

The Thoughts of Dead Prez

Written by Ytzhak ID663

Wednesday, 05 January 2005 23:53 -

Public Enemy and X-Clan are often the groups Dead Prez is lumped into a category with. They're classified as a political rappers; activist rappers and alternative rappers. However if the time be taken out one will find that these brothers are not just performing, playing a role or creating or recreating a particular form/genre of rap. Dead Prez have incorporated their politically charged lyrics into their daily works. M1 aka Mutulu Olubala is president of The National People's Democratic Uhuru Movement (NYC branch), a grassroots organization that defends the democratic rights of Africans. M1 as president works with NPDUM to organize clothing drives, community dinners, mass rallies, and political education classes in his community daily. Stic aka Khnum Olubala trains/studies Ile-Ijala (Home of the Spiritual Warrior), an African system of martial arts, in addition to organizing daily in his community.

I had the opportunity to build with Dead Prez on current conditions of Africans in Amerikkka and revolution. Dead Prez and their thoughts on revolution, it's bigger than Hip-Hop...

Question: What does dead prez mean in one sentence.

M1: All Power To The People!

Stic: We should not accept how shit is, if it's not working for us then we should do something to change it.

What is Revolution?

M1: Revolution. Where I'm coming from, the critical part of revolutionary struggle is concerned with taking power out of the hands of people who stole it from us from all these years and returning back those resources. It's going to be a conscious world wide struggle with decisive victory won in the area of defeating capitalism and imperialism which is our main enemy.

Stic: When people think of revolution they see only one version, which is to be armed with weapons in order to enforce your way of life. When you think of the military or police you don't associate that with violence, but when you see ordinary people with weapons you automatically think of criminals because that's the capital; American system teaching that way of thinking.

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Revolution is based on the victims of a certain society; government, that recognizes that they are being used and abused by the system and its not in their best interest. When you talk about revolution you're talking about seizing control over the institutions that are oppressing the people such as the court system, police department, military system and educational system all together. Food and all the things needed for life are being exploited and people recognize that you have to have control over these things, so revolution is the process in which you seize that power and are able to get it and keep it.

Do you consider yourself a revolutionary?

M1: No. I align myself with revolutionary struggle. I would not say I am a revolutionary, that would be arrogant. Yet at the same time you have to have people who consciously recognize themselves as revolutionaries. And there are those people that I know who hold these positions 24 hours a day; on call people who have dedicated their lives for years and years. But, at the same time I'm just trying to do the best I can to forward our struggles. I am a part of this movement.

Stic: I'm definitely a worker for that (revolutionary) process. I would like to let my work identify me rather than myself. Of course I identify with the revolutionary process, but that takes a lot discipline, vision, hard work, self-sacrifice and courage that you develop along the path.

Question: How does the role you play in this revolutionary movement transgress into your music?

M1: Well it's (music) a new form of communication. The tool that transformed the Black Panther Party in 1966 was the Black Panther newspaper. It had a readership similar to what the Source has today. I think that's the role that we are faced with. It (communication) is a very important tool, because that communication can be precise. It can be a weapon and that's how it gets into our music. Dead Prez music is comprehensive of the struggle; of what we learned in and out of the movement. We try and give people a new eyes, you can look at things in a certain perspective, and not recognize exactly where we stand. That's our (Dead Prez) job. That's how it gets into the music. The most popular way to communicate who we dealing with, that's Rap. Rap is talking to everybody at every part of the earth right now.

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Stic: It started almost 12 years ago, and I didn't consciously set out for the type of music that I'm putting out. As I got older I understood the severity; the effect that music and words have on one's mind. Now that I'm more conscious, I can express any fact through my music. It's not to make you dance (you can listen to any artist for that). I remember when I was in high school, I wrote something for Black History month and the impact that it had on people was remarkable. Parents, teacher, school officials and even the NAACP got involved all because, everyone wanted to know if do I have the right to be saying the things I do. From there I had a responsibility to keep doing what i was doing whether you can can relate to it or not. That's what my motivation is here, seeing that we have to use everything that's out their to solve our problems.

Are you happy with what Hip Hop has evolved to or do you think it like the society we live in needs to be revolutionized?

M1: I think hip hop is revolution because more than anything else in the world, even more than Lexus cars, even more than platinum chains it (hip hop) manifests the world and is a total reflection of reality. It can manifest itself so clearly as one thing. It can manifest itself as revolutionary. It can't be trapped or contained.

Stic: I can't just pinpoint anything in society and just isolate it. I have to look at what exacted hip hop. Once that is done then you can understand what it is. If we want hip hop to be different, then we'll have to change the conditions that produce it. I'm happy that hip hop is continuous and not just financially. But, even though you make a lot of money from it, you can make a lot of money from Crack, but it's fucking up the community and don't produce any life. If a couple of people got some money off it, o.k. but mostly the white people make money off it and the Black people become addicts. The same with hip hop, I don't care about the money, you want the hook up and the travel to communicate, if you have an agenda. That's the good thing.

THE ALBUM

Explain the title of the album; "Let's Get Free".

M1: What the title does is bring you into the recognition that if you think you free, they're obviously people out there who know that they're not. So then apparently there's a choice that

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has got to be made. You either need to investigate that or you're fine. And if it makes you chose a side it does so in a non aggressive way. I think its (the album title) not a turn off it's talking to the masses of those it does appeal to. I think it evokes curiosity in people who don't see that sentiment and don't think its true.

Stic: In alot of ways we are free but's thats only in day to day living. We are not free in the sense the fear of doing what needs to be done or the fear of the responsibility of life. Sometimes when people say we are oppressed, we are enslaved, people say that's negative but really that's just semantics. Today I am free that's why I struggle and resist oppression. I don't need anyone to tell me when to eat or lock me up for something they think I did. Politically I beg to differ in the views of freedom. We are victims of a capitalist system. As workers we are exploited. As people we have no power over our own lives. No self-determination and no ability to reproduce the things we need for ourselves. So we are dependent in people who historically have beaten us, jailed us, lied to us etc. I don't see any freedom in that.

In the artic where the indigenous people sometimes might hunt a wolf they'll take a double edge blade and they'll put blood on the blade and melt the ice and stick the handle in the ice so only the blade is protruding. And that a wolf who smells the blood and wants to eat will come and lick the blade trying to eat and what happens is when the wolf licks the blade he cuts his tongue and he bleeds and he thinks he's really having a good meal and he drinks, and he licks and licks and of course he's drinking his own blood and he kills himself. - Wolves (1st track on "Let's Get Free").

Stic: That's the Chairman Omali from NPDUM (National Peoples Democratic Uhuru Movement) speaking. It's about brothers having to hustle because they don't have any money or opportunities that we're aware of. The government pumps crack into the community to keep brothers down, such as the Black Panthers, etc. Brothers feel its a bright idea when they see they could get \$50 from this little piece of glass rock product. When you're able to eat when yesterday you wasn't, thats a real self-esteem booster. That's a really hard thing to come down on people, but they feel like their actually doing something for themselves but the effect is like a wolf licking a blade, he's tasting the blood but he don't realize that its his own blood. He's so blood thirsty, so hungry to eat. It's not the wolfs fault, he got to eat just like everybody else, he's been tricked into thinking the blade is opportunity. Brothers are tricked into thinking that Crack-Cocaine is our opportunity and we're licking the blade and the blood we're tasting is us in prison, getting shot at parties and living in a military state. The Chairman says we need to blame the hunter, the CIA, government; the people who set us up in these conditions and robbed us from Africa and have been living off of us since we got here; the people who really benefit from the drug trade. The same crack-cocaine after a few years don't start to look better, it looks fucked up. So the money is going somewhere, could it be for more police officers? weapons? and all the new sophisticated technology? That's what the intro to the album is

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represents. To look at things for what they really are and stop licking the blade and start using it.

M1: The analogy of the blade, it stands out stark. The chairman states, I'm not a hunter but I've been told. It alludes to the hunt, the hunter and the hunted. And even when there is no hunter present you find that there these generated genocidal things. I think this is a great analogy because it doesn't put the blame on the people. A lot of times we always blame the people.

"I'm a African never was a African American." - I'm a African (2nd track, "Let's Get Free")

M1: If you study Malcolm, he said he couldn't be American. "He was a victim of Americanism, because if he was an American they (America) wouldn't stick their dogs on you. If you was American you would have rights." We're not American, that's the primary reason we go through what we're going through. If you attach the name American to you, then you must also be attaching the legacy of slave masters. We don't have that legacy at all. To call yourself an African-American is silly. When we was stolen from Africa we got on the boat Africans, so how the hell we gonna get off the boat Americans. I think the identity with Africa will help us see where our world resources are. We think we are poor, but we are rich. We are rich not only in history and culture, but in unity we have the richest land mass that we are all a part of.

Stic: The term African American has no meaning really because the name has changed. In the past it was Afro-American, before that Negro, before that it was Nigger, and somewhere in between it was just Black. We know that Africa is where our ancestors originated. Human life on this planet is the descendants of the people from the continent (Africa). Whether you from Haiti, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, any place on the planet, this (Africa) is our rightful home, it was robbed from us, it was and always will be the home of black people.

The state is this organized bureaucracy, it is the police dept., it is the army, the navy, it is the prison system, the courts. The state is a repressive organization... The police become necessary in human society at the junction in human society where there is a split between those who have and those who don't. - Police State (5th track, "Let Get Free").

M1: People don't recognize the state because its an abstract. The state emerges itself in the material world when you begin to try and get power. If you want to get food stamps you got to

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go the state or to be a part of program that want to help or assist your well being. Its the state that monitors all those resources. It's the state that steps between a domestic dispute against a man and women, the state puts police in schools, the state is what comes in and takes children away from their parents. It's a repressive organization especially when you talk about getting power in your own hands. The state would be the first people who arrive at your front door to tell you in one form or another that you can't have it (power). The state works for rich people. Those who control the state are those who run all institutions, schools; gov't buildings; and major commercial institutions. If there were no classes there would be no reason for state. If we all shared alike there would be no need for this all together body who comes and represents one interest of one class.

Stic: Police State explains who the police are, because people get caught up in the television version of police in society. In every society that you live in there's an Uncle Tom, for N.Y.C. it's Al Sharpton. People say we need to fire the crooked cops and may pinpoint one or two. Chairman Omali says, whether you lock me up nicely or beat my ass and lock me up, you're still locking me up. The reason for that is some people have and some people don't, which requires the people that don't have nothing to have to resort to breaking (the rules of) the people who have shit. The people who have shit are making these rules because they wanna keep the shit that they have and their not trying to share, but what they got they got from what they're accusing you of. If you break into a bank because you need money, or go into a grocery store for a piece of bread because you're hungry the police will call you a thief. But, they stole us from Africa, stole our labor, still stealing from us by paying us minimum wage while the companies are making millions of dollars. So the bottom line is officers fake friendly or the real raw deal vice squad that role like terrorist are here to keep the people at the bottom of society. They are the armed forces in our communities that kill young black teenagers and say the Crips and Bloods do it (gang bangin").

What impact do you see Dead Prez having on the people?

Stic: How much impact has the people had on us is the question. I feel that the interaction that I've had with people is what's gonna be expressed in my lyrics. I'm just thankful that I had the opportunity to reflect the view of others and get the people to interact with us because you know we're not perfect and maybe if others can relate to our music then we can all learn something.

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And "thanks" to The Drum Collective - <http://www.thedrum.org>