

Support Elect Hip-Hop Leaders

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It's Time To Support and Elect Hip-Hop Leaders

By SLAV KANDYBA

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Nasir Jones for president. No, this is not a joke, a pat-on-the-back salute to the Queensbridge poet. It's a direct statement without any hidden connotations. It is the final step up a ladder that he – as well as other conscious hip-hop artists – should start steppin' up. Now is the time to act, not sit back.

I would vote for Nas and I am willing to bet so would millions of people in New York City, where he is still a resident (according to interviews in magazines). In his 30s, the Street's Disciple is known to many as more than just an emcee. Nasty Nas is an intellectual, a conscious mind, a Colin Powell with integrity that manifests itself exactly where it should – in the product he puts out, his song lyrics. Listen to "Black Zombie" couple of times, you'll catch what I'm implying.

It is time that hip-hop heads across the nation recognize that one of their own must be elevated to a position in power. True leaders never ask to be leaders – the people chose them, in my opinion. At least that's how democracy is supposed to work in theory. In America, democracy is alive and well, but it is not working for the hip-hop generation because the generation as a collective has not been able to awaken and realize that slowly but surely it can amass power.

The first step, I believe, is to identify the leadership and here a major distinction, or rather, specialization, must be made. Bankrollers, or the investors in the revolution, must be marked as such (see: P. Diddy, Russell Simmons, Jay-Z, in no particular order). Thinkers should be handled the reigns of power. That is, the ability to legislate and create and modify laws and given the ability to appoint their help.

Because I'm a realist, I do not advocate overthrowing the U.S. government to make this

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happen. Simply, I believe that hip-hop's leaders need to feel support from the public, first. Second, it is incumbent upon them to listen to the public (and media, of course) in making the decision to run for public office.

And any public office will do for starters. The U.S. Congress and other legislative bodies follow seniority rules; these rules are rigid and are probably as ancient as mankind itself. The essential assumption they all contain is that experience is unequivocally the main factor in deciding whom to entrust power. The more direct experience, the better. There are exceptions of course, but they should not become the norm. We've seen what happens when high school ballers turn pro, get signed and get dumped from NBA rosters in time for next year's draft.

It is always a good idea to start small. This implies that someone like Nas is probably best suited to run for a spot on the education board or city council of his hometown. After having put in work on the local level, he could perhaps go to the state government – and finally, the federal. Of course, along the way, he must find support and that is the biggest challenge when hip-hop culture in the mainstream is as individualistic as it gets.

Clearly, individualism doesn't work. That's not to say capitalism doesn't. The fact is that an extreme form of anything doesn't work for a long time. The capitalism pendulum in this country has swung too far to the right, meaning it has been accepted practice to worry about "yourself" and sometimes your "loved ones." It's not exactly encouraged to care about other people, whether they are your peers at work, the street bum or anyone else. We've become a culture of "me" and that simply won't get us through.

2004 is almost over and as we head into 2005, I hope the hip-hop generation moves forward, not backward or sideways. It is clear to me that responsible thinkers, artists, fans, and everyone else at large, must select their leaders and persuade them to seek public office.