

Drowning out the Hate

MTV admirable for marathon addressing badly needed hate-crimes legislation



MARIANO CASTILLO

MTV is often accused of influencing young people with its programming. The network hopes its accusers are right — at least this time.

The network's gutsy decision to run 17 commercial-free hours of hate crime-related programming is an important step in educating the public. The show kicked off a year-long campaign to raise awareness of hate crimes.

The program consisted of reports of hate crimes committed in the nation that were read by celebrities. It was a simple show — the text of the story was on a gray background — but it was very effective.

The 17 hours were preceded by a movie about the murder of Matthew Shepard and a special, "Fight For Your Rights." On a network that has evolved from music videos to shows like "Undressed" and "TRL," the hate crimes special must be commended. "Fight For Your Rights" takes an issue that people do not like to talk about and places it in the spotlight. More importantly, the campaign is geared toward young people so they may make better choices in the future.

For that 17-hour block, every teen who tuned in to MTV looking for Carson Daly, Britney Spears or "The Real World" got this message instead: "Hate crimes begin with discrimination. Fight for your rights."

Take a stand against discrimination."

Especially now, as power is transferred between administrations in Washington, D.C., intolerance and hate issues need to be addressed. The numbers speak for themselves.

The FBI reported 7,947 hate crimes in the United States in 1995. Texas had the seventh highest number, with 326 hate-motivated crimes reported. California led the nation with 1,751 cases. Since then, high-profile crimes, including the dragging death of James Byrd Jr. and Shepard's murder, have put pressure on lawmakers to create hate-crime legislation.

MTV's special did not shy from the sometimes-gruesome details of the hate crimes. The programming paved the way for more discussion, and hopefully, for the public to continue the fight against hate.

The stories included in the program were not edited, giving the viewers a realistic picture of why hate crime is an issue of concern. The show produced a stark and refreshingly blunt look at these crimes. If MTV has the power of influence that critics claim, maybe its young viewers will decide to take a stand against hatred.

MTV managed to avoid stereotypes in its programming by presenting hate crimes committed by various races. One example was a 1999 case from Riverside, Calif., which showed that discrimination is not the problem of just one race. In Riverside, three Hispanic men are accused of beating up a black man in a racially motivated attack.

MTV did a good job of covering

hate crimes that were not based on race. According to the FBI, the majority of offenses were directed at blacks (3,805), Jews (1,145), whites (1,511) and male homosexuals (915).

A large part of the program's success lies in its use of the Internet. The hate-crime special utilized television and the Internet in an informative and refreshing way.

The show, as well as MTV's Website, published information that pushed the idea that hate-crime legislation needs to be addressed nationally. On television and online, the program urged viewers to write President-elect George W. Bush and Congress.

"Fight For Your Rights" is a great idea that follows the path of "Rock the Vote," MTV's voter-participation project. ABC, CBS and other stations should follow MTV's example and try harder to give viewers programming with social value.

It is unfortunate that such quality concepts as "Fight For Your Rights" are given worse time slots than shows such as "When Sex Goes Pop" and "Hips, Lips and Gender Benders."

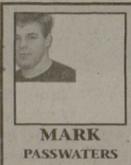
At least it is a start. Television and the Internet are increasingly becoming huge influences for younger generations. Taking advantage of that trend by putting social issues in the limelight is a goal all networks should strive for. Hopefully, MTV has the influence to begin change.

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A Cabinet of diversity

New era of compassionate conservatism falls victim to partisan divide

Usually, a newly elected president enjoys a "honeymoon" period with the press and the opposing party before his viewpoints come under fire. George W. Bush, who could use any possible break, saw his honeymoon end before he was even sworn into office.



MARK PASSWATERS

Bush's Cabinet nominations already have the press up in arms. In spite of assurances they would work toward "a new spirit of bipartisanship," liberal members of the Democratic Party have further inflamed matters. Cabinet nominees should be given an opportunity to answer a confirmation panel's questions about their views before being crucified in print. Apparently, this nicety has also gone out the window with the arrival of the "new bipartisanship."

The media has given Bush credit for nominating a diverse Cabinet. Indeed, with the exception of Bush not having a short, fat white man, Bush has trumped President Bill Clinton's cast, which Clinton called a "Cabinet with a face like America's." With the

selections of four women, two African-Americans, two Latinos, one Asian and one Arab-American, Bush has some conservative members of the GOP griping about the lack of white males in his Cabinet.

The New York Times, usually not a Bush fan, notes he has "put forward a governing team every bit as ethnically and racially diverse as President Clinton's." The Washington Post, another paper that cannot be considered pro-Bush, said, "Bush has accomplished his predecessor's goal of assembling an administration that looks more like America."

Then come the complaints. It is claimed that Bush's people are inexperienced, or that they are too experienced. Then, of course, comes the loudest cry: "They're too conservative!" The New York Times, in a Jan. 2 column, called Bush's picks for "critical domestic policy posts acceptable to his party's conservative wing." In a Jan. 3 editorial, The New York Times called Bush's picks for Interior and Energy secretaries "an insult." The Washington Post wrote that Bush's picks can "be expected to pursue his conservative agenda with gusto and discipline."

But Bush is, after all, a "compassionate conservative." Bush

himself has said it should not be a surprise that a president would nominate people who agree with him. Like Clinton, Bush and his appointees should be given an opportunity to establish themselves, and their agendas, before they are targeted for general scorn.

But Bush and his people are not getting such a break. Members of the opposition have already marshaled their forces to hunt down several of Bush's nominees.

The opposition has already drawn blood. Linda Chavez, the nominee for labor secretary, withdrew from consideration after it was revealed she allowed an illegal immigrant to live in her house several years ago.

Frankly, the incident should not alarm Bush and his staff. Zoe Baird, Clinton's first nominee for attorney general, was shot down over the same issue. The information, however, was not mentioned by Republicans until Baird's confirmation hearing.

With the departure of Chavez,

the new appointed "enemy No. 1" is former Missouri Sen. John Ashcroft. Now, Ashcroft — Bush's pick for attorney general — has gone from an esteemed public servant to the modern version of Hitler in the eyes of liberal activist groups.

The National Organization for Women (NOW) opposes Ashcroft's confirmation on the grounds that he is pro-life and will, according to NOW President Patricia Ireland, "gut a

woman's right to an abortion."

How Ashcroft could do this remains under speculation. He could suggest rules regulating the use of RU-486, the so-called "abortion pill," and that is all. Any other individual action would be against the very law — Roe v. Wade — Ashcroft would be sworn to uphold. His new boss has also repeatedly stated he does not think the nation is ready for abortion to be outlawed.

The other misleading allegation is that Ashcroft is racist. This charge stems from his refusal to vote for the elevation of Ronnie White, an African-American Missouri Supreme Court judge, to a federal judgeship. This isolated decision does not look good on the surface, but a closer look shows that Ashcroft voted for 26 of the 28 African-American judicial nominees forwarded by Clinton and was joined by 54 other senators in voting against White.

As governor of Missouri, Ashcroft appointed eight African-Americans to state judicial positions, including the first African-American ever to sit on the state's Supreme Court. He appointed the first African-American to the Missouri Public Defender Commission and had three other African-Americans

in his Cabinet. In fact, according to Dr. Kris Kobach's column in The New York Post, "given the choice, Ashcroft virtually always chose the African-American candidate."

In spite of these facts, the hue and cry from the opposition has been staggering. After such a malicious and vindictive presidential campaign, the nation needs to recover.

Allowing George W. Bush's nominees for Cabinet positions to have their say in front of the Senate's confirmation panels before publicly shredding them would help that recovery process. Instead, members of the news media and Bush's political opposition have been more than happy to unfairly assault people who are willing to give up their private lives to serve their country.

George W. Bush ran for president on the concept that he could unite the nation. Once he was finally elected, Democrats in Congress promised to work with him to change the tone of the discussion in Washington. The early returns on this new era of bipartisanship could lead one to paraphrase The Who: Meet the new bipartisanship — same as the old bipartisanship.

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RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION