The Supremes Take A Show Business Bow To South Africa's Apartheid

The Price Is Right?

During the past summer, a talented and committed young Black man — exiled from South Africa and living now in London — was a visitor in New York for the purpose of trying to secure a television airing of a film which he had made at home at considerable risk to his life. That film, LAST GRAVE AT DIMBAZA, portrays the grim effects of the South African system of apartheid, with emphasis on what follows when Black South Africans are relegated to “homelands” cruelly incapable of sustaining life. The story of calculated genocidal destruction practiced by the state is treated through the metaphor of open graves.

For LAST GRAVE AT DIMBAZA shows death so prevalent that mothers, knowing full well the inevitable end of unrelieved starvation, dig graves for their children while yet the children live. The unavoidable point of the film is that we are a long ways from covering over the graves which receive Black children under such conditions.

On October 1st, the Black American singing stars, the SUPREMES, embarked for South Africa on a tour which their Black fellow artists, Black political figures, and members of the Black community had begged them not to make.

In choosing to ignore such pleas, it is possible that the Supremes were exercising their option as artists to perform for any audiences they choose. We concede that right. Nonetheless, such is the gravity of the situation in South Africa that we believe the SUPREMES — and Barry Gordy, Motown Head — should take time to explain to Black America just why they choose to honor with their presence the world’s most outspoken practitioners of Black genocide.

For the fact is that the South African regime is the prime colossus of racism in the world today, fanatically devoted to a policy of absolute domination — via physical, psychological, and economic rape and exploitation by a white minority — over millions of Black Africans, and to the absolute denial of all basic rights of humanity to these millions.

If any artist — Black or White — collaborates with such a nation in callous indifference to the plight of their suffering fellow human beings, such artists shame us all. For the purpose of art is the positive reaffirmation of life and human dignity, and not making a buck no matter whom it hurts.

The fabulously successful SUPREMES are slated to return from their visit on November 2nd. Perhaps they, and MOTOWN, will tell us then what we are barred from observing at first hand for ourselves:

How is it with our brothers and sisters who bury their babies at DIMBAZA?
Cover Story

Supremes Bow To South Africa's Apartheid . . .

By JAMES L. HICKS

"We take this pledge: In solemn resolve to refuse any encouragement of, or indeed, any professional association with, the present Republic of South Africa, until the day when all its people shall equally enjoy the educational and cultural advantages of that rich and beautiful land."

This was the opening paragraph of the text of a widely circulated advertisement distributed not to long ago by the American Committee on Africa, and signed by some of the biggest name in show business, such as Sammy Davis Jr., Bill Cosby, Richard Roundtree, Diahan Carroll, Dick Gregory, Fred O'Neal, Brock Peters, Barbara Walters, Joanne Woodward, Leonard Bernstein, Ruby Dee, Ossie Davis, Dave Brubeck, Paul Newman and a host of others.

The lead line in the ad, over the signature of its signers, said:

"We say no to apartheid"

Will You Say No To Apartheid?

The ad of course was show biz's way of letting the world know that the people behind the footlights don't like the racism of South Africa which forbids Blacks and whites to sit down together in the same theater and look across the footlights.

The punch line of the advertisement asked all who read it:

"Will you say no to apartheid?"

Well, evidently, one of the nation's top trio of Black stars either didn't read the advertisement—or were not influenced by what they read.

For last week the Supremes this nation's singinest, swinginest trio, packed their bags and baggage and headed for an engagement in South Africa—apartheid and all.

And because they are high up among the nation's superstars in show business, the action by the Supremes is echoing all over the nation, both behind and in front of the footlights.

Did they Get the Message?

The questions being asked are "Did The Supremes need the money that badly? Will other Black stars follow their example? How much Black pride should one have where money is concerned? What effect will their actions have on their audiences when they return?"

One thing is certain—the Supremes can't do, as many others have done, and claim that they didn't know what they were flying off to in South Africa.
And Show Biz Wonders If The Beat Will Go On!

Months ago, when the word first got around that the Supremes were considering an engagement in South Africa, Brock Peters sent out a letter to all of show business which said:

White South Africa loves apartheid which means racially segregated audiences. White South Africa confers the status of "honorary white" on Black VIP visitors so that they will have more freedom of movement than their African brothers and sisters. As artists, our most effective weapon is to let the government of South Africa know that we will have no part in apartheid. I ask you to write/wire the Supremes urging them not to entertain white South Africa so long as apartheid is still the law of the land."

Joan Sandier, Executive Director of the Black Theatre Alliance sent a letter to the Supremes in care of Motown Records at 6464 Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles which said:

"On behalf of over 30 theatre and dance companies, we urge you to cancel your forthcoming engagement, thereby, joining with other distinguished artists who have refused similar offers. The Supremes are strongly identified with American Black audiences. This comes as a shock...the Supremes draw upon the African American community for support and artistic inspiration...we find it difficult to believe that your management would support South Africa's apartheid policies by acceptance of booking in that country."

Ann Early, Executive Director of Writers in Residence wrote:

"On behalf of five teenage repertory companies and 1000 patron members...as a former ghetto brat from Detroit's Black Bottom, where the roots of your corporation's...am quite distressed to learn that the Supremes are considering lending their support to the segregationist policies of South Africa...I would hope that they...would not allow themselves to be used in this way."

Congressman Charles Diggs, Chairman of the House Sub-Committee on Africa, sent an appeal to the Supremes "I strongly urge you to reconsider any agreement made to perform in South Africa."

His telegraphic message added:

"As a fellow Detroiter and a spokesman on African affairs for many years, I do not encourage American artists to perform in South Africa because of its policy of strict segregation against Black people.

"Under the policy of "apartheid" or separateness, fifteen million Blacks are victimized by three million whites in all areas of human endeav-

Judge William H. Booth, President of the American Committee on Africa

formation lay...we urge you to cancel your forthcoming engagement. For 'none is free...till all is free.'

Marcia Ann Gillespie, Editor-in-chief of Essence wrote — "... as victims of racism and oppression. I'm asking you to cancel the Supremes proposed concert tour, they will be performing for people who endorse practices which force mothers to leave their children in order to find work hundreds of miles away...labor practices that are barbaric by all standards...who live in a state of exile in their own homeland. Men and women whose lives are based on "passes" and the whims of a government that has grown rich on their serfdom...Say No to Apartheid! We must ensure that Black people need never again sing for the "massa."

Robert S. Browne, Director, Black Economic Research Center, said: "I
or. Over 80% of the land is set aside for the white minority. Large profits are earned through the exploitation of Africans, whose land and natural resources have been taken from them and who toil for less than poverty wages.

"Every African over 16 years of age must carry a racial identity card, which must be produced upon request. An African is guilty of an offense if not in possession of this passbook. The government of South Africa refuses to permit Blacks and other non-whites the right to vote and restricts them to special areas to live.

"Curfews prevent Africans from being outside their areas after 9:00 p.m. Members of different races are barred from attending entertainment, cultural or sports events together. In sports, mixed teams and mixed audiences are banned unless a permit is obtained.

"In view of these crimes perpetrated upon the Blacks of South Africa, by the white dominated government, I strongly urge you to reconsider any agreement made to perform in South Africa.

"I'm sure you would not like to have the United States communications media give your supporters the impression that because of monetary concerns the Supremes are indifferent to the social and political implications of such a visit."

Frederick O'Neal, President of Actors Equity Association wrote to the Supremes saying:

"One of our affiliates, Actors Equity Association, adopted a resolution some years ago against members performing in that country as long as the current racial policies exist.

"In view of the concern of many of us in the entertainment field about the policies of the South African Government, I was somewhat surprised to hear of this tour."

But in spite of all these pleadings, warnings and entreaties, the Supremes, idols of this nation's younger set, packed their bags and went off to South Africa.

At this writing they are still there—and show business and its American public is waiting to see what will happen when they return.

Meanwhile—the beat goes on!

The Supremes left for South Africa October 1 and will be returning November 2. They are playing at Capetown, Johannesburg and Durban South Africa.

Ann Early, Executive Director of Writers in Residence

Say NO to Apartheid
American Committee on Africa, 164 Madison Ave., N.Y.C., 10016

Add my name to "We say NO to apartheid", and keep me informed of further developments.

Name _______________________________________________________________
Address ______________________________________________________________
City ___________________________ State ______________ Zip ________________

$____ Here is my dollar(s) to help get a million names.