

Hip Hop Has Long Been Vocal About the War by Davey D

Written by Davey D ID3719

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Hip-hop has been vocal about the war by Davey D Special to the Mercury News

While debates raged in Congress recently about funding the war in Iraq, the Source Magazine, which has long been considered the bible of hip-hop, published an article asking why more rap artists haven't spoken out against the war. It also profiled Oakland rapper Boots Riley of the Coup and Mississippi rapper David Banner, because both have been vocal from Day One about their opposition to U.S. intervention in Iraq and assertions that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction.

Ironically, the Source article hit the newsstands at the same time as a Chicago Tribune column by Grammy-nominated rap superstar Twista, who took the president to task for his veto of an early bill that attached war funding to a timetable for withdrawal from Iraq. Twista urged fans to speak up and do whatever they could to bring the troops home.

"They didn't attack us, so why should we have to attack them?" he wrote. "Sometimes I don't know what to think."

I'm certain Twista was offended by the Source article, just as I was, because his position on the war was similar to that of countless hip-hop artists who have expressed vehement opposition and have taken action.

In the Bay Area, three anti-war hip-hop compilation albums have been released: Hard Knock Records' critically acclaimed "What About Us," which featured Zion I, Blackalicious, Michael Franti, the Frontline, Piper of Flipsyde, Rico Pabon and Hobo Junction, among others; "War (if it feels good do it!)," a compilation by Bay Area music veteran Billy Jam, which features sound montages skillfully mixed by the DJs of Mass Destruction and songs from Public Enemy, Mr. Lif and local artists Azeem and Aya de Leon; and "War Times - Reports From the Opposition," put out by Oakland's Freedom Fighter Music, hosted by political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal and featuring anti-war songs by local artists Goapele, Hanifah Walidah, Felonious and Red Guard and tracks by nationally known spoken-word artists Danny Hoch and Suheir Hammad. Many of the artists on "War Times" also organized and participated in anti-war rallies around the country.

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We would be remiss not to mention Bay Area rapper Paris' album "Sonic Jihad," which was probably the first disc addressing the events of Sept. 11, 2001, and the war in Iraq. Featured on this landmark LP were dead prez, Kam and Public Enemy. The album was accompanied by a 10-page essay and, later, a DVD breaking down the politics behind Sept. 11 and the war on terror. It sold more than 300,000 copies worldwide.

Also deserving a mention is San Francisco's Rappin' 4-Tay, who teamed with then-presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich to do the song "Weapons of Mass Distraction."

These examples represent just the tip of the iceberg. To date, more than 100 anti-war songs have been put out by hip-hop artists.

They range from Snoop Dogg's insightful "Brothers and Sisters" to Nas' Tears for Fears-inspired "Rule," Eminem's groundbreaking "Mosh," Rock and Roll Hall of Famer Mele-Mel's "Tha Bushes," Sage Francis's "Makeshift Patriot" and KRS's heartfelt track "Soldier." Even the Ying Yang Twins released an anti-war song, "We at War." These are just a few of many that stand out.

Former San Jose producer Fredwreck brought together some of the biggest acts on the West Coast, including Mack 10, WC, Dilated Peoples, Defari, Cypress Hill and Daz, to do two anti-war songs, "Down With Us" and "Dear Mr. President." Radio stations were afraid to touch these politically charged songs, even though they were available for free.

Lupe Fiasco, Jay-Z, Cypress Hill, Mobb Deep, Saul Williams, Wyclef Jean and Talib Kweli are also among those who have recorded, or were featured on, anti-war songs. We had all sorts of Hip Hop journalists and scholars ranging from author Kevin Powell to Professor Michael Eric Dyson to activist /author Adrienne Marie Brown formerly of the League of Pissed off Voters who have been vocal in their writings about the wrongness of the War. People should not forget that KRS-One held a well attended anti-war/9-11 conference in LA to mark the one year anniversary of 9-11. The event included artists like MC Lyte and Kool Moe Dee to name a few. This is just a short list of Hip Hoppers who have

Lastly we have several under-reported stories where Hip Hop stood up against the War. The first involved P-Diddy who several months before he launched his Citizen for Change/Vote or

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Die campaign in February of 2004, astonished a large crowd in Los Angeles attending the Rock the Vote/Lippert Awards. Diddy upon receiving an award gave a 7 minute speech in which he pledged to "Kick George Bush's ass out of office". He apologized to the event organizers who were supposed to be non-partisan and then he repeated his remarks. He went on to note that Bush needed to go because of the immeasurable pain he had caused countless inner city mothers who's sons and daughters had died in an "illegal war". Hearing Diddy go off on the political tip was dope and at the time a welcome breath of fresh air. In spite of the throngs of media present including MTV and the LA Times, Diddy's explosive anti-war remarks were hardly reported. It took me several weeks before I finally was able to obtain a copy of his remarks and at the time I sat on the advisory board for RTV.

Hip Hop mogul Russell Simmons was much more blunt and explosive with his remarks directed toward Senator Hillary Clinton shortly after the start of the Iraq War. He along with Big Daddy Kane and Killer Priest appeared on our syndicated Hard Knock Radio show where all three spoke out forcefully against the war. Simmons put Clinton on full blast, accusing her of selling out and being untrustworthy. He remarked how he given all sorts of money to help get her elected and was angry that she would support the war which he felt was wrong. Simmons was also clear about expressing his concern for the number of poor people who were likely to wind up on the front lines dying.

Just recently, we had Washington DC based Hip Hop Caucus do a two month Make Hip Hop not War tour in over ten cities and colleges campuses throughout the US. Reverend Yearwood who headed up the tour wanted to make sure that Hip Hop had a stronger presence in the anti-war movement. Artists ranging from Akir to Immortal Technique to Hasan Salaam to Mystic to DJ Chela who did an anti-war mixtape called "Embedded Reporter" all partook.

As I mentioned earlier, all this is just the tip of the Iceberg, so let it never be said hip-hop has been silent about the war. We need to ask why we haven't heard more of these voices in the mainstream. If there's anyone that's been silent and complicit, it's been those big time broadcast, newspaper and television owners and programmers who went along with Bush's war agenda in the face of overwhelming evidence suggesting we go in another direction.