

media

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“Don’t believe the hype.”

Flavour Flav
Public Enemy

Soul Man: Norman “Otis” Richmond

Norman “Otis” Richmond is the articulate host of *Diasporic Music* and *From a Different Perspective* on CKLN 88.1 FM. Both shows deal directly with the affairs and concerns of people of African Descent. Otis manages this while spinning the most devious selection of Black music ranging from classic Motown to hardcore hip-hop to reggae. As well as being a radio personality, Otis is also very active in the Black community and is the president of the Black Music Association (BMA) in Toronto.

I caught up with Otis after the completion of yet another highly informative show.

By Dalton Higgins

excalibur: For those people like myself, who aren’t aware of the Black Music Association, could you give me a brief explanation of what this organization is all about?

NR: The BMA was founded by Kenneth Gamble in Philadelphia. It is basically a trade association to fight for a fair share of the music industry for Black people. We started up a Toronto chapter and there was at one time eight or nine

chapters across the U.S., as well as one in England. We started the organization to uphold Black music. This includes the DJ’s, record companies, artists, and other people associated with the business, not just the singers and performers.

excalibur: You appear to have an extensive record collection, judging by the great records you play on your show. Who are your favourite Afro-American musicians?

NR: I like all kinds of music from the Black world. I respect Duke Ellington because he wrote music about history, he wrote about Africa, about Black people in the U.S. and about the Haitian revolution as well. I respect John Coltrane too. John Coltrane was like Malcolm X with a saxophone. I also like Max Roach and Dinah Washington to name a few.

excalibur: I know many people who believe that Black music is one of the greatest curiosities that white people have. Being involved in the music industry, what are your views on the exploitation of Black music (ie. New Kids on the Block and Vanilla Ice)?

NR: Vanilla Ice is like a minstrel. It started with white people, imitat-

dians don’t have that same mentality — to exploit the talent.

excalibur: Do you think Toronto will ever get a radio station that caters to the Black (urban, etc.) community?

NR: I certainly hope so. FM 108 has now changed their format to dance, although that is not in the hands of African people. African

“If now isn’t a good time for the truth I don’t see when we’ll get to it.”

Nikki Giovanni

ing Black people during slavery. Paul Whiteman became the King of Jazz, Benny Goodman became the King of Swing, and Elvis became the King of Rock’n’Roll; although Little Richard claimed he was the King and Queen of Rock’n’Roll. Vanilla Ice, I guess you could say, is like the Pat Boone of Rap. He is just not that talented, nothing personal.

excalibur: The fact that hip-hop, funk acts etc. have to ship their talent south of the border. What do you think about the state of the Canadian music industry?

NR: I don’t think Canadians take risks like the white people of corporate America. Most of the record companies are now owned by the Japanese, the Germans and the Dutch, but historically, the multinational records would see a Black artist and say “I give you a million dollars” because they know they can make 10 million off of them. These people are willing to put some money behind the artists because of this. Cana-

people don’t own that station. I am more concerned with Black people not just being the disc jockeys and singing the music, I am interested in Blacks exercising their ownership capabilities. I would like to see a Black owned and operated radio station or music company. I mean we can’t own a Chinese restaurant, music is like our oil, and I think we should be able to control this natural resource. Nobody should be able to get more than 49 percent of this natural resource from us. If we share our music with anyone, we should own at least 51 percent, the most we should give up is 49 percent. Black people have been put in a sharecropping situation, where we go into the back door to get 20 percent of something we should go into the front door to get 100 percent of. That’s the history of Black people, and the history of Black music.

Norman Otis Richmond can be heard Thursday from 8 - 10 pm and Sundays from 6 - 6:30 pm on CKLN 88.1 FM.

What's it gonna be, Black or White?

By Jomo Ashley Dey

African history month is a celebration of Black heritage. It is a time for Black people to become more aware of the perils of society and it also allows us to recognize and appreciate the advancements made by other Black people. During this special time Black superstars are looked to, especially by the younger generation, as positive examples of the success Blacks can achieve in the entertainment arena.

Michael Jackson, one of the most awarded names in music, epitomizes the word ‘entertainer.’ He has sold more albums than any other artist, with his best selling album *Thriller* surpassing forty million copies. He has reached legendary status. He is the King of Pop.

However, this larger-than-life superstar has a black mark against him, or should I say a “white” mark. To many, Michael Jackson has distanced himself from his heritage and culture. With the release of each new video it becomes more evident that he is choosing to disassociate himself from Black people. Witness his drastically changed appearance.

In “Black or White,” the most recent video from his latest album *Dangerous*, Jackson’s hair is longer and straighter and his skin appears even lighter than in pre-

vious videos. He appears to be making a conscious effort to alter the characteristics that are distinctive to Black people.

Most Blacks who grew up listening to Jackson find his transformation appalling. His actions alienate the very people who supported him and made him what he is today.

The King of Pop (which he was officially dubbed upon the release of *Dangerous*) has a knack for creating controversy. This, along with his enormous popularity, makes him an easy target for scrutiny. For instance, the premiere of his video “Black or White” (which went to the number one position on Billboard faster than any other single) caused a huge commotion as people tried to analyze what it “really meant.”

For some, the violence and “dirty dancing” is the source of controversy. For the Black community, however, it is the complexion of Jackson’s face that warrants attention. The theme of the song stresses racial harmony, with lyrics such as “It doesn’t matter if you’re Black or White” and “you shouldn’t spend your life being a colour.” Well, perhaps you shouldn’t spend your life being a colour, but you should accept your colour. Ironically, Jackson contradicts his own message. If it really doesn’t matter if you’re black or white then, then how

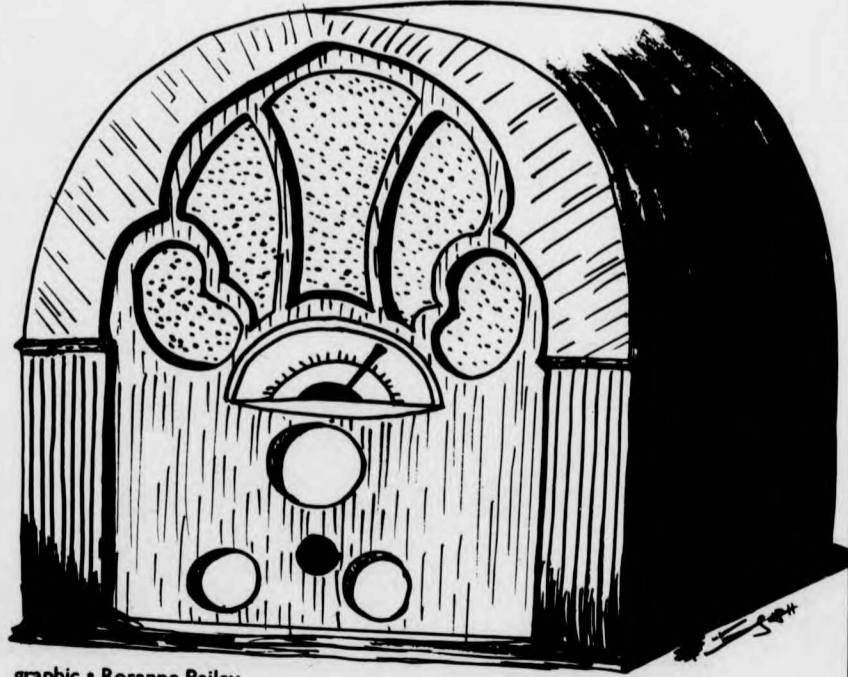
does he explain his fervent attempts to lighten his skin?

Looking back at his previous work, Jackson’s complexion was clearly darker than it is today. The transformation is obvious, and the underlying message is that being white is somehow better. This presents a negative outlook to young Blacks who see Jackson as a role model.

Jackson’s conscious rejection of his “Blackness” reinforces the idea that Blacks should neglect their community and culture once they have attained success in the white world. This is definitely not a message Blacks want perpetuated. The message we want to reach our young people is that you can achieve whatever goals you set for yourself and maintain a sense of pride without relinquishing your cultural identity.

Michael Jackson’s life is an American success story. The work he does is fabulous and should by no means be disregarded by Blacks or whites because of his changed appearance. But at the same time he must be held accountable for his actions. On a positive note, Teddy Riley, who helped produce Jackson’s latest album, said in a recent edition of *Rolling Stone Magazine* that Jackson’s gives the distinct impression of regretting some of the decisions he has made in the past about his appearance.

Well, it’s a start.



graphic • Rosanne Bailey