

MC Lyte: More rappers need to be role models

By Amecia Taylor
Special to Sentinel-Voice
WASHINGTON (NNPA)

Hip-hop influences many trends, but how does one influence hip-hop, especially the negative aspects of it?

That was one many questions raised in the National Urban League Influencer Summit plenary session, "The Intersection of Hip-Hop and Social Conscience: What Next?" Moderator Jacque Reid, anchor BET Nightly News, was joined by panelists George Daniels, MC Lyte, Jehmu Greene and Jeffrey Johnson.

"We become insiders by becoming experts about politics at the local level," said Jeffrey Johnson, the host and producer of "The Cousin Jeff Chronicles," a series of mini-documentaries that tell the stories of Black and Latino communities.

"Don't just focus on the presidential elections... engage a person about ballot issues, who's running for the school board, mayor, judge..."

Johnson posed the question: How do you translate voting and politics into something that sticks and is not just a fad?

Hip-hop legend, author and actress, MC Lyte replied, "It starts with people like Cousin Jeff who goes into the communities on a consistent basis."

But it doesn't stop there. "In order for our kids to want to be something else, they have to be able to touch doctors... where are our professionals in the hood? It's too many Huxtables now," said George Daniels, the founder of George's Music Room in Chicago, the most

recognized independent retail music store in the United States.

"Things won't change as long as we don't control hip-hop... the funders don't fund conscious artists like Talib Kweli," said 29-year-old Griouard Weddington of Kansas City, Mo.

What hip-hop is now is not what it was... hip-hop made you proud to be Black and inspired you to be positive and make something of yourself," said Allan Mashia, 25, of Portland. "We went from empowerment messages to sex, from educational knowledge to sex."

Rock the Vote President Jehmu Greene said there needs to be a balance between attracting young people to politics and keeping them involved.

"Get their attention by using celebrities, but keep it real when it comes to issues and holding politicians accountable," Greene said. Rock the Vote is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to building political power for young people.

"Identify young people in the community that we can train into leaders," Johnson said. Johnson added the young people need to be taught how to create donors and cultivate sponsors.

"Create leaders from the ground who aren't afraid to deal with issues."

Some say music shouldn't be viewed in isolation.

"If we understand politics as much as we understand hip-hop, we can be a dominant voice," Weddington said.

"It starts with our daily conversations... hip-hop songs are negative daily con-

versations turned marketable. A poetry reading is the only place to go to have a social discussion amid peers." Weddington, aka Bonafyde G is a co-founder of Urban Literation, a poetic community in which poets share their work.

"MC's need to take responsibility of being role models," MC Lyte said. "Young people can't separate the difference between what's in videos and what a respectable woman wears... You can dance to the beat, but lyrics are degrading and dehumanizing. You have to change the minds... show these girls they're worth more."

That may not be as simple as it sounds.

"The power is in the distribution," Daniels said. "It's a mindset in the U.S. — girls think they will get rich from shaking their butts in videos. It's about economics... get with FCC and raise hell about images in videos. We have to come back home... we must change the commerce back to the neighborhood."

And there is even more to do.

"We can't depend on older leaders to carry us... it starts with young women boycotting and pulling our dollars," Greene said.

It's not just about hip-hop; there are other issues that need to be dealt with in dealing with the current generation.

"We demonize hip-hop... talk about healing process... the real issue is not just about hip-hop, it's about how we view ourselves," Johnson said. "Only communities that are strong breed strong and healthy young people."

"Don't bogart the power, man."

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Jean: Mash-ups more than at-the-moment music trend

NEW YORK (AP) - Wyclef Jean sees mash-ups — blends of totally different songs — as more than just a hot trend. "The way that we're moving forward toward music, it's all about using music together," Jean told The Associated Press in an interview this week. "We have hip-hop, we have rock, (but) all the kids now, we all listen to the same thing. If you're listening to rock, you're listening to rap."

Jay-Z and Linkin Park recently collaborated on a mash-up album, blending his "Black Album" with the band's thrashing rock music.

Mash-ups also are popular on the Internet, where one can find blends of artists as divergent as Beyonce and Coldplay.

Jean will perform at Amsterjam, an Aug. 20 concert at Randall's Island that will celebrate mash-ups. The list of performers also includes the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Snoop Dogg, Fat Joe, Garbage, 311 and Reggaeton star Hector El Bambino.

Meanwhile, Jean is working on his label, Clef Records, an upcoming album and doing charity work in his native Haiti. And there's the much-talked about Fugees reunion album.

"It's not on the back burner; we all are talking and are on good terms. That's one of the mysterious projects," he said. "It's always fun... The Fugees, it's like your high school band, it's always fun."