass out of office'. It was bold claim that drew loud applause and made RTV organizers nervous because of their non profit status which forbid them advocating for a candidate. You can peep that speech by listen here:

<http://odeo.com/audio/333433/view>

At that time Diddy aware of the discomfort he was causing publicly apologized to organizers and re-asserted his claim to get Bush out of office. He then followed up with a short speech about how Bush was ruining the lives of mothers who's sons were killed in an misguided war. He ended by saying he was gonna see to it that Bush was kicked out of office.

When I saw Diddy about 4 months later he had launched Citizen Change and was distancing himself from those remarks by insisting he was non partisan. When I pressed him he became stern and repeated his non partisan status like a mantra. After the November 2004 election Diddy was and remains silent when it came to politics. I'm still trying to figure out what happened.

We know he caught all sorts of heat after the 2004 election. Most notably from talk show pundits like like MSNBC's **Chris Mathews** and Fox News" **Sean Hannity** who both crucified and mocked Diddy. They asserted that the youth vote he sought to deliver did not turn out in high numbers and as a result he failed to get Bush out of office.

The truth of the matter is that high numbers of young voters did come out. Organizations like **CRICLE**

(Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) bore this out. When Diddy kicked off Citizen Change he said he wanted to get 20 million young voters to the polls. His figures were in synch with other youth oriented organizations. Close to 21 million showed up. As for the youth vote failing to get Bush out of office, that was an unfair charge because when the actual numbers came back you find that out of all the demographics within the Democratic party it was the youth vote that actually voted in the majority for then presidential candidate

John Kerry

. It was everyone else who failed to deliver.

Diddy along with the dozen or so youth/Hip Hop organizations like **National Hip Hop Political Convention**, **League of Pissed Off Voters**

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Hip Hop Congress

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Punk Voter

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Hip Hop Summit Action Network

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**Roc
k the Vote**

,
Black Youth Vote

, and

Rap the Vote

just to name a few had succeeded in getting people out to the polls and more importantly, helped normalize political discourse in circles where it was often shunned. In the case of Diddy, he went the extra yard and did some behind the scenes good work when he purchased a polling company. That aspect didn't get too much mainstream play, but it was indeed a power move.

According to Democratic strategist **Celinda Lake** who owns one of the nation's premier polling companies, Diddy did some good work in terms of gathering data and polling underserved urban communities. During our recent interview here in Washington DC, she pointed out that he was making headway with his company before he stopped. The information was shedding light that could later politically empower those communities. Like me, she too could not figure out why Citizen Change closed down and Diddy of all people wasn't out and about during this historic election season. After all he's not touring or promoting an album. You don't think he could've made some noise at the very least selling Obama or Hillary shirts?

I've not been able to get an answer as to where and why he disappeared off the political landscape. Everytime I see him at a function his time to answer questions is limited and restricted. The recent stories that came out around his last album '**Press Play**' didn't address that issue except in one instance where he said he vaguely suggested that he was going to return.

The rumor mill and speculations have run the gauntlet with some asserting that he was running out of money and that Citizen Change was just another unnecessary added expense. Others have noted that he was extremely embarrassed by the assessment put upon him by media pundits who claimed he failed. Many have written Diddy off and said that he was never fully committed and that he simply got bored with politics and moved on. That would be an interesting turn of events considering that Diddy prior to the 2004 election had involved himself in the 2002 New York gubernatorial race where NY was set to have its first African American governor **Carl McCall**. Back then Diddy was all up on the radio and was pretty firm in saying that being politically involved was important not just for him but for his kids who he wanted to set an example for...

Still others have theorized that he may have been shut down by folks in power who didn't like him stirring things up and rocking the boat. Keep in mind he did find himself under federal

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investigation not too long after the investigation. His organization's non profit status came into question as he was accused of campaigning for Kerry.

What's interesting is that we never saw similar investigations launched to see just how non partisan many of those conservative evangelical churches were. Nor did we see investigations launched at some of the churches that came out in support of Bush when he took a stand against gay marriage. Am I the only one that remembers all those Black preachers who lined up and cheesed for the camera and said Bush was the man to get behind?

Say what you will, but I've always wondered if Diddy had been victim to backroom **Karl Rove**-like tactics where some holding considerable political power shut him down by bringing up un-publicized questionable behavior that he may have been attached to within the music business. Maybe there was a threat to bring this too light if he didn't chill on the political tip. And if by chance something insidious like that took place it would have more to do with his ability to "effectively" mobilize the masses and change the power dynamics. Folks who run things aren't always willing to sit back and let that happen without a fight. It certainly wouldn't be the first time things like this have happened.

In any case Diddy or no Diddy, 2008 will be an exciting year with hopefully a record number of young adults coming to the poll. People are obviously inspired by Obama and Clinton, but popular artists like **Timbaland**, **Lupe Fiasco**, **Common**, **Rhymefest** and others are publicly weighing in and sharing their opinions. We seen songs put out by local Bay Area artists like

Kev Choice

<http://www.myspace.com/kevchoice>

and

D"Labrie

www.myspace.com/dlabriemusic

praising Obama. They follow in the footsteps of

Rappin" 4Tay

who in 2004 put out a song for

Dennis Kucinich

. The recent online passionate public debate/spat between

Lupe (Clinton)

and

Rhymefest (Obama)

is an indication that politics is here to stay amongst the generation we once wrote off.