

A Series: THE BLACK FAMILY AND THE CHALLENGES OF THE 80's

PART VI - OUR CHILDREN AND EDUCATION IN THE '80s

By Maudra Jones

It was November 1974 in New Orleans when I was interviewed by an enthusiastic young newsreporter for the Southern University "Observer." Our high spirited discussion of the events surrounding the National Conference of Black Lawyers' 3-day meeting at Dillard University, trailed off into an examination of the "tone" of popular music at that time. We were, ("Patch" and I) reciting the songs of Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, Aretha Franklin, Donny

Hathaway, Bill Withers, to name a few -- all of whom I called "social scientists" of our times. It was during that period that their music (lyrics) took on deep life-meanings. The words were about spiritual, moral and social issues - speaking to the hearts of Black people, particularly Black families. Words like "Save the babies," Grandma's hands used to lift our face and tell us..., "Hold your head up high", "...they can't take away my dignity..."

to another set of issues and another set of values in an already complicated world of drugs, crime, unemployment...violence, child abuse, injustice, discord...Music, like television has a definite

discussion hosted by Jerry Phillips titled -- "Suggestive Black Music in the Community." Saleem Hylton, President of BMA (Black Music Association), Capital City Chapter of Washington D.C.,

highlighted the discussion on lyrics in Black music for the publication "Positive Energy," December 1982. The following is a reprint of Mr. Hylton's review:

our lives when we clean-up the lyrics and write more from the heart and not so much the mind and flesh.

Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff, and a few others, have been doing it for some time. However, we all need to get down with it in the eighties. We as black writers, musicians and the like, must realize what our true roles are as being products of the oppressed people, and begin to take our work more seriously. We must set a better example for our children. I believe that one can produce dance music with enlightening or inspirational lyrics and be even more effective in terms of reaching our young positively. Remember, its all in the rhythm and the beat.

I conclude on this note. The parent nor the consumer have to put up with the negative music that is being played on the radio. We have to stop disregarding what's being played on the radio, because the music definitely has an impact on the minds of our children.

I challenge all black radio station owners and management to be more sensitive to the nature of the music that is played on their airways so that a more conscientious effort can be made toward programming music with a more positive lyric content. After-all, it's about communication. We must be about sharing some of our positive experiences as well as the knowledge we acquire which makes us better people. Cleaning up the music plays an important part in our struggle to survive in this industry so LET'S GET IT ON!"

The question arises: What, in light of the foregoing, becomes our responsibility as parents and extended family members? Our children are looking to us for the answers and the examples.

"I believe the children are our future - teach them well and let them lead the way, show them all the beauty they possess inside...Give them a sense of pride to make it easier. Let the children's laughter remind us how we used to be..."

From the song, "The Greatest Love", written by Michael Masser and Linda Creed.

Some of us were listening and responding from the heart. Others of us were just dancing to the beat. Many of us were especially concerned that too few of our children were listening to the message and learning about the real issues of life that were being translated through songs. The messages

were about charity, hope, faith, peace, strength, courage, unity, progress and survival. They were songs that could "take you higher -- and they were "good enough to sing."

Now, a decade later, our children are listening carefully to a new brand of "social scientists" -- "educating" our children



Maudra Jones

impact on our children. Music is a message. And if the messages our children are receiving today continue to be transmitted without guidance or a solid moral foundation, then we will see the results in their behavior and in the things they value.

Recently, Washington D.C.'s WHUR-FM Morning Sound Show presented a panel

America. Even before our people came to this country -- music played a very significant role in the everyday lives of the African people. As an example, the drum was the main means of communicating. Marriages, funerals, new births and all other special occasions were celebrated with some form of music and dance.

During the times of slavery, the spirituals were sung to express the true feelings of those who were put into bondage and made to work for little or nothing. "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" is a song which was often sung when times were bad and it seemed to always reinforce hope for those who did not have strong faith. The music is always created as a reflection of the times and experiences for those who created it. Blues, jazz, rhythm and blues all came at different

Black writers and producers of today, have no excuse for creating negative material, because there are so many positive things to express in our music in 1982. Yet, some are still producing what I call "garbage music" or "bubble gum music" which has no positive affect on those who hear it.

Let me define the two. "Garbage music" is the music that you hear mostly on black radio. Its usually sex oriented and sometimes violent. Disco was mostly garbage music. "Bubble gum music" is the music that is produced primarily for the youth.

This music has a lot of rhythm and drums and is designed for dancing. The only problem I have with the "bubble gum music" is that there are no positive lyrics to go along with that rhythm and drum beat. I believe that the music will have a greater impact on all of

"We Must Clean-Up Our Music"

"Music has always had a direct affect on the lives of black people in periods, mainly as a result of negative experiences.

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