

Mainstream Society & African-Americans

by

Andrew Bradley

Let's begin by making a statement of honesty that is relevant to today. Virtually every aspect of the American culture is now infused with the movement of hip-hop music and entertainment. Television, movies, sports, magazines and even clothing have incorporated the raw, controversial culture that was once called a fad by those who opposed it. What began as lyrical battles on street corners of the urban ghettos and underground mix-tape circulation is now a multi-billion dollar a year industry which has become an intricate part of mainstream society. But has this musical phenomenon brought the kind of welcome from the white majority of America that would put African-Americans on the equal plane of all aspects of life in this country?

In some ways yes, but not quite and that shows that there is still a sense of racial inequality that exists. America needs to address these problems, especially in other more important social areas. Mainstream society in a sense has put a strain on the socio-economic relationship between African-Americans and the U.S. and it is something that needs to be studied more thoroughly.

In today's society, everyone knows that without the proper education, you can't go high up the economic and social ladder. From grade school to college, the desire to gain more knowledge is greater than ever before, but there is an invisible disparity when it comes to who's actually getting the best instructions and financial care in the classroom. A press release covering the Senate's new law on federal spending says, "Most funding for America's public schools comes at the local government level in the

form of property taxes, “Title I,” of the federal ESEA typically contributes over \$7.5 billion annually for programs to aid disadvantaged children” (U.S.). By dividing the dollar amount by public school districts in America and then again for each student to get adequate books and teachers, this shows why minorities, mostly those in urban public schools in metropolitan environments and rural south, are failing more than whites living in suburban areas.

Testing and curriculum is also a problem. An article in *Psychology Today* states the growing disparity between minorities and whites in the realm of national testing, especially for test such as the SAT (Asprion). These types of findings reveal why programs such as affirmative action were implemented into college entrance criteria, but people quickly opposed it saying it favored minority candidates over whites in entrance acceptance. “Quota systems that use race to include or exclude people from higher education and the opportunities it offers are divisive, unfair and impossible to square with the constitution.” (Affirmative)

If the president of the U.S. opposes such a plan, even with proven findings of disparities from educated sources, there are obvious problems when it comes to fair education. Many experts have tried different alternatives to this problem such as multicultural education in every classroom or even sending students to different areas in order to gain the equal education. While these may be interesting ideas, they do not warrant a feasible solution. A more formidable plan would be to institute a government sending policy that equally distributes grants by the size of the individual states population, not by district and not based upon size or school accreditation.

We should discount national testing and implement a nation wide curriculum for every grade level that must be taught in every school, excluding special education needed for the disabled and higher placement classes such as advanced placement courses. This would be backed by training for teachers on the foundation of this curriculum and include bilingual speech skills. Every student must receive the same information in the class from grade school through high school. Multicultural aspects of education, such as history and social sciences, would be encompassed into the learning as well to give all races and genders the necessary knowledge of the surrounding world at large. This is a plan that is not inapproachable if the congressional bureaucracy were to take the needed steps even if it would take some time and additional money, as all things do.

In the world of music and entertainment, 50 Cent, Jay-Z, Tupac Shakur and the Notorious B.I.G. are some of the most recognizable names. They are today's elite and very rich hip-hop recording artists even though two have since died. Second, they all were born to the rugged and violent streets of America's ghetto communities and survived. What is even more unfathomable is they all have been accepted into the mainstream light of glamour and celebrity. But when you look into their past before they were famous, it's hard to believe what they have accomplished.

How can ex-drug dealers be upstanding symbols for young adolescents, especially African-Americans who are constantly harassed by authorities and peers for their so called thug image? An article written by acclaimed editor Myron Medcalf states, "The thug persona that a lot of rappers portray is often represented in the past" (*The Reporter*). The answer is not in the persona that they display on TV and onstage but behind the story they tell to the public and the effects hip-hop has placed on society itself. Society

relishes in the Horacio Alger style stories of today, but some feel there is a down side to this phenomenon. Has hip-hop been into an integration-versus-assimilation catch 22 that has damaged the image of the African-American community with stereotypes? Maybe, but it takes looking into facts to prove this theory.

Though hip-hop may be accepted by the mainstream, there are those in the African-American community who do feel that these artist lifestyles are stereotypical and are a negative reflection on the population as a whole. In a related internet article, the writer indicates the issues of how African-Americans feel that the celebrities are used to stereotype the culture as a whole, thereby degrading black's acceptance in other areas of society (Burton). While there may still be negative views in the media and that depict all minorities and African-Americans in a certain way, everyone does not feel that this leads to a complete negative view by whites. In a counter argument from an internet wire report it is noted that, "Hip-hop reflects an urban aesthetic, a style and attitude seen by millions on rap videos. Its appeal cuts across class and racial lines, and is embraced by suburban as well as urban consumers" (Lehrer). Hip-hop is also a business, one which is very profitable. The same writer noted later in the report that the hip-hop culture is a very lucrative business as well which has seen many minority entrepreneurs exceed expectations and gain acclaimed notoriety for their ventures in the business world.

Radio, television and Hollywood have also felt the rising fluctuation for diversity. Oprah Winfrey, Denzel Washington, Damon Wayans, and Halle Berry are just a few names that have transcended the normal view of African-Americans in mainstream culture by showing that they can be just a normal star and still have mass appeal. Many of the problems in the entertainment industry are subsiding in terms racial diversity.

Additional solutions to some of the problems that still exist such as stereotyping and racial profiling are ones that can be easily attained through continuous recognition that blacks are prevalent to the expansion of entertainment without negative connotations involved. More positive integrated media coverage would also be beneficial.

Ever since the proclaimed “white flight” of whites and business moving to suburban areas, African Americans have felt an economic self-esteem drought. In a research report that cites a novel titled American Apartheid, the writers clarify by saying, “...promoting segregation through the selective construction of public housing and discriminatory tenant placement policies. On the other side of the equation, government-assisted private investment, in conjunction with rapidly rising suburban property values, assured whites of access to wealth appreciation through home ownership – and advantage that was systematically denied to people of color.” (Delgado, Gary. Race and Regionalism) Events such as these create inferior feelings and negative reactions towards whites because inner-cities are often depicted as slums and violence prone areas now. To show a more statistical side to the opinion, a 2000 census report showed that whites are in fact fleeing the urban city for the suburban area of living and taking valuable resources and businesses with them as well (ABC News). Obviously this shows that everyone is not being accounted for equally on the economic forefront.

Other parts that make up the econ-social threshold are also put into perspective when dealing with today’s mainstream views. With the drop in the labor market across the board, many feel the burn to find work but African-Americans fair worse. Often related to welfare and government funds recipients in the media, reports say that, “The unemployment rate among African-Americans has climbed back into double-digits [10.5

in the U.S.] and is the highest it has been in nine years.” Findings such as these can’t go unnoticed even in the light of an economic slide for every race. Even homeownership in suburban areas that whites have moved to is now an issue. In the same report it says, “Homeownership rates among African-Americans have not increased significantly during the Bush Administration and less than half of African-American families have their own home today.” (Kerry, John. “African Americans for Pres. Kerry”)

While everyone appeals to the idea of having the American Dream of owning a house, it is known that most are not seeing the same dream but times are beginning to change. Looking at a brighter perspective for what African-Americans have accomplished, a writer claims, “Black home ownership and stock ownership have steadily risen too. And blacks have climbed to the highest echelons of government and business. Some of the world’s largest corporations – Merrill Lynch, Fannie Mae, AOL Time Warner, and American Express – are run by a black CEO” (Ostrowski)

These problems may seem big because they deal with a lot of financial figures and business but the idea is simple to create for a solution. Even with the equal rights for job opportunities, business and executive firms need to more actively recruit minorities into the upper skilled world. State and city governments’ positions should be more pursuant to hire African-Americans, especially in heavily populated areas. Honest governments should destroy Section- 8 federal aid and housing projects in the inner city and force private and government contractors to begin building affordable houses like those of the suburbs in the place of tenant apartments and high-rises. First-time minority homeowners should also be given priority and financial help due to factual evidence of being the least amount of buyers in the market.

These proposals along with the issues that accompany them are situations that have to deal with a past of racism, violence and institutionalism before the future can really be free to flow with non-racial classification. Even though the economy may have slowed down, if societies future continues to move at the speed of today's fastest computers, many of these plans won't be too far off. Mainstream acceptance of the African-American population and of all minorities will one day be just as normal as turning on your television.