

Blackness we can put our money behind!

By Adam Katzman
GUEST WRITER

In the process of getting Mania Music Group approved for Serendipity, I nearly broke down when someone in Senate asked if this unverified rap group would be problematic.

While understood in the context of Mickey Avalon, the present circumstances that question was asked under unveil an underlying prejudice. Like, why did no one ask why we're spending who knows how much on a group of white guys playing southern-fried noodling with a Malian melengoni thrown in?

You could have done that for \$2,000 with predominantly white Michigan Afrobeat enthusiasts NOMO (I spoke to their agent last semester).

Better yet, for that kind of money, why not have gotten actual African artists? Why didn't they consider actual Malians like Amadou & Mariam? Or the DRC-based electric thumb-piano percussion group Kono No. 1?

Afrobeat legend Hugh Masekela is still playing shows, but he's better off with people who actually listen to African music, right? Guilford is too busy being progressive to pay respects to African culture outside of a possible documentary in Bryan Jr. Auditorium.

And then there's Holy Ghost Tent Revival, who don't even bother with the rest of the world, because they're busy playing American roots music. Great.

So the moment a black rapper drops

b- and n-bombs in songs, it's like, "What? Did they use the n-word? Are they talking about our women? Put a leash on their barbaric blackness!"

It suggests that Mickey Avalon's problematic factor wasn't his misogyny, glorified drug abuse, or general crudity (who was expecting better from the rap section of MySpace's music label?), but that he

hook as opposed to being called out for its misogyny. No, they think, "love songs are soulful...oh, soul! Now that's black music I can get behind!" Yes, thirty years too late.

Essentially the only rapper that can perform without scrutiny is Common, who we paid exorbitant sums for two years ago.

Why? Because he's a "conscious rapper," essentially meaning that he can be held up

McDonald's when they want to reach the urban market by writing Lovin' instead of Loving in their trademarked phrases and doing an R&B jingle to back it up.

Making matters worse, Common, for all his supposedly elevated lifestyle accounts for, made not only a GAP commercial (sweatshop haven, because the streets of China aren't as important as the hood in Chicago) but a whole song for a Coke commercial about keeping it real (as opposed to "not selling out.") But not even the conscious ship lasted that long.

Anyone interested in seeing Common play into what's "popular," check his last album Universal Mind Control, where he pulls a Mickey Avalon, as if he wasn't in the rap game for 15 years but was instead 15 years old.

The whole thing reeks of commodified solidarity. We'll decide what luminaries from underprivileged communities to spend money on, and that way we can set up a venerable collection of progressive and "civilized" black products, while simultaneously distancing ourselves from erroneous statistics about the majority white consumer demographic that purchases rap.

Arguing that it's the white consumers whose preferences for misogynistic, materialistic violence gives white record executives the incentive to mold the apparently servile and malleable black kids into honky-approved Sambos for white consumption suggests that black people don't make decisions, that they're too good to think for themselves, and that now we have to save them from destructive immorality.

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was doing it in the overtly eyebrow-raising framework of the predominantly black genre of rap music. Not a problem was that his cherry picking of rap's material excesses without the socio-political factors that shade their existence is basically a minstrel show, in which he's putting on the white presumption of black regressiveness.

If he were some kid with a guitar writing pained songs about anonymous females that ruined his reason for being by breaking his heart, and the only thing he could do was recycle and perpetuate the tradition of dudes singing about archetypal heartbreakers (i.e. women) that make up the bane of their existence, he would be left off the

as a light against the dark recesses of woman-hating, drug-running, gun-happy gangsters. Let's for a moment forget that Common once rapped the line "I house more hoes than Spelman."

We'll let that slide because Common raps about being positive, about being non-violent and anti-gangsta. He says words like "revolutionary" and writes songs called "The People."

That half of Common's lyrics are made up of lazy pop culture references is not really a populist form of witty poetics. Being a major-label rapper with large corporate capital, it amounts to synergistic strategies generally employed by companies like

Bush's No Child Left Behind Act needs more than a new brand

By Maria Kupper
STAFF WRITER

According to The New York Times article, "Rename Law? No Wisecrack Left Behind," the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) needs a more appropriate title.

Andrew Rotherham, who previously served as the Special Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy during the Clinton administration, announced a contest for the renaming of the law on Eduwonk.com. The New York Times cited such notable contestant ideas as the Double Back Around to Pick Up the Children We Left Behind Act, the Rearranging the Deck Chairs Act, the Teach to the Test Act and the Could We Start Again Please Act.

Many of the original NCLB policies date back to 1965. After Clinton, President George W. Bush also re-named the act, adding more required tests and accountability mechanisms.

However, since his popularity dwindled, education and government officials as well as the public began to mock the name of the NCLB. Yet people feel more comfortable making fun of Bush's legislation than agitating for policy change.

Arne Duncan, the Secretary of Education of the Obama administration believes that the program needs to be "re-branded." But so far the new administration has not proposed policy changes.

Simply renaming the program only

serves to create a new veneer for the same issues, whether or not the program was ill-served by the Bush Administration.

Currently the debate about the NCLB involves two major camps. According to Rotherham, many educators and advocates believe that public schools should not be held accountable for poor test results due to other more serious social factors, such as family problems, poor healthcare, and students' poor diets.

Others believe that the education system needs stringent consequences for schools who fail to meet the state's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) standards. These deterrents include relocating students to other schools, using school funding for tutoring programs, forced restructuring of the school or, after a certain amount of years of failing to meet AYP, even shutting the school down.

Although AYP requirements for test scores seem to be a strong effort by the government to oversee student progress, each state can decide its own standards, and have different tests.

At first, allowing students to relocate to other institutions seems to provide a safety valve for students. However, in places such as Chicago where this has come into practice, only one percent of eligible students could take advantage of the transfer option, because higher-performing schools were too full to fit in new students.

Revoking school funding because of a

school's failures seems counterproductive to an education system that desperately needs more money and better organization.

If the laws in place to help struggling students are not working, I wonder why the government is not enacting policy changes instead of simply making the title appease the public.

"Sometimes renaming can be a powerful indication of substantive change; sometimes renaming only gives the appearance of change," said Nancy Yoder, visiting associate professor of Education Studies.

"I think if educators (and all citizens) want meaningful change to NCLB, they need to be politically active - to be talking with people who can influence the legislation, insisting that only a name change is not enough," said Yoder.

The current situation for many students reflects that need for such political action.

"With dropout rates of nearly 50 percent for minority youngsters, and yawning gaps in achievement between white students and minority students, educational equity must be at the forefront of any effort to expand opportunity in America," Rotherham said.

Although re-branding may signify that lawmakers and government officials recognize the inefficacies of the NCLB, a new name will only be covering up for an education system laden with overly flexible standards, and safety valves that fail in practice.

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