

Hip-Hop and The Limits of Political Engagement in The Age of Obama

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Abstract - *Hip hop has the power to be a political force. It has also been successful in mobilizing young people for political activities through organizations and big rappers. Unlike its past where the music genre had a commitment to resist and challenge mainstream politics, the United States presidential election of 2008 changed the tradition from defying politics to actively engaging in it. Obama's blackness became the impetus to this progressive move for his candidacy was regarded as the most tangible manifestation of a black leader. The political engagement, however, is limited to the fact that music has been monopolized by few companies and that hip-hop artists often have personal interests when involving in politics.*

Keywords: *Hip-hop, Political Engagement, Obama.*

INTRODUCTION

Hip-hop has the power to be a political force because it is 'the best vehicle to organize youth' (Spence, 2011). According to Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar, there has been no music from any genre but hip hop that 'has been so central to the mobilization of young people' (Gosa & Nielson, 2015). Hip hop contributed to political activities not only through organizations but also through its big rappers, unlike black athletes or movie stars who are mostly sceptical about politics (Gosa & Nielson, 2015). In its long history, hip-hop has gained a reputation to have a commitment to resist and challenge mainstream politics (Watkins, 2006). Yet, the United States presidential election of 2008 changed that traditional face of hip-hop from defying mainstream politics to actively engaging in it. There have been no elections in American history in which the involvement of the hip-hop community is very much pronounced except the 2008 election (Henry, Allen, & Chrisman, 2011). Before and during the election African Americans became very active in mobilizing and recruiting potential voters through a series of events at the grassroot level (Gosa & Nielson, 2015).

Obama's blackness became the impetus to this progressive move that the hip-hop community saw him as not only the 'most tangible manifestation of a black leader', but also a living aspiration that through his presidency racial disparities could be narrowed (Gosa & Nielson, 2015). Obama's position became more 'ideologically progressive' after many people in the US considered the era of bush was the era of failure. It is Obama who should step onto the political stage to bring hopes for the disappointing Americans. Not only that, Americans also demanded more wind

of change from the presidential aspirant from universal health care to total end of Bush's notorious foreign policies (Gosa & Nielson, 2015). The high expectations, however, turned sour as the hip-hop community felt betrayed by Obama's policy decisions after he became a president (Nielson, 2013). The engagement of hip-hop in mainstream politics is limited to the fact that music has been monopolized by few companies that have put hip-hop, to paraphrase Tricia Rose, in a 'terrible crisis' (Rose, 2008) and that hip-hop artists often have personal interests when involved in politics. Yet, the monopolization of hip-hop has given birth to underground hip hop with 'counter-hegemonic ideas' that give more rooms for rappers to freely create political lyricism and revitalize the innovation and creativity of black artists (Vito, 2015).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Power of Hip Hop

A New York City council member, Charles Barron, went to the stage to deliver a speech on June 19, 2004. He was one of the delegates attending the first ever National Hip-Hop Convention in Newark, New Jersey. In the four-day convention he said: "We have come a long way and when you start moving, hip-hop is the most powerful movement in the world" ("Rap on Politics," n.d.). He is not wrong that hip hop is not what a New York Times bestselling author, John McWhorter, claims: "It's just music. Good music, but just music" (Gosa, 2009). Hip-hop is surely not merely music. It is a community, a generation, and a political force which influences people's life and has the power to 'move the crowd'.

According to Watkins, hip hop has been very influential in ‘all the things that traditionally matter to young people – style, music, fashion, and a sense of generational purpose’ (Watkins, 2006). Given this fact, it is no surprise that hip hop can even influence the behaviour of youths as explained by Lester K. Spence, saying ‘youth exposed to violent rap are more likely to express support for violence as a means of conflict resolution [...] and girls exposed to rap are more likely to express low self-esteem about their body image [...]’ (Spence, 2011).

Hip hop is not just music as it has revolutionized to become a creative platform for the once marginal black youths (Watkins, 2006). The revolution of hip-hop was reemphasized by *The Crisis* magazine, in its September/October 2004 edition arguing that hip-hop has shifted its influence from music to political revolution (Robinson, 2004). Written in capital letters under a big title ‘in the MIX’, the headline irrefutably showed the confidence of the black magazine that they believed that hip hop is capable to voice the concerns of marginalized black and Latino youths to those in power (Gosa & Nielson, 2015). The best vehicle to realize this vision is the hip-hop community as explained by Russell Simmons:

“I think the hip-hop community is the best brand-building community in the world. When they say do something, everyone follows. When they say that Pepsi hot, people drank Pepsi. If they say Coke is hot, then Pepsi is out of luck. This is a fact. The hip-hop community is the best trendsetting and brand-building community, and when they go in their communities and they talk about voting, their parents, their friends and everyone who is maybe not so cool or so hip-hop, does what they say (“Hip Hop Action Summit,” n.d.)”

Simmons’s perception is understandable because black people, according to Watkins, are different from other ethnic groups that they are less individualistic if, for example, compared to white people. This situation, he argued, affects their political life because when they make political decisions, the most considered aspect would be the collective benefits that can be reaped from the decisions (Spence, 2011). For this reason, hip hop communities such as The Hip Hop Summit Action Network (HSAN) and National Hip-Hop Political Convention (NHHPC) drew much attention of black youths and were very successful in their effort to move the crowd. As Spence puts it, ‘The founders of both organizations believed that hip-hop always had the potential to be a force of social change’ (Spence, 2011).

HSAN was formed in 2001 as a non-profit organization that acts as an education advocacy and social activism for the empowerment of black youths

(Gosa & Nielson, 2015). This organization was supported by a wide range of people from different backgrounds including hip hop big stars like Jay Z, Sean Diddy Combs, and Jermaine Dupri (Gosa & Nielson, 2015). It is the belief of the group that they could best realize ‘hip hop political potential’ (Watkins, 2006) as seen in their statement: “Hip hop is an enormously influential agent for social change which must be responsibly and proactively utilized to fight the war on poverty and injustice” (Hip Hop Summit Action, 2013) (Gosa & Nielson, 2015).

HSAN was successful in gathering people in several American cities as an effort to influence voters’ decision when going to the ballot in the 2004 presidential election (Watkins, 2006). Throughout the country the organization’s summit organizers claimed that they had registered more than 100.000 new constituents (R. “biko” Baker, 2004). The organization registered more than 40.000 potential voters in Detroit, 40.000 in Chicago, 60.000 in Los Angeles, and 80.000 in Philadelphia (Watkins, 2006). Dr. Benjamin Chavis Muhammad, HSAN’s CEO, commented on this successful move: “We’ve only been able sign up so many people because we have built strategic alliances with organizations doing good work in these communities (R. “biko” Baker, 2004).”

Similar to HSAN, NHHPC had the same confidence about hip hop that, in the words of Watkins, ‘there is untapped political power in hip-hop’s widening and maturing constituency’ (Watkins, 2006). Organized by among others, Rosa Clemente, Bakari Kitwana, Ras Baraka, and Angela Woodson, NHHPC held its first national convention in June 2004 in Newark with hope to make youths more politically engaged at all levels of American politics (“National Hip-Hop Political Convention in Newark | Bakari Kitwana,” n.d.). The convention successfully attracted more than 3000 attendees and approximately 400 delegates (Kitwana, 2005) from across America. The focus of NHHPC was in five agendas: education, economic justice, criminal justice, health care, and human rights (Watkins, 2006).

Hip-hop and Obama

Prior to the 2008 presidential election, there were two important phenomena in America. The first phenomenon was that African Americans had long been sick and tired of the Bush’s administration due to the fact that during his tenure the poverty rates among their communities increased (Gosa & Nielson, 2015). In addition, America’s involvement in Iraq war also became a source of their disappointment as protested by rappers such as Jay Z and Jadakiss in their songs ‘My President’ and ‘Why (Remix)’. While Jay Z rhymed ‘You can keep your puss, I don’t want no more Bush. No more war, no more Iraq’ (“JAY-Z – My President (Remix) Lyrics | Genius

Lyrics," n.d.), Jadakiss rapped 'Why is Bush acting like he trying to get Osama?' ("Jadakiss – Why (Remix) Lyrics | Genius Lyrics," n.d.). A survey on the 2008 election conducted by The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) revealed that 10% of the entire voters and 12% of young voters considered 'the War in Iraq was their top voting issue'. Additionally, 50% of young Americans age 18-24 had a strong rejection of the Iraq War (Kirby & Kawashima-Ginsberg, n.d.).

The second phenomenon was that young African Americans had long missed a black leader since the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X (Gosa & Nielson, 2015). T.I for example who in 2001 rhymed, 'Killed Malcolm X, Martin Luther King and everybody else tried to come down here us' ("T.I. Lyrics - What Happened," n.d.). Jadakiss also voiced his concern, rhyming 'Why did Malcolm's mission die with the man. Why we ain't pick it up where he left it and carry out his plan' ("Jadakiss – Why (Remix) Lyrics | Genius Lyrics," n.d.).

There came Obama who in his campaign, as Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar puts it, 'was able to tap into the energy, verve, and passion' of the hip-hop community's eagerness for change (Gosa & Nielson, 2015). The hip-hop community desperately needed Obama because they believed that the black president candidate, as demonstrated by a survey conducted by Gallup on 18-28 September 2008 to youths age 18-29, understood the 'problems of people your age'. 71% of the youths surveyed preferred Obama to McCain who only received 12% (Inc, n.d., p.). This high percentage signifies not only the fact that the hip-hop community positioned Obama as their saviour but also idolized the president hopeful.

Besides his skin color and quite young age compared to McCain, the reason why Obama was adored by the hip-hop community was his 'coolness' and hip-hop itself is 'an art that values cool' (Inc, n.d., p.). The two components became very appealing that Obama deserves to be placed in the same group as other cool black celebrities. Ebony magazine reemphasize the coolness factor by listing him on the top of "The 25 Coolest Brothers of All Time" alongside hip hop artists such as Jay Z, Snoop Dog, and Tupac Shakur (Cobb, 2008). What makes Obama cool, according to the magazine is that he 'is embraced by millions of people' and 'young people flock to his call because they trust his promise' (Cobb, 2008).

Hip-hop artists supported Obama through their tracks by portraying him as the best figure who could continue the struggles of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. The most prominent track of this kind was that sung by Young Jeezy featuring Nas in which Jeezy rhymed:

Tell him: "I'm doing fine". Obama for mankind
We ready for damn change so y'all let the man shine
Stuntin' on Martin Luther, feeling just like a King
Guess this is what he meant when he said that "he had a dream" ("Jeezy – My President Lyrics | Genius Lyrics," n.d.)

In its remix showcasing Jay Z several months after the song was released, the famous rapper rhymed the same message:

Rosa Parks sat so Martin Luther could walk
Martin Luther walked so Barack Obama could run

Barack Obama ran so all the children could fly
So I'mma spread my wings, you can meet me in the sky ("JAY-Z – My President (Remix) Lyrics | Genius Lyrics," n.d.)

While these lyrics, in the words of Travis L. Gosa, 'indicate that voting for Obama is a way to honor these black freedom fighters' (Gosa, 2010), according to Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, however, such association is 'careless and historically irresponsible' (Gosa & Nielson, 2015). Despite the debate, one thing was certain that, hip-hop tracks supporting Obama candidacy were mushrooming before and during the 2008 election. Gosa analysed 637 hip hop tracks and found that 253 of them or about 40% contain suggestion to cast votes for Obama (Gosa, 2010). 217 (approximately 80%) of these 253 tracks contained the abstract ideas of "hope", "change", and "believing" and Obama's campaign quotes such as "a better America" and "change the world" appeared on 97 different tracks (Gosa, 2010). Other rappers, besides Jay Z, Young Jeezy, and Nas, who put Obama in their lyrics were, among others Meek Mill, Yelawolf, 2 Chainz, Gucci Mane, Soulja Boy, Kid Cudi, Jadakiss, Sophia Fresh, Juelz Santana, Nicki Minaj, The Game, and Waka Flocka Flame, Common, and Talib Kweli (Gosa & Nielson, 2015).

Whereas the hip-hop community members endorsed Obama by becoming enthusiastic volunteers during his campaigns and persuaded older people and their parents to vote for the black president candidate (NW, Washington, & Inquiries, 2008), HSAN, the League of Pissed-Off Voters, CHANGE, and the Hip Hop Congress successfully registered millions of young voters (Gosa & Nielson, 2015). These efforts combined with the effects from pro-Obama-hip-hop tracks, turned the 2008 election into historical for young people that, based on the data provided by The Census Current Population Survey November Supplement, their turnout percentage was 51.1%. Although quite low this turnout was extraordinarily high, especially among young African Americans, after 1972 (55.4%) and 1992 (52.0%) elections

(Kirby & Kawashima-Ginsberg, n.d.). The survey indicated that the high level of young people participation was resulted from three factors: efforts in reaching voters, a close election, and 2008's campaign success (Kirby & Kawashima-Ginsberg, n.d.). The good part of this story was that Obama received the most support from young people aged 18-29 (68%) (Kirby & Kawashima-Ginsberg, n.d.). Not only that, the black president candidate was also strongly supported by African-Americans and Latinos in all ages, getting more than 90% and 50% for respective race (Kirby & Kawashima-Ginsberg, n.d.).

In Open Letter to Obama, MC Jin rhymed 'I don't know politics, that's no joke. But I do know that I get one vote' ("Jin – Open Letter To Obama Lyrics | Genius Lyrics," n.d.). It is one vote given by hip-hop generation that helped Obama to win the election even though exit polls claimed their role in the election, as cited by Pew Research Center, was not 'crucial to Barack Obama's victory' (NW et al., 2008).

Hip-hop and Obama after Elections

Senator McCain, Obama's contender, in his concession speech deemed the victory of Obama as 'historic election' and recognized 'the special significance it has for African-Americans and for the special pride that must be theirs' (Harnden, 2008). Similarly, the Director of the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research at Harvard University, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. also praised Obama's win, saying 'the symbolic culmination of the black freedom struggle, the grand achievement of a great, collective dream (H. Baker et al., 2011).' Yet, Rosa A. Clemente disagreed with such euphorically positive comments and in her opinion the association of Obama with hip hop was not accurate. She also argued that Obama was unfit to be associated with hip-hop as he 'spoke about offensive rap lyrics and Black men having respect for themselves by pulling up their pants'(Clemente,).

Indeed, before Rosa, some hip-hop artists had forewarned the hip hop community in order not to be excessively hopeful to Obama. Nas rhymed 'When he wins, will he really care still?' ("Nas – Black President Lyrics | Genius Lyrics," n.d.), while Dead Prez insisted 'After the election, You'll see, Mark my words' ("Dead Prez – Politrikkks Lyrics | Genius Lyrics," n.d.). Not long after Obama won the 'historic election', in 2009, the Obama's administration launched the White House Music Series at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. Despite the fact that the series had sponsored a wide variety of musical performances from jazz, classical, country, to even Motown, hip-hop, the music genre that helped Obama to be elected was not 'formally recognised' ("How hip-hop fell out of love with Obama | Music | The

Guardian," n.d.). Unfortunately, this exclusion was just a beginning as the hip hop community were yet to experience what Dead Prez said in his track, *politrikkks*, 'It's the same system. Just changed form' ("Dead Prez – Politrikkks Lyrics | Genius Lyrics," n.d.).

Erik Nielson argued in 2013 that Obama's presidency from the time he was elected had been 'abysmal' and had done nothing to solve the drugs use epidemic in the US, the high rate of incarceration, and the the unstoppable growth of for-profit prisons (Nielson, 2013). According to him, Obama's tenure had set records for deportation. Not only that, the president also joked about the use of drone strikes, did not fulfil his promise to close Guantanamo Bay, did not do much for reducing high rates of black unemployment, was silent on guns use and its impacts, expanded surveillance practices inherited from the Bush era, and listed Assata Shakur the '2Pac's godmother' the FBI's Most Wanted Terrorist' (Nielson, 2013).

Erik was not the only scholar who criticized Obama. Fredrick C. Harris wrote for The New York Times just a week before 2012 presidential election began, saying 'the Obama presidency has already marked the decline, rather than the pinnacle, of a political vision centered on challenging racial inequality' ("The Price of a Black President - The New York Times," n.d.). Criticism also came from hip hop artists, including Lupe Fiasco who claimed "the biggest terrorist is Obama in the United States of America" (Harris, 2011) and Killer Mike who dubbed Obama 'an employee of the country's real masters' ("Killer Mike – Reagan Lyrics | Genius Lyrics," n.d.). When interviewed by Travis L. Gosa and Erik Nielson about Obama, Killer Mike responded: "We gave you this job, and now that you have this job, we're gonna judge you by the exact same standards that we judge those white people. Now you can get a little slack because you our brother [...]" (Gosa & Nielson, 2015). In spite of his discontent, yet Killer Mike was not consistent about his stance on Obama. His accusations were contradictory to what he said to hiphopdx.com in an interview in which the rapper urge black voters to vote for Obama. And if they are not, they are race traitors("Killer Mike Explains His Comparison Of Barack Obama To Ronald Reagan, His Brotherly Bond With El-P | HipHopDX," n.d.).

Besides Lupe Fiasco and Killer Mike, other hip hop figures such as Rebel Diaz, Boots Riley, Immortal Technique, Blue Scholars, Lowkey, also had the same feeling toward Obama (Nielson, 2013). Even Jay Z could not help but to criticize the president although he was one of the most supportive hip hop artists towards Obama's bid in 2008. The famous rapper admitted in 2011 that the criticism against Obama was not unfair, saying "numbers don't lie, it's fucked up out there" (Gosa & Nielson, 2015)

It is not wise if the hip hop community merely pointed their fingers at Obama as they also played a role in this situation. The inclusion of Obama by the hip hop community is not according to his civil rights activism but merely due to his blackness (Gosa & Nielson, 2015) and their supports, hopes, dreams, and energy were uncritically given to him without examining his track record, philosophy, or aspirations (Gosa & Nielson, 2015). In fact, they were aware that what Obama loved from hip hop was only the story and the flow as he admittedly declared that he remained to be “an old school guy” who’s still “got a lotta of that old school stuff” (Burns, 2014). Furthermore, the political investment given by hip hop community in order that Obama won the election was ironic given hip-hop’s contentious relationship with the state along with various government officials’ criticism of hip-hop music (especially gangsta rap) (Henry et al., 2011).

Like what Rosa said, one of the critics among government officials, in fact, was Obama himself. The black president voiced his concern on some of hip hop lyrics containing materialism, misogyny, violence and the term ‘nigga’ that according to him they are socially unacceptable (Henry et al., 2011) and that he does not want if their children are exposed to them (Smith, n.d.). Obama’s view on hip hop became more tangible when criticizing Ludacris’s track titled ‘Politics as Usual’ in which the controversial rapper called Senator Hillary Clinton an ‘irrelevant bitch’, Bush ‘mentally handicapped’, and McCain ‘paralyzed’ (*Ludacris – Politics as Usual (Obama Is Here)*, n.d.). Obama considered the song as very offensive (Smith, n.d.).

In spite of much criticism and widespread disappointment directed to Obama, numerous well-known hip hop artists still became his loyal supporters. Not only that, Obama could still steal the hearts of African Americans in 2012 president election as he was voted by 93% of the ethnic group (“Presidential election 2012: Record number of Hispanic voters head to the polls | Daily Mail Online,” n.d.) although they fully knew that hip hop songs were unfound in Obama’s 29-song-campaign playlist (“Obama and hip-hop,” n.d.).

Hip-Hop Limits

Although proven ‘successful’ in moving the crowd and helping Obama to be elected, there are two things that can potentially constrain the engagement of hip-hop in American politics. The first thing is that the production and circulation of music has long been monopolized by only few powerful capitalists-minded corporations. By 2004, Warner Music, EMI, Universal, and Sony/BMG, controlled 80% of the entire commercial music on earth, while Radio One has the control of “hot urban” radio stations in many big cities (Gosa, 2010). As a music genre hip-hop is

of course also affected by this monopoly as it has been responsible to the shift of rap lyricism from containing politically-protest contents like in the 1980s and 1990s to gangster, pornographic, materialistic, individualistic, and anti-intellectualism rap (Gosa, 2010). Chuck D once explained the situation:

[...] talk positivity in some of their records, but those records have to be picked by the industry executives and program directors to be magnified. MC Eiht talks about “[...] The media just doesn’t focus on those positive songs, they’d rather dwell on the negative” (“The Black Commentator - Dismantling The ‘Bling’ - Another Look at Hip-Hop - Issue 99,” n.d.).

According to Norman Kelley, the unhealthy relationship between hip hop and music industry is ‘a post-modern form of colonialism’ (“Norman Kelley, The Political Economy of Black Music,” n.d.) that the raw products are taken from people living in black ghetto to be processed, packaged, and resold to them (Neal, 2004). Such efforts are intended by white men consumers market, as Byron Hurt, the filmmaker of *Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*, puts it, to portray black women as ‘bitches and ho’s’ and black men as ‘gangstas and pimps’ while still benefiting from that kind of racism and sexism (Hurt & Berg, 2007). Despite this fact, however, it is undeniable that the music industry gives young talented African Americans income stability and wider audience (Wright, 2004). Even Chuck D himself admitted that many in the hip-hop circle have a belief that negativity is an ideal way to make them megastars (“The Black Commentator - Dismantling The ‘Bling’ - Another Look at Hip-Hop - Issue 99,” n.d.).

Yet, the massive power and control possessed by media corporates over hip-hop does not completely kill the creativity of some critical hip-hop artists to freely voice their aspirations. Immortal Technique is an example to this. The rapper has been able to voice his own messages but still garners success though without the help of music labels. ‘100 percent independent, I’m the fucking boss/I sold 80,000 off a quotable in the source’ he said in his ‘Watch out Remix’ track (“Immortal Technique – Watchout Remix Lyrics | Genius Lyrics,” n.d.). Another rapper named Chance also has the same story that the hip-hop artist is still able to market his songs to fans around the world despite having no contract with any recording corporates. According to the rapper “Label deals suck, that’s just the truth of it” (Shah, 2015).

The success stories of both rappers would not have happened if the internet did not exist. Not only that the cyber world has given a new hope to the hip-hop community to resist the hegemony of music labels, it has also made it possible for underground rappers to freely reach and interact with their fans through social

media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Youtube has also given access to rappers to easily create and upload their songs without any interference from third parties ("The Evolution of Rap | Harvard Political Review," n.d.). According to Gosa, it was social media that made interpersonal communication for non-celebrities possible to influence youths to directly participate in politics in 2008. Given this fact, it is understandable why Obama used Facebook to announce his running mate for vice president, Joe Biden, before informing the mainstream media (Gosa, 2010).

Furthermore, the internet has also caused a panic among many recording companies. As argued by Gosa, the internet has revolutionized music consumption from buying music to sharing it (Gosa, 2010). Despite denied by Felix Oberholzer and Koleman Strumpf, digital music files such as Napster and MP3 have become a nightmare loss to music industry. As reported by CNN Money, the total revenues from the sales of physical music and licensing fell from \$14.6 billion in 1999 to only \$6.3 billion in 2009 ("Music's lost decade: Sales cut in half in 2000s - Feb. 2, 2010," n.d.). Rap sales also declined by 44% from year 2000 to 2007 ("Hip-hop's Down Beat - TIME," n.d.).

Second, hip-hop artists oftentimes have vested interests when involving in mainstream politics. In the words of Nielson and Gosa, they are in 'ambiguous positions as social commentators and activists' and as 'professionals' in a destructive and marginalized industry (Gosa & Nielson, 2015). They either treated hip-hop as a commercially profitable commodity or used it to get close to a political leader for personal interests. In the case of Obama era for example, some rappers took advantage of Obama's popularity for their own benefits. Combs introduced "Ciroc Obama" for his expensive ciroc vodka in 2008, while DJ Drama named himself "Barack O-Drama" (Gosa & Nielson, 2015). Similarly, Jay Z also does not have a purely pro African Americans political agenda. His support for Obama was intended to get access to the president to boast his products. Not only that, Jay Z was also a prime defender of the US's exploitative economic system which had long favoured the top 1% over the majority 99% as seen in his unwillingness to support the Occupy Wall Street movement (Gosa & Nielson, 2015).

Furthermore, Russell Simmons's HSAN was even used by the rapper to market consumer products such as cell phones and soft drinks (Kitwana, 2003). He advised Motorola to penetrate the hip-hop community to promote his soft drink brand, DefCon3, at his Hip-Hop summits throughout America. He correlates his product with community empowerment as a marketing strategy. ("The CEO of Hip-Hop - Bloomberg," n.d.)." For this reason, Simmons was

criticized by Rosa Clemente in her open letter in which the activist repeatedly said "YOU ARE NOT HIP-HOP!" ("Russell Simmons You Are Not Hip Hop," n.d.).

CONCLUSION

As Watkins puts it: 'The idea that hip hop can be a political resource is not unique' because long before the era of Obama, Afrika Bambaataa has 'experimented with the notion that hip hop could and should use its sway to inspire young people to be agents of social change' (Watkins, 2006). Without a doubt, this is an undebatable claim as this essay suggests that hip-hop is enormously powerful to move young people. It is for this reason that hip-hop artists and activists have not only possess a crucial role in shaping hip-hop culture but also bear a big responsibility to be a catalyst for the betterment of hip-hop community members. Their activities, be it through social activism or hip-hop tracks, has to be used for race-lifting and to always 'keep it real'.

The extent of 'crisis' to which hip-hop is now in has to be evaluated. While it is true that, as some claim, hip-hop artists often have no choice but to join big labels if they want to gain a successful career, the emergence of underground hip-hop rappers and the media revolution brought by the internet have refuted the accusation. Moreover, the most important thing about this condition is that it is not about a choice whether or not to join a record company but rather it is about how to react to a situation. A bad situation is one thing and a reaction to it is another different story. For this reason, despite life has not often been easy for many of the hip-hop community members, to react positively or negatively is purely under their control. By any means, immorality, violence, and all negative things, including those found in hip-hop lyrics, are not only intolerable but also unjustifiable. In addition, hip-hop moguls should not contaminate hip-hop with personal interests. What they have done could grow antipathy among the hip-hop community which threatens the prospect of the future hip-hop engagement in American politics.

It is undeniable that politics is full of, what Nas reminds in his track, 'So many political snakes' ("Nas - Black President Lyrics | Genius Lyrics," n.d.). In this case the hip-hop community is not an only community as there are many other communities surrounding the president that often have more power. Thus, given this fact, blaming Obama alone for the perpetual plight of the hip-hop community is not fair. What has been happening is just a matter of 'one man can't change it' (Paine, 2008).

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