

Black men in the prison system



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

“ We ain’t thugs for the sake of just bein’ thugs.

Nobody do that where we grew at N___, duh! The poverty line we not above. So I come in the mask and gloves ‘ cause we ain’t feelin’ the love. We ain’t doin’ crime for the sake of doin’ crimes. We movin’ dimes ‘ cause we ain’t doin’ fine. One out of three of us is locked up doin’ time.

You know what this could do to a N___ mind? My mind on my money, money on my mind. If you owe me ten dollars you ain’t givin’ me nine! Ya’ll ain’t give me 40 acres and a mule. So I got my glock 40 now I’m cool. ” -Jay-Z
Imagine waking up every morning hungry, except rather than just driving down to your local fast food spot, you can not even afford a dollar hamburger from McDonald’s. Imagine falling asleep to the sound of gunfire, rather than the sound of crickets. These conditions sound like the middle of a war zone or third world country, but on the contrary, this is the environment that many black high school students live in.

Rap lyrics may not be the formal type of quote to open a paper; however, in order to properly represent the voice of young black males, it is completely appropriate. The fact is that they are angry, and extremely resentful towards white people because of the treatment of their slave ancestors. Seeing successful whites while they are struggling in the slums of America is not fair to the African-American community. Despite the numerous pleas from black support groups like the NAACP, their proposals of fair and equal treatment have seemingly fallen on deaf ears in the world of these students.

As a result, a great number of them have turned to crime. The rate at which black males are being trapped in the prison system is alarming Today African

Americans comprise 62% of imprisoned drug offenders, though they are only 13.5% of the national population. One out of every 115 black males enters prison each year on a felony drug crime, compared with one of every 1,150 white men, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Black youths are admitted to state correctional facilities for drug offenses at 48 times the rate of white youths, according to a report by the Building Blocks for Youth Initiative. (CITATION) There is obviously a problem in the programming of the successful African American youth. If a shortage can be created in the circuit of this problem, then the rate at which these young men are straying can be decreased.

In a much simpler time, humans roamed the earth just living and reproducing. The quote, "So easy a caveman can do it" has implied that humans were pretty much illogical at one time. As logic and sheer discovery came into play, we evolved into a purposeful race. A boat without a paddle just does not make sense anymore. Would you walk your dog if it did not have accidents inside of your home as a puppy? Would soldiers continue to fight in Iraq if their freedom and liberties were not threatened? From walking a dog to fighting for freedom, the common denominator is motivation.

Motivation is defined by the U. S. Army as, "the will to accomplish a mission". (CITATION) It is safe to assume that throughout our lives, the will, not necessarily the want, is essential for change. With that said, the logical answer to my questions is 'no'. Without some kind of motivation, whether positive or negative, even the simplest task is meaningless.

Psychology teaches that there are four methods to either learning, or to morph an expected conduct into a routine way of acting; positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, extinction, and punishment. Positive reinforcement is adding something to a situation in order to create an increased response. (CITATION) “ The most common types of positive reinforcement are praise and rewards...

(CITATION) “ Negative reinforcement is taking something negative away in order to increase a response”. (CITATION) An example of negative reinforcement is a child performing chores despite the mother’s nagging. After doing what is asked of him, the nagging stops. The subtraction of the constant nagging in this situation will reinforce the child to perform his chores in the future. Extinction is removing something in order to decrease a behavior. Restriction is the most obvious form of extinction.

Punishment is “ adding something aversive in order to decrease a behavior”. (CITATION) Most have experienced punishment either as a receiver or a giver. Corporal punishment is considered to be a form of punishment. As a result of a certain behavior, a spanking is added to the situation in order to decrease that behavior.

It is thought that black families are known for using corporal punishment in excess. Besides the fact that by the time they reach the age of 13 spankings become redundant, this does not seem to be the answer. “ Punishment can also invoke other negative responses such as anger and resentment.

(CITATION) So this tells us that solely using one of the four approaches to learning is not the answer to this particular issue.

Perhaps a more enhanced prevention of criminal behavior should be put in place. Rather than just using a punishment or extinction mechanism such as incarceration, the utilization of some sort of positive reinforcement in conjunction, or in some cases in replacement of the lone punishment and extinction, will decrease the cycle of African-American males ending up in the prison system. Reparation plans have been an ongoing debate for over 100 years. Albeit a lot of the debate is relating the hardships the Native Americans of the "Manifest Destiny" as a direct result of white immigration west, and the Japanese-Americans that were interned in prison camps of WWII to the 250 years of slavery African-Americans endured, many Americans feel that more handouts in addition to welfare would just be lowering the standards of African-Americans even more. What one must try to grasp is the mentality of the destitute African-American male. The hugest barrier to understanding them is ethnocentrism.

It is the core of prejudice. As we examine the poor African-American male, we must consider the environmental conditions that he is under. Growing up in the "hood" for a young black male has consequences that young males growing up in a suburban neighborhood do not have to endure. Growing up in the inner city, black males are accustomed to seeing liquor stores and pawnshops down every block.

The local corner stores are abandoned and are turned into a local crack spot. It is not unusual for a youth in the inner city to see a close friend or a relative killed. The laws in the "hood" he is grown to obey are different. A young black male sees the glitz and glamour of the drug game. It is the drug dealers with all the money.

The police are trying to stop him from getting his money and as a result become the enemy. His choices become to either work for minimum wage, or be a lookout on a corner for about ten times as much as minimum wage. The choices in the inner city are different. No one is building a Toyota plant in the inner city. You do not see anyone building a Home Depot. What you see is crime, drugs, and eventually a jail cell, or death.

The issue with the solution is finding a compromise that will not further depress African-American standards of a fruitful lifestyle, and will serve its true purpose of repairing racial relations. Ignorance is not solved with handouts; ignorance is solved with education. However, being black is a hindrance of opportunities like a college education. If a person is a good student, and works hard to get through high school successfully, shouldn't he be able to go to college? Neither the trivial issue of cost should not be the cause of that student not going to secondary school, nor should the uncontrollable circumstances that the student has no choice to live in. According to the Federal Bureau of Justice State Prison Expenditures report in 2001, the government spent \$38.2 billion to maintain the Nation's State correctional facilities.

The day-to-day operating expenses totaled \$28.4 billion, and renovations, \$1.1 billion. The most alarming is the money that was spent for each inmate per day.

\$62.05 per day was spent on each inmate in 2001; a total of \$22,650 that year per person. CITATION) In order to defeat the problem from the root, the government should consider providing all African Americans with a form

of reparations that would offer the opportunity that is currently being deprived; education. In the past, Rep. Conyers proposed a bill called The Conyers Bill that would “ acknowledge the fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality, and inhumanity of slavery in the United States and the 13 American colonies between 1619 and 1865...” (CITATION) This bill requested solely money as repayment for “ lost wages” during their times of enslavement.

Unfortunately, this bill, among a plethora of other, never received enough support to be passed. Although the standards of equality have been raised, the number of irate young black men occupying the state prisons remains steady; it is not being improved. The solution is not to necessarily supply another “ handout” of strictly money. The solution is to provide them a free education, but in order to retain the funds, a passing GPA must be maintained as well. The compromise would be that the students would have to work for their education by maintaining the standard while receiving the funds.

However, since they are hindered by their circumstances; their education would be cost-free to the student and the student’s family. Providing these deserving people with an education is an obvious solution that should be implemented into their lives. In conclusion, there is a society issue that needs addressing in our young African American males. One probably never thought they had it so good until they are made aware of the conditions that our fellow Americans have to go through on a daily basis.

It is shocking and unacceptable. We paid our debt to others that we have harmed. Why not fix the relations between us and the minorities that need it the most? The black race is a proud race, and they are not always looking for handouts. Dignity is the objective of this solution. They are a strong people and should be treated as such.

Booker T. Washington said, " I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has had to overcome while trying to succeed. " As far as the obstacles the African American race has overcome, why not assist in helping them overcome their largest obstacle of opportunity?