

Hip Hop Artists Need to Become Politicized

Written by Omowale Adewale ID3283

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Hip-Hop Fridays: RIAA Drama - Artists Must Act Now by Omowale Adewale

Artists need to become politicized within the music industry. Not because organizers say so speak about community issues, or because it's the right thing to do. The reality is, if you're truly a "boss" as Slim Thug maintains he is or a "king" or "president of Hip-Hop" as Nas and Jay-Z respectively claim then at least stop permitting former slave masters to break you off crumbs and utilize you like sheep. Run the music business not just a business within the music industry. The reports of DJ Drama and employees of Gangsta Grillz being raided in Atlanta, Ga on Tuesday, January 16, 2007 by SWAT, FBI, and apparently the RIAA for bootlegging mixtapes was a clear message to Hip-Hop. The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) said blatantly, we run Hip-Hop and any music genre, whether considered black music or not.

Hip-Hop has been maneuvering their own independent companies for a long while within the music industry. However, there has been either a lack organization or a wealth of fear that has left Hip-Hop entrepreneurs, particularly black businessmen unable to distribute or manufacture in the tier that the "big 5" has managed. The term "big 5" comes from the oligopoly of music groups (not major labels) Universal, Sony, BMG, EMI, and Warner. Each one is a branch of a conglomerate. Conglomerates are corporations with a variety of different interests in various unrelated industries. In this instance, music and to a lesser extent media is the main focus.

Each of the big 5's headquarters is strategically placed in one of the "G8" nations, which is a group of 8 governments that make international decisions for the world. Three of the "big 5" are located in nations which are permanent members of the Security Council, which are France, Great Britain, and the U.S. The Security Council essentially controls the United Nations. Only five nations make up the Security Council.

It is important to understand this international paradigm to recognize, that although consolidation is important to the RIAA, domination is foremost and is created in a web-like process, in strategic locations. For instance, EMI's position is significant, as it speaks for Great Britain or the UK. When Polygram's music group was bought by Universal which is headquartered France, it was all right with the former "big 6" because BMG was there in Germany, and no longer needed Polygram's positioning. True indeed, dead prez was right all along "it's bigger than Hip-Hop" and DJ Drama for that matter.

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So, why raid DJ Drama? DJ Drama has been one of RIAA's important associates for a long while. Most of DJ Drama's music on Gangsta Grillz albums are exclusives with a couple of songs on the artists' album that are always available for legal promotion. If anyone is in trouble, it's the artists who come without the record company holding their hand. The record labels of the music groups pay DJ Drama to promote their artists. Rarely does the artist have that kind of money. The music group contacts DJ Drama, not so much the artists. DJ Drama charges a grip, a gwop. You're talking \$50K into the six figures. DJ Drama has been upfront about his motives and ambitions in the game as he professes "...I'm about to own Hip-Hop" on one of his collaborations." In the words of the Shogun Assassin's storyteller (ask GZA), "maybe that was the problem".

The RIAA wants total domination and the money that comes with it. Capitalism is about increasing profits annually. If the sales aren't doing well, they don't want an apology, they want to retribution from whomever they believe is responsible even if its their fault.

For them to go after their former helpful aid, DJ Drama probably began venturing into off-limit territory. He might have been looking to create a label or music group that excluded the RIAA or maybe rejected being an official member of their team. DJ Drama has the connections to change the game like some of the other mixtape organizers, such as DJ Whoo Kid who has an organization of DJ's. Drama's potential power was real and it was an obvious threat. Starting with southern DJ's was definitely the RIAA's order of the day through tactical planning. The Hip-Hop in the south has been an entity onto itself and has managed to force music groups and their labels to come to them. It worked for Master P and Cash Money. This wasn't just about DJ Drama, the south has been able to function without mainstream promotion and do quite well by their own standards.

Artists, especially emcees of Hip-Hop should be the main opposition to that strategy. Artists in Hip-Hop are the most rebellious force in music. I will not name the names, but artists are most times not permitted by contract to work without the permission of their record companies, yet they do. Hip-Hop artists are religiously rejecting that system of sharecropping and working with everyone to make money in the midst of having their albums pushed back. If DJ Drama is found guilty, it's the beginning of the end for recording in contract artists, specifically those under the big 5. Artists should envision their future going from jail to solitary confinement in prison. DJ Drama represents artists to a high level of degree, artists should represent him too, which includes watching what artists say to the authorities. DJ Drama is innocent (I'm not a journalist, so I can say that). However, the black community knows how the police can be extremely manipulative to arrive at a conviction.

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For the public, which also includes artists, I appeal to you in the strongest way possible. Please do not merely just demand "FREE DRAMA! FREE CANNON!" If they are freed, it's not like the RIAA will give up. I mean, seriously, they came in with dozens of armed men and attack dogs. They'll be back in Hip-Hop. Demand from legislators that artists have union rights. The International Artists Union (IAU) of the Grassroots Artists MovEment (G.A.ME) for several years has been researching the methods of the RIAA, interviewing artists, meeting with congressmen and artist unions and non-artist unions. The Artist Freedom Act (AFA) influenced by Hip-Hop's rebelliousness demands that artists receive collective bargaining rights under the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) and that the specific media and music exploitation aimed dually at Hip-Hop and the black community be acknowledged. Right now, artists are considered independent contractors and not employees. In simple terms employees are told what to do and how to do it. Independent contractors are told what to do, but not how to do it. There are several artists admitting on albums and industry insiders that have said artists are told to alter their art to extreme degrees. Dame Dash publicly stated that Hot97 and MTV dictated what they dictated in the studio.

If artists have collective bargaining rights so will anyone they choose to work with. Artists would be placed on equal footing with the Universal or Warner. If artists have rights, they can exercise their creative rights to speak up for the community and not for their bosses owning their masters. If artists have rights, that means a change of what goes on in the music videos and on radio. In reality, it's good justice for any employee or artist to have these rights. In reality, collective bargaining through unions is good justice for any artist. Artists are supposed to have healthcare, artists should not be confined to a record label for an indefinite amount of years, and artists should not be forced to choose whether to make money and disrespect his/her community or be broke but, full of integrity. It's the right thing to do. If Hip-Hop is going to change, it must begin with changing the current situation of artists.

G.A.ME is meeting publicly February 13, 2007 at 7:00pm at Hunter College to discuss moving forward with the Artist Freedom Campaign (AFC). Contact Terry at icebergsift@gmail.com regarding work with this campaign.

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Visit www.kickgame.com the website of The Grassroots Artists MovEment (G.A.ME)