

Farrakhan defends hip hop, asks for more discourse

Special to Sentinel-Voice

NEW YORK—Louis Farrakhan defended rappers who use foul language and graphically depict violence and sexuality, saying they are only reflecting society and the nation's "gangsta" government.

But the Nation of Islam leader, speaking at the Hip-Hop Summit last week, also implored rappers to recognize the influence they have over fans and asked them to raise the level of their discourse.

"I love you, but I am not satisfied that you are doing all that you can," Farrakhan said during his 2 1/2-hour stemwinder, which he called "probably the most important speech I ever made in my life, because you are the most important people I've ever talked to in my life."

Among those present for the keynote address were rap moguls Sean Combs and Russell Simmons; rap-

pers-producers Wyclef Jean and Jermaine Dupri; and rappers LL Cool J, Queen Latifah and Redman.

The crowd applauded when Farrakhan criticized those who criticize rap, saying the hip-hop culture is only mirroring America's culture.

"The youth has manifested of the wickedness of their parents, their teachers, the judges, the politicians," he said. "You talk about gangsta lyrics. You are literally showing aspects of a government that is gangsta, tells you you should smoke (kill) a leader that they disagree with."

He later added: "What society wants to do with the young people is to break the mirror rather than take a look at it and clean itself up."

Recently, members of Congress have taken issue with the graphic content of many songs, including



LOUIS FARRAKHAN

rap, that they say are targeted toward children, and have threatened to pass legislation to penalize the recording industry for such actions.

But Farrakhan said Washington was acting only because they fear the power of rappers - that their music and messages are being embraced not only by young whites, but by youth around the world.

Farrakhan also drew on some of the backlash he's received for his own fiery rhetoric as an example that sometimes using inflammatory words can hurt your message.

"There are words that can trigger a hateful response, and there are words that can bring people together," he said. "I am learning every day that you can say things ... and inflame people, and say it in another way and it goes in."

Farrakhan got effusive applause after his speech, but at least one multiplatinum rapper said changing the language and content in some rap would be difficult.

"We all know what he's talking

about, it's hard to do it, but he's right about it," Redman said. "The way I look at it, preach and rap don't make no money. Negativity lives in rap, that's what it's built on, that's what money circulates and generates from. Negativity, that's all we see."

Still, Will Smith, who doesn't curse in his raps and has sold millions of records, said it's important that rappers recognize that their message can influence the youth worldwide.

"This is something I've been speaking about for several years," he said. "The importance of covering a more accurate spectrum with the voice."

The summit, which has been exploring issues concerning artist responsibility, the marketing of hip-hop and its impact on youth, concluded last week.

Panthers

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office of Governor Kenny Guinn. When contacted yesterday about the governor's reaction, Guinn's spokesman said, "We don't really have one." Asked if it is possible for the governor to initiate the conference Panthers are demanding, within their time frame, Press Secretary Jack Finn responded, "I can't, at this time."

The Panthers have proposed that \$6 million in redevelopment funds be used to create an investment company, and to provide professional assistance to businesses the company would support. Current says the \$6 million would be matched, three-to-one, by the U.S. Small Business Administration, for "a grand total," he said, "of roughly twenty-four million dollars."

His organization wants \$5 million used "to help establish a Small Business Investment Company (that) will assist existing businesses and provide capital for start-up businesses," and an additional \$1 million used "to provide management and technical assistance" to the participating businesses. Current said the plan is "in its infancy," although the search for a chief executive officer and a board of directors has already begun.

So far, Current has proposed his ideas primarily to the city and most recently to the state. Ultimately, however, he wants all appropriate governing bodies invested in westside redevelopment, and intends to approach the county as his plans unfold.

"A lot of people think we're just looking at the city, or the state. No," Current said, clarifying. "The county is involved in this too, because they have had to drag their feet," he said of county commissioners.

Current said establishment of the company and \$20 million in capital could create "over 571 jobs (based on 1 job per \$35,000 invested)"; assist "over 80 businesses...(based on average investment of \$250,000)", and become "a vital tool to the economic development of the community." Citing insufficient capital and lack of management as the major reasons businesses fail, Current said, "Both areas will be addressed through the establishment of this company."

"People are saying: Why doesn't the black community pull itself up by its bootstraps," Current observed, explaining, "We just don't have no boots. This, as far as I'm concerned, is the boots that will enable the community to pull itself up by its bootstraps."

Not only should state and local government help revitalize West Las Vegas, but also, "Gaming can pitch in," contends the head of the Panthers, who believes marching on the strip would create bad publicity- just when the industry has begun to salivate over anticipated Labor Day revenue. "We are appealing, if you will, to their good business sense," said Current.

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Lawmakers to rap industry: Regulate content

NEW YORK (AP)-Members of Congress urged the hip-hop industry last week to better regulate the content of their records before Washington beats them to it.

"We do not know the hip-hop generation. We do not know the hip-hop industry. We feel that those who know themselves and those that know the industry can regulate it better," said Rep. Earl Hilliard, D-Ala., during the so-called Hip-Hop Summit's first day in New York.

The Recording Industry Association of America voluntarily puts parental advisory stickers on CDs it deems inappropriate for children. But Hilliard said: "We need to



Rep. Earl Hilliard, D-Ala. go to the next level and go beyond that."

He suggested a ratings system similar to the movie industry's.

Sen. Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., recently introduced

legislation that would give the Federal Trade Commission the authority under its false and deceptive advertising laws to act against entertainment companies that market "unsuitable" material to children. And the congressmen warned they could place more stringent restrictions on the industry.

"Washington can regulate you out of business if you do not have your act together," said Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss.

Among those present for the first day of the summit - aimed at addressing hip-hop issues, including artist's responsibility - was Luther "Luke" Campbell, whose

raunchy lyrics during his 2 Live Crew days in the late '80s and early '90s challenged free speech laws.

Campbell said he was disappointed by Lieberman's criticism of rap.

"We've got somebody, Lieberman, that we supported seriously in the election, as black people, and he's the one that's mainly attacking us. To me, that's really a slap in the face," Campbell said. "To now try and take food off our table and try and deaden our industry and try and put a whole lot of black people out of work, that's serious to me."

A spokesman for the former vice presidential candidate declined to comment.

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