

# Miller Brewing Co.'s tribute to rock n' roll stirs race animosity

By Makebra Anderson  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA)—Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Fats Domino and Jimi Hendrix have been credited with creating rock n' roll, but Miller Brewing Co. has created a controversy by promoting an all-White celebration of rock music.

A recent Miller Brewing Co. promotion in partnership with Rolling Stone magazine chose to celebrate the "50th Anniversary of Rock 'n' Roll" by featuring Rolling Stone cover shots of Elvis Presley, Blondie, Alice Cooper, Bon Jovi, Def Leppard, Joe Walsh, Eric Clapton and Willie Nelson on Miller beer cans. They did that even though six of the first 10 Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame inductees: Chuck Berry, James Brown, Ray Charles, Sam Cooke, Fats Domino and Little Richard were Black.

"I can't imagine that this was intentional," says Robert Thompson, a professor of pop culture at Syracuse University. "From what I've been hearing from the reports by the Miller Co., they were limited to Rolling Stone covers. Obviously Rolling Stones weren't being published when the real pioneers were bringing the pot to a boil."

Rolling Stone was first published November 9, 1967 with John Lennon on the cover. Since then, it has published more than 20 issues with Blacks on the cover. In fact, Jimi Hendrix has been on the cover six times and was crowned the "Greatest Guitarist of All Time." Other African-American cover subjects have included Sun Ra, James Brown, Little Richard and Robert Cray.

Miller now admits that it erred in not including Blacks in the promotion.

"We took a hard look at the situation and realize where we fall short. You can count on Miller to step up," Virgis Colbert, Miller's executive vice president of worldwide operations said.

The commemorative can series is only one aspect of the campaign. Another aspect is "Rock Through Time"—a two-day New York City concert featuring James Brown, Bo Diddley, Wyclef Jean and Lenny Kravitz will be held September 17-18 at Roseland Ballroom.

"We regret what happened and we would have definitely done things differently if we would have realized the potential harm," says Larry Waters, manager of corporate relations for Miller Brewing Co. "We are proud of our diversity efforts and our programs like the Thurgood Marshall Scholarship and our minority entrepreneurial program. We are committed to supplier diversity and we don't want people to lose sight of our track record."

He said the exclusion of Black artists had everything to do with licensing.

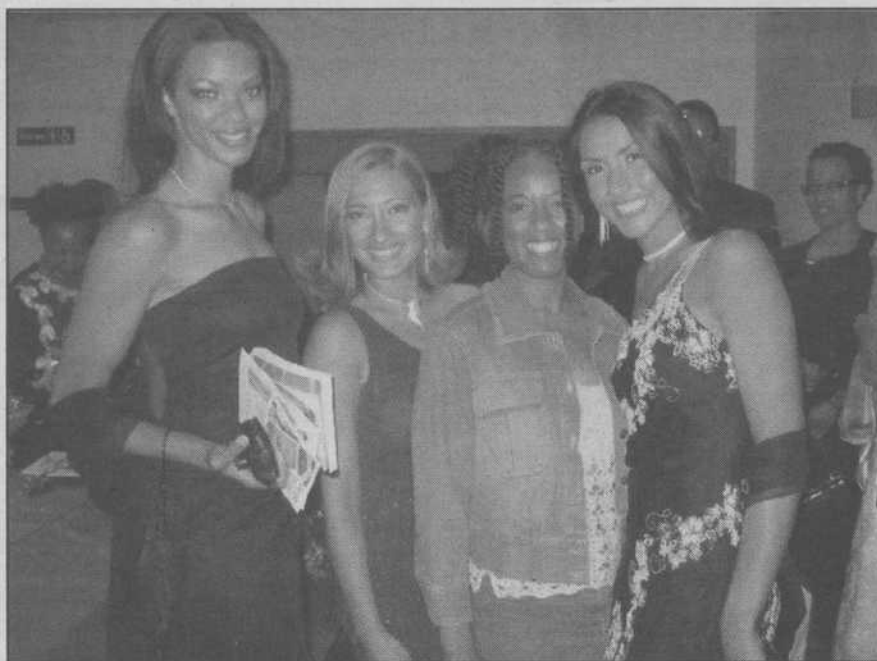
"We tried to secure a list of legends, including Jimi Hendrix, Chuck Berry and James Brown, but for various reasons permission (to use their images) wasn't granted," Waters said. "Obviously, we should have pursued it further." Waters claims that several artists didn't want to be associated with an alcoholic beverage company, or simply didn't respond to Rolling Stones inquiries.

Since the early 50's, rock music has dominated an aspect of American pop culture. It became the first style of music exclusively for young people and was developed by mixing African-American rhythm and blues with White country.

"Certainly the artists featured on the cans aren't the most important," Professor Thompson said. "Anyway of trying to look at this as a hall of fame is not appropriate. It's simply eight popular artists."

Eight popular White artists.

"I think this was more of an issue of carelessness than anything else," Thompson says. "(NAACP President and CEO) Kwame Mfume nailed it when he said of television networking 'They're either careless or clueless or both.' This was definitely an act of carelessness. Miller execs didn't realize what an enormously obvious omission this was."



## TOP MODELS

From left to right: Dereka Hendon stands with Helen Dias, Tekiah Smith of "The Cosby Show" fame and Priscilla Dias. Hendon, a Las Vegas native living in Chicago, recently won the title of 2004 Chicago Model of the Year. The annual contest is put on by Creative United. The only non-Chicagoan in the competition, the Vo-Tech graduate and former UNLV student is a systems engineer in downtown Chicago.

Photo special to Sentinel-Voice

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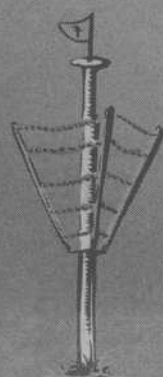
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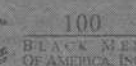
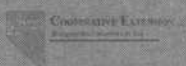


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