

Rap Sessions Study Guide

Politics & Hip Hop

By: Daniel White Hodge

In 2004, more than 20 million 18-29 year-olds voted for president, an increase of 4.6 million voters up from the year 2000. 2004 was the highest level of national youth voter participation in over a decade. Much of the voter increase can be attributed to efforts on the part of young activists and organizers to galvanize the youth vote using the power and influence of Hip Hop, the pop youth culture of our time. The 2008 presidential election promises to be an electrifying race for young people where their vote is expected to have a major impact. With the election less than a year away, now, more than ever, Hip Hop's ability to morph into a political force is being tested like never before. Add a woman and African American to an already high stakes election and Hip Hop's ability to weigh in on the 2008 race becomes even more significant; couple that with the already mobilized and politically savvy Hip Hop generation and you have a powerful movement that could help shape politics and social change for the 21st century.

Presented in a town hall meeting format, this highly interactive 90 minute forum is led by leading Hip Hop activists, scholars and artists. The goals of this town hall style meeting are to help young people think through the range of issues associated with Hip Hop & politics; place on the table the tensions and animosities between suburban America and urban American Rap Sessions seeks to present youth with viable strategies they can implement in their personal lives and organizations for the next generation.

This study guide seeks to examine the social constructs of politics and Hip Hop. The study questions here are listed to continue the conversation that was started during the Rap Sessions forum. This study guide works best when done in a group or community setting. The community based learning format is preferred because we tend to learn more when others share, interact, and engage with our thoughts and opinions. We recommend you go deeper as a group on this particular subject. [Start here](#) and view the Rap Sessions *Digital Stories* which will also help direct you through this study guide.

For Starters...

This timely community forum on Hip Hop and politics engages students and gets them to go deeper with the issues of politics and Hip Hop. To begin, start by answering the first few questions in a group of 2-3:

- Voter registration and voter education what is at stake for youth?
- What are the political issues that matter to the Hip Hop generation?
- Why does the Hip Hop vote count and to whom?

- How has Obama inspired a new generation of the Black community?
- Is Obama “Hip Hop?” Explain your answer.

Now, get into larger groups and begin discussing these questions below:

- How can local Hip Hop organizers influence the outcome of the 2008 presidential election?
- What can student activists do to mobilize the Hip Hop vote?
- Understanding the issues, candidates, the role of the Federal Elections Commission and more, how can Hip Hop have a positive influence on youth to get out and vote?

Probing Deeper...

Take a look at these two video clips: [Video 1](#) [Video 2](#)

Now, watch this video ([Click Here](#))

Now, take a moment to reflect on what was said in the videos. What is your initial response?

- What do you feel as you watch this taking place?
- How has Hip Hop helped/ not helped with these phenomena?
- How do you think the prison industrial complex is both politically motivated and racially motivated? If you do not believe that it is, then explain why it is you believe that.
- How are drugs like Levitra, Viagra, and Cialis similar and or different from “drugs” like Marijuana, alcohol, and caffeine? What makes those latter drugs so “bad?”
 - Should “drugs” like Marijuana be legalized or are “drugs” like that merely politicized? Explain what you mean.
- Do you think that Hip Hop has a strong enough voice to advocate change or does Hip Hop simply get stereotyped as “gangsta” or too violent?
 - How might Hip Hop make a difference with issues such as these?

In a 1994 interview, Tupac Shakur stated that he wanted to have a Hip Hop political party to run in the 2000 elections. This party was not to be Democrat or Republican, it was to be its own identity and represent the needs, wants, desires, and hopes of a Hip Hop generation. Tupac was preparing for this and raising money when his untimely death occurred on September 13, 1996.

- Based on this, how do you think the political climate might have changed if there were a Hip Hop political party?
 - Would it be as corrupt or dishonest as some political parties?
 - How would it avoid the corruption?

- ❑ How might this presidential election be affected if Hip Hop had a running individual?
- ❑ As long as an individual meets the presidential criteria to be president, almost anyone in the U.S. can run for president. That is part of the democratic process and ideology. However, given that in 2007 Mitt Romney spent \$50 million of his own money just to run and be defeated by John McCain, how can someone, say, from inner city America ever aspire to even be the president?
 - Could Hip Hop even help with this?
 - How might future presidential candidates that have a heart and passion for both Hip Hop and inner city America get elected?
 - Do you think Barack Obama has a heart for Hip Hop?

Examining Hip Hop's Political Constructs...

Take a look at this video [here](#).

Michael Eric Dyson argues that Crack becomes political and that Crack helped create a lot of the social and economic conditions in our community today. Moreover, many Hip Hoppers feel that Ronald Reagan played a part in Crack not only being distributed in inner city America, but also specifically targeting Black communities with the drug.

- ❑ Share your feelings on these sentiments.
- ❑ What has been your experience with the political economy of Crack cocaine?
- ❑ What are your thoughts about Crack being sold and distributed to directly destroy Black and Brown communities?
- ❑ How does the issue of immigration politically connect with what is going on in the video clip?
- ❑ What does Dick Gregory mean by the CIA is more corrupt than Hitler? Break that down a little more.
- ❑ How did the Reagan Bush era affect Hip Hop today?
- ❑ What was KRS-One talking about in regards to the police being drug pushers?

Does George Bush hate Black people? Was Kanye right when he made this statement? Let's ponder this a little further. Take a look at both of these video clips: [Video 1](#), [Video 2](#)

- ❑ How does Hip Hop help bring to the surface the deep seated feelings of the urban community?
- ❑ What do you think Kanye meant with his statement? Be specific?
- ❑ How as the U.S. government let Black and Brown people down for the last century?

- For that matter, how has the current administration bull-dogged their way across the globe?
- Where does Hip Hop have a role in all of this?

Hip Hop and politics is nothing new, when the power of media came in the form of *Yo MTV Raps* back in the 80's, rap and Hip Hop took on more social conscious form and made history. Hip Hop tends to point out the injustices of the urban community in a raw unedited form. Many people find that offensive and hard to believe. Yet, often many rappers predictions and or statements about political and social injustices have either been true or come to be true. So, what do we do with that? Moreover, how does this historical election play a role in the shaping of the next generation of Hip Hoppers? We are facing some great challenges in the 21st century and Hip Hop is on the leading edge of discussing those issues. It is important to not only discuss these issues, but also move out and get involved at some level! If you haven't already done so, register to vote!

For Further Reading

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Daniel White Hodge

Dan White Hodge is a dynamic speaker, scholar, Hip Hop theologian, Tupac Shakur scholar, & racial bridge builder that connects Urban Popular culture (*Including but not limited to Hip Hop, Race/ Ethnicity, class, socio-cultural concerns, The Black Church, & The Emergent Urban Church*) with daily life events. Having received his PhD from Fuller Graduate School of Intercultural Studies, his dissertation focused on the life, theology, and spiritual message of Tupac Amaru Shakur (TITLE: *Baptized in Dirty Water: The Missiological Gospel of Tupac Amaru Shakur*). Dan has been an active member of the Hip Hop Community since he was in first grade, and continues to not only study the culture, but live it as well. His unique perspective on Hip Hop and Theology challenges his audiences to look beyond the "outer surface" and go into the deeper parts of the culture. Dr. White Hodge is currently working on a book entitled "*Tha Hostile Gospel: Missionally Engaging The Theology of Hip Hop*." This book is being published by Inner Varsity Press and deals with the theology and spirituality of Hip Hop culture.