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**OP-ED: The BET Awards '08 Was All About Positivity and Unity**

Posted on Oct 21, 2008, 0 replies

By: Tameka Jo Pauldo

For the third year in a row, the BET Hip-Hop Awards were held in Atlanta, Georgia. But this year's vibe was a little different and didn't include the bitter rivalries and beefs between rappers that normally exist at these types of events. Instead, it was centered on positivity, unity, and yes...Barack and Michelle Obama <-more-->

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After about two hours of photographers snapping pictures of celebrities on the Red Carpet, that included heavyweights like T.I., Big Boi, 50 Cent, and LL Cool J, the doors of the Civic Center were open to thousands of eager fans ready to see their favorite entertainers perform.

Ushers were on deck to guide attendees inside the auditorium that seats about 4,600 people. The announcer was on point, counting down each second, warning guest that doors would be closing at start time. The intended host was

Katt Williams; however, he didn't show up. According to rumored reports on the web, he was arrested by police which prevented him from being there. But as the saying goes, "one monkey doesn't stop the show," and the pint-sized comedian was replaced, surprisingly by T-Pain who got the show poppin'.

Who would've thunk it, Mr. Teddy P. holding down the two-hour long ceremony? But believe it or not, he was the best host the BET Awards have seen in a long time. He kept the crowd laughing out loud all night, and of course, he had to bring out the infamous voice tuner to assist him on stage.

The opening act was none other than T.I. who missed last year's production, because he was arrested after allegedly purchasing firearms from an undercover cop. And, he most definitely made up for that little mishap, performing his new single featuring Ludacris titled, "On Top of the World." Apparently, T.I. and Ludacris squashed their differences to come together on this hot collaboration, in which both rappers reflect on the struggle they endured in their younger days to make it where they are in life today; successful rappers who help put Atlanta on the map.

Shawty Lo, T.I.'s one-time rival even gave him a shout out during his acceptance speech, after winning MySpace Music Rookie of the Year. (I told yall there was nothing but "love in the air")

The theme of the '08 Hip-Hop Awards was appropriately named Game On., as we are counting down the final days to the election. Huge scoreboards made a statement as decorative props on the stage, but the biggest message of the night was unity. Every time a celebrity approached the mic, they expressed the importance of everyone coming together by going to vote on Election Day. The hip-hop community has openly embraced presidential hopeful Barack Obama and countless "Barack and Michelle shout outs" bellowed across the room throughout the night.

In light of the recent spotlight that was put on the world of Hip-Hop when Don Imus' controversial remarks suggested that rappers were to blame, BET took the time to shed light on the positive things artists are doing to give back to their hometowns and less fortunate neighborhoods. Several stars, including T.I. and Lil' Wayne's foundations were featured on big screens between segments, as they gave brief introductions about their organizations and how they help to make inner-city communities better.

LL Cool J presenting Russell Simmons with the "I Am Hip-Hop" Icon Award was among the stand out [inspirational] moments, and the Female old school tribute was the highlight of the night, as rappers MC Lyte, YoYo, Lady of Rage, and Salt n Pepa (with Spinderella on the turntable) took the stage with a medley performance. The crowd went wild, lip-syncing all the words to the ladies classic throwback hits.

In the end, despite all the ups and downs, and harsh criticism that Hip-Hop artists and their music have received, the legacy remains clear that Hip-Hop is Alive! And, it looks as though there's no stopping a culture that has embraced

"us" since day one! A sense of hope and optimism was restored among African-Americans, thanks to Hip-Hop and our next president, Barack Obama!

Be sure to check out all this "Black Star Power" airing on BET Thurs., Oct. 23 @ 8 p.m. ET.