

ENTERTAINMENT

Look Out Gangsta Rappers! You Done Got Mamma Mad

By Chester Higgins, Sr.
WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Uh! Oh! Snoop Doggy Dogg, Ice-T, Niggaz With Attitudes! You done gone and got Momma mad!

And anybody with smarts knows you should never get her started!

In a crowded Russell Senate Building, the National Political Congress of Black Women and its Entertainment Commission formally declared war on Gangsta Rap and its filthy, misogynist lyrics.

Dr. C. Delores Tucker, who chairs the organization, flatly declared that this music is simply "not acceptable" to America's Black women and other decent Americans.

She called it "pornography," pure and simple and introduced a Baker's dozen of national Black organization leaders, including representatives of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the National Newspaper Publishers Association, the National Association of Black-Owned Broadcasters, the NAACP, the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority and others, who chorused a loud "Amen!" as they faced a forest of news cameras.

A local funeral director movingly underscored Dr. Tucker's anguish by declaring he was burying four young Black today, victims of the drugs-induced Gangsta Rap violent culture "and I don't want any more of this business." Washington, D.C., has been dubbed "the Murder Capital of the World." Already this year more than 400 murders have been committed as the city appears on its way to breaking its own bloody record. Most of the victims are young Blacks killed by other Blacks.

Joe Morgan, a board member of the NAACP and host of a popular radio talk show,

said it is not sufficient for radio programs to bleep out offensive words "because kids listening can supply the censored words, and then go out and buy the record."

The NPCBW's Entertainment Committee is co-chaired by luminaries Melba Moore and Dionne Warwick, both internationally acclaimed artists, and Teri Rossi, an entertainment industry executive.

Dr. Tucker disclosed that U.S. Sen. Carol Moseley Braun (D-IL) has agreed to hold a Senate hearing on the controversial music that she calls simply "pornographic" early next year. She said support for her drive is gathering national momentum and coming from a number of surprising sources.

Looking at this well-dressed, highly educated, cultured and sophisticated group of Black women and their Black male supporters, one begins to wonder what happened and when. How did such gross behavior -- scatological talk engaged in only in the most private male circles when we were growing up -- become common and more or less publicly accepted?

To raise the question can be an exercise in futility. Sophocles once said: "It's a sorrow to be wise when wisdom profits not." Black music is America's only popular indigenous music, accepted with reverence, globally. Travel anywhere in the world, as I have, and you'll discover the truth of this.

The old field slave "holler" songs give little clue. Nor do early blues. Jazz, which began in the bordellos of New Orleans contained sly, insinuating lyrics and, indeed the word "jazz" itself, suggested a double meaning not to be explained in polite company. But nothing explicit like gangsta rap.

Gospel paved an often happy road to the celestial hereafter. Nothing suggestive there. Scat singing ala Jon Hendricks and Bobby McFerrin, is a rapid, stylistically staccato delivery style, pleasing to the ear, but containing no hint of early gangsta rap porno.

Mr. B. was a wonderful balladeer, so was Nat King Cole, who became a star after he "got piano playing" and that trio off his back, both gentlemen of distinct order; the bodacious James Brown had nothing in "Papa's Brand New Bag" that even faintly resembled the foul-mouthed filth spewed by today's gangsta rappers.

Bessie Smith's blues singing could be suggestive, but nothing, as I say, explicit. Lady Day sang of a bitter "Strange Fruit" and Nina Simone was even more outraged with her "Mississippi Goddam." But none of it in the gangsta rap mode. Then there are Aretha, the Motown Sound stars -- from Diana Ross and Little Stevie Wonder to the Jackson Five and now Michael Jackson, the latter who makes some highly sexually suggestive moves in dance. But still no gangsta rap.

Chubby Checker is a twistin' deverish; Joe Williams Day (I have the Blues); the Divine Sarah and Ella and Lord knows -- you'll need the Encyclopedia Britannica to list them. Sterling artists all. But nothing in this musical continuum to hint at the dark (no) white lurking-to-be-born streak, porno rap.

Maybe the rappers took note of the in-your-face machismo of the 1960s Black Panthers; the scathing scatological stage rap of an early Richard Pryor or Eddie Murphy. Or some other angry cats who came out of some strange and frustrated ghetto bags.

Anyway, Dr. Tucker is leading a national group of influential Black women, to put an end to the public airing of gangsta rap filth. I say it's about time momma got mad enough to do something about it. After all these are her (and our) children!

Ladysmith Black Mambazo Brings African Harmonies To Life At UPS



Ladysmith Black Mambazo

In its only Northwest appearance, Ladysmith Black Mambazo will perform on Sunday, Jan. 30, at 8 p.m., in the Memorial Fieldhouse, University of Puget Sound. Tickets are \$12 for general admission, and are available at Ticketmaster outlets, and the Student Union Information Center, 756-3419.

These nine Zulu men, most well-known for their work on Paul Simon's Graceland project, have most recently received rave reviews for their role as the omnipotent chorus in "The Song of Jacob Zulu," a drama about the effect of the ironies in South African society.

The traditional music sung by Ladysmith Black Mambazo is called *Isicathamiya*. It was born in the mines of South Africa. Black workers were taken by rail to mines far away from their homes and families, where they were poorly housed and paid worse. After a six-day week they would entertain themselves by singing songs into the wee hours of every Sunday morning.

The workers called it *Cothoza Mfana*, meaning "to walk on toes, lightly." This was a challenge to the performers' ability to practice without disturbing the white camp guards as they practiced their dance steps at night, during the week. When miners returned to their homelands, the tradition returned with them.

Joseph Shabalala is the founder and leader of the Mambazo, along with his brother Headman Shabalala, who was shot dead a year ago along a highway near their township of Durban. When questioned as to what the group would do without Headman, Joseph's answer was simple. They would sing. Said Shabalala, "This is Joseph Shabalala had sung with various groups during the '50s and '60s, but was rarely satisfied with the results. Then a dream came to him, and there he heard the harmony he wanted to teach to others. He recruited members of his immediate family, and he taught the group the harmonies from his dream.

A radio broadcast brought about their first recording contract in 1970 and the rest was only a matter of time. Brought into the spotlight by Simon's 1987 Graceland tour, the group remains one of Africa's most acclaimed artists, having sold more than 3 million records. In 1988, their recording, "Shaka Zulu," won the Grammy for Best Traditional Music Recording. They have toured the globe extensively and have worked in television, films and commercials. Soundtrack work in Eddie Murphy's "Coming to America," and Marlon Brando's "Dry White Season," their critically-acclaimed appearance in Michael Jackson's "Moonwalker," their award-winning 7-Up commercial and their appearances on "Sesame Street" have kept them quite visible.

Ladysmith Black Mambazo is sponsored by ASUPS Cultural Events. For more information, contact the Student Union Information Center, 756-3419.

Cutting Through The Crap On Gangsta Rap Coverage

By Todd Burroughs

"Rap music is an externalization of highly charged inner feelings shared commonly by young Black people."

--James G. Spady, co-editor of the book, Nation Conscious Rap: The Hip-Hop Vision

Some things to take not of as the white media continues to write and broadcast about "gangsta rap":

1) No disrespect intended, but Stanley Crouch (the author) and William Raspberry (The Washington Post columnist) are NOT -- I repeat, are NOT -- experts on hip-hop music and Black youth. They are far away from the reality of "gangsta rap" and its problems as Washington, D.C. from Mars.

Crouch and Raspberry may be Black, but they are NOT youth-oriented, are NOT Afrocentric and did NOT grow up in the (sub-) culture that the White media obviously feel they are qualified to talk about.

It's well past time for the White media to expand their rolotexes to include people whose point of reference on race they don't agree with as well as those they don't like (which is often the same thing in the White media culture).

2) John Leland of Newsweek finally got it right (almost!) when he wrote the following in its recent cover story on gangsta rap: "The problem of urban violence is much bigger than rap... The music, the industry, the White and Black audiences all push the performers back toward their roots and reward them for staying close. But these forces aren't villains, just unwitting accomplices. The real problems

are outside the music, not within."

Kevin Powell, a gifted young Black writer for whom I have a lot of respect, wrote in Vibe Magazine (a White-edited Rolling Stone-type magazine for hip-hop), some comments that should be looked into, in the light of Leland's statement.

He points out in a recent issue that "the 'harder' the artists act, the more successful they become; from the ghettos to the suburbs, hard-core rap is selling like crazy. Record companies can't get enough of this gangsta boogie. And if it's 'the real niggas' who get the most loot, naturally everybody wants to be real nigga. So, does being hard mean being real or does it mean - dare I say it -- selling out? Being hard is not a question of reality anymore -- it's an aesthetic choice, a marketing decision. Call it hardness for sale."

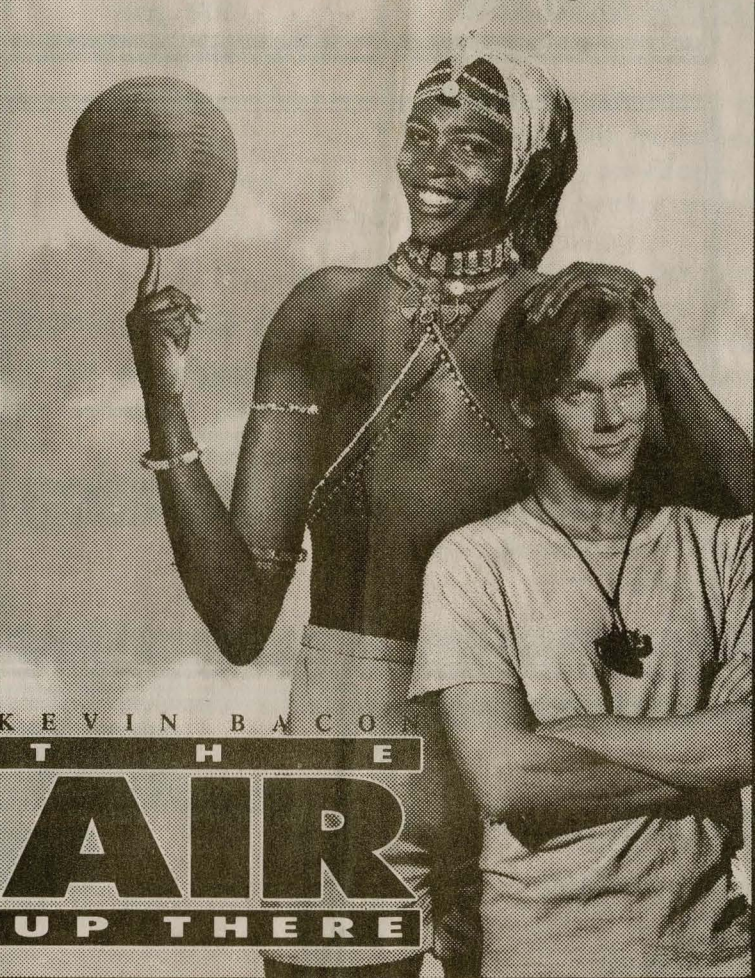
If Powell is correct, then how could a (White-owned) record company be an "unwitting accomplice?" And if the majority of hip-hop record-buyers in this country are White, who is selling this stuff to whom, and how does this contribute to the image distorting of African Americans? And are Blacks who play the role of the gangsta rapper voluntarily contributing to this madness, and at what price to the Black community?

3) If it is the responsibility of the Black community to provide answers to its own problems, any suggestions? If the answer is "yes," send them to the Black newspaper that has printed this column. If you know anyone who could write about this issue, have them contact this newspaper as well.

"The 'COOL RUNNINGS' of basketball films."

— Paul Wunder, WBAI-FM

Jimmy Dolan went to Africa to recruit a new player.
What he found was a whole new ballgame.



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