Hip-Hop Vote Campaigns Did Work

Written by Robert ID1463
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The hip-hop and rap artists who pushed for getting out the vote, did help in the last election according to a report released yesterday.

The US Census Bureau released a report yesterday verifying a significant increase in Black voter turnout in 2004, especially among Black youth who cast more votes than ever before.

According to the Census report, turnout rates for Blacks overall were 60 percent, compared to 65 percent for Whites. While the increase in turnout over the last Presidential Election for Black youth between the ages of 18 and 24 was higher than that of White youth, Black and White youth are voting at essentially the same rate (47 percent). Asian and Hispanic youth trail far behind at about 34 percent.

The National Coalition on Black Civic Participation's (NCBCP) Unity '04 Voter Empowerment Campaign (Unity '04) had a major impact on Black voter turnout by bringing together over 160 organizations determined to increase participation and create a movement reminiscent to that of the civil rights era says Melanie L. Campbell, executive director and CEO of the NCBCP.

"I'm glad the Census report officially validates our earlier findings. Clearly, a 10.1 percent increase in the Black youth vote demonstrates a growing trend among Blacks that will have a major impact on the political landscape in America," said Campbell.

Mobilizing the youth was a major focus of the Unity '04 Campaign. "We needed a major youth initiative," said ShaRhonda Knott, co-chair of Black Youth Vote! (BYV), the youth-led division of the NCBCP.

BYV! joined with organizations like Black Entertainment Television (BET), Citizen Change's VOTE or DIE Campaign, and the National Pan Hellenic Council (comprised of nine fraternities and sororities) to educate, register, and mobilize Black Youth.

According to numbers reported from member organizations the Unity "04 Campaign collectively

registered nearly one million new voters and mobilized thousands of people across the country, many of them were between 18 and 35 years old.

The youth are not only voting, but continuing their organizing efforts beyond the ballot box, Knott said. "We're determined to hold elected officials accountable. We are keeping an eye on how they handle issues like social security reform because we realize that what they do now will affect our future, " adds the Chicago college student.

Knott noted the recent BYV! Civic Leadership Conference, where over 200 youth from across the country assembled for a briefing at the US Capitol and dispersed to visit their respective congressional representatives to talk about issues important to their community.

Other coalition partners continuing to turn the youth energy into political clout include GA Coalition for the Peoples' Agenda, the Tom Joyner Morning Show and 100 Black Men of America. In July the National Urban League Young Professionals will sponsor   "The Training Ground: A Next Generation Leadership Institute," bringing together young business, social and community leaders for political workshops focused on developing an agenda for young professionals to learn how to gain influence in the political process.

"The Unity '04 coalition came together early to organize at a level that we hadn"t had since the 60's," said Dr. Ronald Walters, NCBCP board member and architect of the Unity Strategy. "While our member organizations and corporations like BET and UniverSoul Circus cushioned the burden, Unity '04 operated with a barebones budget," he adds.

The organization is already organizing for Unity '06 focusing early on raising money from within the community. "We'll emerge in 2006 with more member organizations, more money, more turnout, and more power," Walters adds.

The NCBCP is a 501 (C) 3 nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to increasing Black civic participation in civil society. For more information or to make a donation visit www.bigvote .org   .