

Cards and Letters

Rock 'n' roll or racism?

Regarding your three-part series on MTV, a close and intellectual scrutiny can't help but to reveal the pervasive presence of an evil that lies at the core of MTV and rock radio, and threatens to strike at the very heart and soul of rock 'n' roll — racism. There is little doubt that, like her next-of-kin album-oriented, or more appropriately, "apartheid-oriented," radio, MTV is nothing more than the music industry advocate of cultural white supremacy and racial separation.

MTV's racist bent first was widely publicized when singer Rick James' video was refused air-time by the station's program directors. James' protestations made news (including NBC nightly news) when he brought up the race issue. MTV denied that James' race was a factor in refusal of the video, and simply stated that, its format was limited to "rock and roll," and James' music was not included in its definition of rock music. However, it hardly was ironic that no other black performers' videos had been accepted, either.

A "breakthrough" of sorts occurred when Walter Yetnikoff, president of CBS Records, threatened to pull MTV's video clips of Eddie Money, Pink Floyd, and Journey if MTV maintained its refusal to play Michael Jackson's videos. The little headway made by this, however, was evidenced in the July Billboard review of the MTV Adds and Rotation: Number of black artists with new videos added: zero; black artists in Heavy Rotation: two; Medium Rotation: one; Light Rotation: one (that old category-stomper, Donna Summer); number of black performers with MTV concerts or specials in the history of the station: zero.

Further evidence of antipathy toward blacks was seen at a recent anniversary party for Musician magazine in New York, attended by MTV. The Police, whose tour was being sponsored by MTV, were to attend and party-goers were treated to a performance by bassist Jamaaladeen Tacuma and his band, Cosmetic. The MTV camera crew spent its time shuttling members of the B-52's, the Psychedelic Furs, Musician, and other white celebrities before its cameras. Despite the fact that Tacuma's group was appearing at the request of Police guitarist Andy Summers, MTV specifically refused an interview with Tacuma, who is black. It would be very interesting to hear whether there is any justification other than race for that situation.

The issue of race has been raised by some prominent people in music itself. During a January interview David Bowie tongue-tied VJ Mark Goodman when he asked him on the air why they didn't play more black music. Also, in the September issue of Record, the director of a Michael Jackson video labelled the MTV people as outright "racist bastards."

Throughout this period, MTV maintained — and continues to — that its decisions are based solely on one criteria: is it rock and roll? They noted that when blacks make videos with heavy rock and roll guitar, such as Jackson's "Beat It," they get played on MTV. But where is the "heavy guitar" in the music of Duran Duran, Dexy's Midnight Runners or Thomas Dolby?

Benjamin J. Eicher
second year
College of Law

Long day . . .

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At the end, there is a twist — Harold thinks he has discovered who is after him and why, and he believes he has solved the problem. Even though the deal of his life has fallen through because of what an American calls a "mess," Harold feels proud and confident, in the Dunkirk tradition, when he's pushed into a car and onto the roulette wheel once more. He seems almost to smile.

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