

Identifying the True Purpose of Hip Hop Culture

Written by Ashahed M. Muhammad ID4205

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Identifying the true purpose of hip hop culture; Is it a tool for social, political and economic empowerment or social decay? By Ashahed M. Muhammad Assistant Editor of the Final Call.

An enthusiastic crowd braved cold weather and snowstorms to participate in a “hip hop empowerment” panel discussion asking the provocative question: “Is hip hop a champion for social, political and economic empowerment or a tool of social decay?”

Legendary hip hop icon Darryl “DMC” McDaniels, of the pioneering hip hop group RunDMC, told the crowd that what they see on television in music videos is “show business” and not a true reflection of what hip hop represents. As part of one of the most influential rap tandems ever, DMC’s words found a receptive audience, and carried some weight.

“The whole purpose of hip hop is to inspire, to motivate and to educate. It is the transfer of information whether you are in the ghetto or Beverly Hills. Hip hop is about the life we live—especially for Black people,” DMC said. “Hip hop was created to make it known that we as a people are in charge of our purpose and our destiny. The true purpose of hip hop was not just to create rappers,” he added.

The 16th Annual WVON Pre-Kwanzaa celebration on Dec. 15th and 16th at the South Shore Cultural Center brought together creative and influential minds from within the hip hop cultural community in Chicago with like-minded artists from the south, and east coast, demonstrating that there is no rivalry when enlightened minds come together for a common cause.

TJ Crawford, founder and executive producer of the MPR Report, a radio talk show airing weekly on WVON 1690 AM, said though the “hip hop” demographic was targeted, anyone interested in working to find collective solutions to the problems that plague our communities was welcome.

“It’s beyond just hip hop, it’s beyond just a generation,” said Mr. Crawford, who was responsible for bringing the artists together Dec. 15. “This is about people who want better for their people and recognize the power that is in the music. People who move in that same type of spirit are trying to see who they can connect with to take it to that next level,” said Mr. Crawford.

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The crowd shopped for books, arts, crafts, African cultural clothing and enjoyed African dance and drumming classes held throughout the two-day cultural exhibition. Panels and workshops were designed for the youth to hear words of wisdom from hip hop legends, spoken word artists, radio personalities and Black scholars.

Rap scholar Professor Griff's presentation, "The Psychological War on Hip Hop" was so popular and information-packed that he was asked to return the next day to deliver a part two. He challenged rappers who shy away from telling the truth for fear of persecution or material loss. He also dealt with the subliminal messages that are in many of the most popular songs.

"We have a duty and responsibility to our people," said Professor Griff. "Some of these rappers are just straight up crazy! They need a hip hop detox and some hip-hop therapy! Some of this toxic hip hop is our enemy." he added.

"The Last Poets said n----s are scared of revolution! Minister Farrakhan said a White man's heaven is a Black man's hell! The Last Poets said, blessed are those that struggle, oppression is worse than the grave, it's better to live for a noble cause than to live and die a slave," Professor Griff said to the enthusiastic cheers of the crowd. "Somebody has to pay the price for your bling-bling. You need to define your necessity," he added.

Michael "Killer Mike" Render made the trip up from Atlanta to share words of empowerment with youth. He encouraged the crowd to take control of hip hop in all available ways, lyrically, culturally and on the business end. "We can and we must do for self because nobody else is going to do it for us. Black people are always open to positivity and marrying that with jamming music is the trick. We just have to get back to doing it with good music," he said.

After the panel, an all ages concert was held, hosted by Mr. Crawford and his MRP Report co-host, Dr. Chandra Gill.

While the snow fell heavily outside, rapper DA Smart accompanied by his manager and founder of Hip-Hop Detoxx, Enoch Muhammad performed a medley of revolutionary lyrical gems that brought the crowd to its feet injecting a positive charge into the atmosphere.

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Andres “Dres” Titus, of Black Sheep, took the audience back to the early 1990s when he performed the classic hit “Flavor of the Month.”

Though many of those present were very young or perhaps not even born when the song was a hit, they found themselves swaying to the groove. Enough fans were present and familiar with the song to recite the lyrics and Dres seemed to enjoy it. Spoken word artist and composer Malik Yusef also shared some thoughtful and creative words of power performing and interacting with the crowd.

“The people came out sat and listened,” said Chicago native Che “Rhymefest” Smith. “It was packed because the people are ready for change.”

Many hip hop artists are coming out of their “fear” of being different and making changes in their lyrical content, he added. “Fear is nothing but a false emotion that appears to be real and when you know that it is a false emotion, you won’t succumb to it,” Rhymefest said.

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