



Search

[View the Archive Index](#)

THIS WEEK

[Home](#)

[Campus News](#)

[City Beat](#)

[A&E](#)

[Commentary](#)

THE CHRONICLE

[*Forum](#)

[Staff](#)

[Contact](#)

[Suggest a Story](#)

[Awards](#)

[Advertise](#)

[Archives](#)

[Classifieds](#)

WEEKLY FEATURE

[Top 5](#)

[Premium Blend](#)

[CAMPUS](#)

[CITY BEAT](#)

[A&E](#)

[Commentary](#)



Spreading the good word
University of Hip-hop hosts panel about hip-hop activism

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Staff Writer



University of hip-hop

Kenwood Academy students work with University of Hip-hop professors to create the hieroglyphics-themed graffiti pictured here.

The walls inside the University of Hip-hop, 6400 S. Kedzie Ave., are covered with bright, bold graffiti. The word "unity" is splashed across one with red and yellow spray paint. Even the chairs in the room have graffiti on them.

It was here that three hip-hop activists gave a lively discussion on how hip-hop was once a political platform to speak on issues. Discussing everything from rappers who should stop complaining about not having enough "bling," to how it was important to reach out to children and communities by returning to staging protests, the three pointed out that race relations in the United States are not very healthy.

These men came together on Oct. 13 for the panel discussion "Know More: Can't Stop Won't Stop: The Past, Present and Future of Hip-hop Activism." The three panelists were Jeff Chang, author of Can't

Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-hop Generation; David Stovall, assistant professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago; and Lavie Raven, founder of the University of Hip-hop, a year round schooling program devoted to teaching the culture of hip-hop.

Stovall explained that the media is to blame for the images of hip-hop now, saying that Bill O'Reilly portrays black people as animals. He then said what hip-hop is to him.

"Hip-hop is a movement of young people from the Bronx to South Africa," Stovall said.

Chang added that hip-hop was once a type of political speech, with rallies and free-styling. He said that out of the 4 million new voters in the 2004 election, 2 million were minorities.

"We need to come together in unity to move folks toward progressive types of thinking," Chang said.

Raven agreed, but also noted that the change in hip-hop must come from another source as well: elders talking to the younger generation.

"Sit down and listen to what the shorties have to say," Raven said. "Elders are the arm, but children are the fist."

Raven argued that elders are trying to forget their past political actions, and that the current generation is not taking the risks they used to take.

"We expect Jay-Z to run for president," Chang said, expressing disappointment in how children let rappers lead them.

The discussion then turned to race. All three panelists were vocal about how minorities are treated badly by the government.

Stovall was passionate about getting people to know what is going on with the "Renaissance 2010" program, started by Mayor Richard M. Daley in 2004 to help underachieving schools get help with overcrowding by building new schools. Stovall said the plan is born out of racial divisions and white bias, and ends up cheating black people.

"If you do not understand white supremacy, everything else will confuse you," Stovall said later.

Chang, wearing a black "Renew Orleans" shirt, described how for years the city did not get any money to help the mostly poor citizens, and that Sacramento, Calif., is also under sea-level but has resources to get through a hurricane.

Raven later came back to the subject of hip-hop emerging as a foothold for politics. He expressed the need for voices to come out through graffiti and the arts.

Raven created the University of Hip-hop eight years ago to use hip-hop as a way to keep kids away from gangs and drugs during after-school hours.

?I was trying to establish a small school, but real schools need to be started,? he said.

Stovall says hip-hop will one day be a political platform again.

?A form of expression leads to a form of action,? he said.

As for the rappers of today, Chang summed up the night by saying that they should focus on their childhood and how hard it was being poor.

?Tell the truth,? he said.

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