

Hip Hop Community Sees Backlash in Kilpatrick Indictment

Written by Bruno Gaston ID4255
Monday, 31 March 2008 23:59 -

Major players in the hip-hop community are discussing how the possible conviction on felony charges against the man branded as the "Hip-Hop Mayor" will affect the image of the hip-hop community.

Detroit Mayor, Kwame Kilpatrick held hip-hop political rallies during his mayoral campaign and has been lauded for his proclamation that every year the third week in May be recognized as Hip-Hop Appreciation Week. Davey D, a hip-hop journalist, activist and host of KPFA-FM's Hard Knock Radio, thinks if Kilpatrick is convicted it will fuel a continuing negative perception of the hip-hop culture. "The hip-hop community is already being smeared," he said. "He's not a rapper, but he comes from that generation. This tarnishes both aspiring and current politicians from the same generation."

Kilpatrick and his former chief of staff, Christine Beatty, pleaded not guilty to charges of perjury, conspiracy, obstruction of justice and misconduct in office. The two are accused of using taxpayer money to cover up an affair and denied it under oath, after two Detroit police officers, who were fired for overtime fraud, filed suit against the city. The city paid more than \$9 million for legal defense and settlements to the police officers. Text messages Kilpatrick and Beatty exchanged contradicted their testimony in the whistleblower case and are the basis for the new charges against the two. Beatty and Kilpatrick will be paying for their own defense in the new trial.

Kilpatrick was seen as a major political step forward for many hip-hoppers when he was elected the city's youngest mayor in 2002. He participated in the 2004 Boston Hip-Hop Summit headed by Def Jam co-founder, Russell Simmons's Hip-Hop Summit Action Network. Simmons is said to have given Kilpatrick his hip-hop moniker.

"I don't know that it impacts hip-hop any worse than we are already impacted. It's just bad that he failed to live up to his obligations," said NYOil, a Staten Island-based rapper. "It would have been incredible if he did a wonderful job as the "Hip Hop Mayor". Fact is he was a Crooked Mayor."

Not everyone agrees. Tuesday, 60 ministers convened at Corinthian Baptist Church in Hamtramck to show their support for the mayor. The Detroit Free Press reported that a group of women turned out Wednesday in support of Kilpatrick's NEXT Detroit effort to revitalize

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neighborhoods, but critics say the city government helped organize the meeting.

Professor Griff of Public Enemy thinks hip-hop is being targeted again. "Knowing the history of this country's dealings with black leaders, they have to destroy him," he said. "For him to be labeled as the hip-hop mayor brings in an entire new frequency, energy and vibration because it resonates with young people."

Kilpatrick faces up to 90 years in prison if he is convicted of all charges. That could deepen the challenges facing rappers, journalists and activists who contend that hip-hop culture is not the source of his troubles. "At the end of the day, he will never receive the same treatment as his white counterparts," Davey D said, pointing out that the media have depicted Sen. Obama and Rev. Jeremiah Wright "in a bad light" and has pretty much forgotten about former N.Y. Gov. Eliot Spitzer because of what the current New York governor is talking about now.

New York Governor, David Paterson admitted to having extramarital affairs prior to taking the oath of office. A report in the Albany Times Union accused Paterson of using state funds for the affair. Errol Cockfield, a Paterson spokesman, denied the report was true.

"Even Bill Clinton's "brilliance" is still allowed to be considered despite his critics on the Monica Lewinsky scandal. Bill's behavior was much more damaging and disturbing then any of the aforementioned Black men under scrutiny right now,"

Davey D said. The hip-hop community seems to be re-examining itself over recent years. While record sales are declining, hip-hop was blamed for the "Nappy Headed Hos" comment by radio talk show host Don Imus, who was fired by CBS Radio and MSNBC only to return to the airwaves eight months later without his MSNBC simulcast. Imus claimed he was just echoing language he heard from rappers. As a result, national townhall meetings entitled, "Does Hip Hop Hate Women?" and headed by Bakari Kitwana of Rap Sessions, are being held in several colleges and universities to facilitate dialogue on key issues in the hip-hop community.

A racist tirade from Seinfeld actor, Michael Richards in 2006 at a Hollywood comedy club raised questions about the use of the N-word and prompted rapper Chamillionaire. to stop using the term in his music. But prior to both incidents NYOil unleashed one of the most aggressive responses to the industry in with the song, Y'all Should All Get Lynched, referring to those he

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felt responsible for causing the damaging effects of negative hip-hop.

"We are being pigeonholed into a terrible stereotype that is limiting and crippling our ability to be taken serious as a culture and generation of people," NYOil said. "It won't be until we define and determine our own images that we can be elevated beyond these mischaracterizations. But then hasn't that always been the need?"

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