

BIRTH OF A HIP HOP PRESIDENTIAL RACE Greens" Candidates Run to Be About It by MARK FITZGERALD ARMSTRONG Fly Paper Political Correspondent. A Fly Paper EXCLUSIVE

In the land where Abe Lincoln launched his presidential campaign bid, reputedly at Mary Todd's pot-and-fire-iron-hurdling prodding, the U.S. Green Party's politicking for the White House promises bountiful trailblazing from a hip-hop and heartland perspective.

Of four Green Party candidates appearing on the Feb. 5 Illinois primary ballot, two would actually qualify as "hip-hop candidates" only a decade after a Vibe piece introduced the term to label two of the then promising new hopefuls destined for U.S. House of Representatives, the Rev. Jesse Jackson Jr. of Illinois and Harold Ford Jr. of Tennessee. Both highly educated black Democrats, with relatively urban backgrounds, from families identified with ultra-liberal civil rights activism, and falling into the eternal Hip-Hop Generation age range of 13-35, hardly emitted even a sliver of empathy for a hip-hop electorate and whatever issues it claimed back.

Jackson joined Illinois' congressional delegation in 1995 after his immediate successor Mel Reynolds was convicted on charges of sexual relations with fickle jailbait and after the senior Jesse Jackson reportedly called in a gang of favors from black Chicagoland politicians. Ford was campaigning a year later between University of Michigan Law School studies to fill his father's congressional seat. The younger Ford's active presence in the Democratic Leadership Council and as a Blue Dog Democrat laid the groundwork for a "compassionate conservatism" that has not stood the test of believable doublespeak after that policy passed from Clinton's everyman pandering to the younger George Bush's boorish elitism.

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The Greens' lead hip-hop male Jared Ball is a Maryland-based journalism Ph.D., Radio Pacifica commentator, hip-hop journal editor, avowed hip-hop scholar, and communications professor at Morgan State University who favors statehood for Washington, D.C., and is enjoying generous stumping with campaign co-manager, rapper and D.C.-originating rapper Head-Roc. Among the national Green Party's big-ticket fund-raising paraphernalia is a politically charged Head-Roc LP album.

Hip-hopheads have admired Georgia-based Cynthia McKinney back to when she was an against-the-grain black Democrat in the U.S. House of Representatives. Losing her congressional seat in 2006's primary elections has apparently not dulled her aversion to going along with questionable policy for the sake of getting along office-holding colleagues who've turned averting eyes and ears to the voters' weariness with continued funding of an inconclusive Middle Eastern war, as U.S. jobs traveling overseas with that sucking sound Ross Perot warned of a decade ago, as Canadians and Europeans raid U.S. retailers for ultra-bargain-basement deals the way Americans used to raid Mexico retailers for the same, as housing foreclosures and bankruptcies reached near-Great Depression levels, and as the states are forced to find blood in turnips for federal mandates, such as No Child Left Behind. McKinney can also rely on her reputation as the only member of the Black Congressional Caucus to speak up for hip-hop and its efforts to organize politically.

"Hip-hop, being a multi-million-dollar industry, has not eradicated any kind of poverty," Ball says in calm revolve via phone as the clock ticks away toward his next campaign appearance in the Southeastern Seaboard. "Only a handful of people can become successful in any field. In any case, people are forced to practice their [hip-hop] craft after work hours. People have to enjoy anything after their normal work hours, such as health care. Or they have to work extra hours for it or take [unpaid] time from work for it.

"If any of these things are going to change, we're going to need a party to change it. Hip-hop is

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only set up to allow only a handful to reap the benefits, and we're saying that's not acceptable. So if my man Head-Roc can't use his craft to sustain his family, we need something else."

Both Ball and McKinney are pursuing 800 presidential-nominating delegate votes from the '08 National Green Party Convention meeting Jul. 10-13 at the Chicago Theater, a 1920s beaux-arts movie palace in downtown's Central Loop turned concert venue, where Maxwell Street native Bennie Goodman once played a major breakthrough swing gig (the larger field of declared Greens candidates includes veteran Ivy League ultra-liberal maverick Ralph Nader and womanist and former Black Panther leader Elaine Brown). The Greens' '08 national convention headquarters will be at the newly restored 1908-built classic French beaux-arts luxury palace in the South Loop, the Blackstone Hotel, only a block south of the '68 Democratic National Convention headquarters, the Chicago Hilton & Towers, which was known as the Conrad Hilton Hotel 40 years ago.

The Blackstone was also where Ohioan newspaper publisher Warren Harding won the Republican Party's nomination for president in 1920. In spite of his scandal-plagued administration, Harding, who replaced a pompously Jim Crowish Woodrow Wilson, goes down in history as the first U.S. president to speak out against racism on Southern soil.

Unlike Illinois' Democratic and Republican primaries, the Greens' primary determines on the back end how committed delegates are divvied up among contenders for the National Green Party's presidential nomination. Official results from the Illinois primary will be used to proportionately assign delegate blocs, says U.S. Green Party co-chair Phil Huckelberry. Lists of committed delegates Greens' '08 national convention, compiled by each candidate, are approved at state conventions, where Illinois Greens will also slate the state party's presidential electors for the Nov. 4 general election.

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Anyone who casts a vote for a Democratic or Republican presidential candidate in an Illinois primary acknowledges preference for that candidate and also elects their committed delegates to a national party convention. The Illinois Greens' '08 state convention will be March 28-30 in Peoria. Huckelberry also says that unlike the national Democratic and Republican conventions, the National Green Party Convention does not recognize "superdelegates," or party members who automatically get to vote on the party's presidential and vice presidential nominations and platform because they are party officers or party members holding elected or appointed public office.

Greens will not appear on the May 6 primary ballot in neighboring Indiana. The party's Iowa City-based national secretary Holly Hart reports that the Iowa Greens are looking at "unofficial" precinct caucuses in February or March that would include mail-in ballots in lieu of taking a straw vote during the Jan. 3 Democratic and Republican Iowa precinct caucuses. The Greens also will not field candidates for the nation's first presidential primary on Jan. 8 because New Hampshire lacks an active state Greens organization.

The Greens' '08 nominating and platform gathering will also occur during the fifth official observance of Chicago Hip-Hop Heritage Month—established by a fragile coalition of machine Democrats, anti-machine Democrats, and independents—and around the 40th anniversary of the thoroughly tumultuous 1968 Democratic National Convention.

Compare on the Democratic side of the campaign aisle with tail-end baby boomer Barack Obama, for whom the Illinois General Assembly moved the '08 state primary moved up from the third Tuesday in March. Obama' overachieving pounding on the Lincoln trail to the White House as an Illinois state senator turned U.S. senator is sobered by his spaceward cross-examination for Vibe's reputed first political cover and after complaining at times about the free-spirited nature of pop culture in media, including buttocks-shaking music videos.

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The junior Jackson, who's very publicly called his Old Guard civil rights activist father out for backing the Missus Clinton over Obama, cavalierly advised a '96 press conference of primarily black media, during an MTV Rap the Vote rally at George's Music Room in the West Side's K-Town neighborhood, that hip-hop's rappers and producers best needed to organize themselves against then Sen. Carol Moseley-Braun's witch hunts on rap's ribald, pessimistic, and misanthropic candor. Ohio's very respectably maverick and vegan U.S. Rep. Dennis Kucinich is the only Democrat on the Feb. 5 Illinois primary ballot who's actively reached out to a hip-hop electorate in his presidential campaigns long before Obama hit U.S. politics' national radar.

A paltry few paid attention to Obama's female contender Hillary Clinton, a native of Chicago's gilded Northwest Suburbs and a former presidential partner, when she condemned hip-hop during the 1996 Democratic National Convention meeting at United Center on the gentrified Near West Side as "a certain youth culture that believes in drinking and smoking and that symbols and emblems on one's sweater and jacket is more important than peoples' lives." That particular utterance occurred as the Missus Clinton praised then vice presidential partner Tipper Gore for leading the charge toward urban music witch hunts through the Parents Music Resource Center, and only across the street from where FDR's multiple nominations instilled hope in the World's Greatest Generation from the Depression to the winding down of a second world war.

Back in summer '96, hip-hop parties and BS'ed through those cynical developments toward a lame duck term of Clintonesque center-right politics from the Oval Office—attending an abortive MTV-sponsored concert headlined by Digable Planets remnants at the former Red Dog nightclub in Wicker Park on the Northwest Side, fawning over the likes of Common and Crucial Conflict for an MTV Rap the Vote rally, and bum-rushing alongside well-over-40 White staffers an MTV bash at the North Loop's Hard Rock Café, attended briefly by a then underage Chelsea Clinton. No widespread notoriety went to the Young Democrat delegates who called out their patronizing older adult colleagues and their ineffectual soggy youth-demonizing platform planks, or to writer Luis Rodriguez's organizing of a youth convention that adopted a very crunchy more realistic youth platform, or to young female organizers from Washington State enthralled with learning that the Native American equivalent of Public Enemy (Arizona-based Without Rezervations) existed, or to a 28-year-old Oklahoma alternative to the convention who questioned aloud if the rubber-stamping Democratic hoopla was going to make a meaningful

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and progressive difference for the nation.

As with a decade ago, and even 40th years ago, an imperial Daley mayoralty survives despite infamously rampant administrative corruption now including the mayor's Army enlisted Iraq-bound son, a virtually rubberstamp City Council, and police brutality, and opposition at least one Jackson, or two. Of the "two" is Jackson's wife, first-term Chicago Ald. Sandi Jackson, a Howard Dean Democrat who's challenging Daley stalwart William Beavers for his 7th Ward Democratic committeeman post in the Illinois primary.

Her husband's outspoken resistance to "plantation politics" and Obama's impassioned freedom-fighting does not extend to opposing the south suburban stranglehold Thornton Township Supervisor Frank Zuccarelli maintains as township Democratic committeeman, president of the South Suburban College board of trustees, and head of a "side-party" political organization dedicated to keeping him in power called the Z Team. Zuccarelli also holds what one budget-cut casualty described as a ghost pay-rolling supervisory job on the office of Cook County Recorder of Deeds Eugene Moore, who's seeking Democratic re-nomination to his county job in the Illinois primary.

Those portions of the West Side and the Southeast Side scared by social unrest touched off by Dr. King's assassination in April '68 have gentrified to the point that white flight is in reverse, with deportations of those who once inhabited the Chicago Housing Authority's now dismantled high-rise projects to remote, isolated, underdeveloped suburban acres underserved by readily accessible public transportation and expensively priced on utilities. Grant Park, only across Michigan Avenue from the '68 Democratic National Convention headquarters and the '08 National Green Party Convention headquarters, is as manicured as it was nearly 40 years ago when protesters and innocent bystanders turning out from the theaters fled there from the cop-induced clubbing that Richard J. Daley ordered.

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The Chicago Coliseum that once stood in the Prairie Avenue District mansion belt of the Near South Side, which would have rivaled the International Amphitheater as a pop music concert venue back in '68, has been replaced with a condo canyon. William Howard Taft won the president nomination there at the 1908 Republican National Convention. That event launched a presidency that actively promoted self-determination for the U.S.-held Philippines once nominated by Spain, and Taft referred to native Filipinos as "our little brown brothers."

It doesn't yet appear that anyone during the Greens' '08 convention is going to re-enact the Youth International Party's nomination nearly 40 years ago of a pig for president. The youthful, or relatively youthful, dissenters are now an integral part of the political process.

As Chuck D noted back in '96, between a gauntlet of interruptions from celebrity chasers at the George's rally, hip-hop needs its folk at all levels of the political process. And with the Greens' Illinois primary and '08 national convention, the trademark smoke-filled rooms of Chicago's grassroots political organizing, now engaging hip-hop, is well on its way to rebirth in a town that was the most frequent site of national political party conventions in the last American century. For the Greens, as Ball notes in illustrating his perception of Obama's and Clinton's hypocritical photo-moment embrace of urban pop culture, hip-hop isn't merely a means to an end.

"Hip-hop has to be ready to make powerful choices and changes, like it always has," Ball says. "We have to have a wider array of discussion and debate, and there's no reason that hip-hop can't do that. Obama and Clinton are just using hip-hop to make connections for what they have no connections to. We aren't just using hip-hop. We are hip-hop."

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The National Green Party Convention is among five national '08 slating and platform adopting gatherings meeting in the Midwest. The Democratic National and Libertarian national conventions will meet in Denver, and the Republican National Convention will meet in St. Paul-Minneapolis (events for the GOP gathering is split between the two Minnesota cities).

RELATED LINKS TO CHECK OUT

- Jared Ball for President, www.jaredball.com
- Cynthia McKinney for President, www.runcynthiarun.org
- U.S. Green Party, www.gp.org
- Illinois Green Party, www.ilgp.org
- Indiana Green Party, www.indianagreenparty.org
- Wisconsin Green Party, www.wisconsingreenparty.org
- Iowa Green Party, www.greens.org/iowa
- Illinois State Board of Elections, www.elections.il.gov

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- Chicago Board of Election Commissioners, www.chicagoelections.com
- Cook County Clerk' Office – Election Division, www.voterinfonet.com
- Federal Election Commission, www.fec.gov
- Illinois Election Code, <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs3.asp?ActID=170&ChapAct=10%26nbsp%3BILCS%26nbsp%3B5%2F&ChapterID=3&ChapterName=ELECTIONS&ActName=Election+Code>