

Black and economic structure

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1) Malcolm X spent much of his life fighting for equal rights for African Americans. Like others, Malcolm suffered from discrimination, economic suppression, and violent acts at the hands of the whites. Throughout his life, he could not escape the atmosphere of racial prejudices, as it existed everywhere from his welfare agencies to school and his family relationships. Although some form of equality exists today, many African American males are still continuously trying to establish themselves in society.

As a young boy Malcolm participated in activities where he experienced little freedom. Malcolm was ranked number one in his class and elected class president, which shows that the school system allowed him to succeed to an extent. Malcolm had a dream of becoming a lawyer, but his English teacher quickly rejected his dream and told him he should become a carpenter, which demonstrated that whites were willing to allow black success only to a certain degree.

Malcolm eventually came to an understanding that white society allowed progression when doing so did not threaten the established order of white society. Throughout his life Malcolm was seen as a “pet, mascot, and pink poodle,” which excluded him from society. He was a black student in a predominantly white school who was like a poodle in a family. He was seen as a submissive creature that represented no real threat to anyone. He was portrayed as white society’s model for how blacks should act, but white society didn’t see him as a human being in his own right.

Malcolm realized that no level of accomplishment or esteem would break down the essential barrier to his acceptance and success in society. White

oppression stripped him of the power and independence a normal man would experience. Although Malcolm experienced great amounts of discrimination, he was still able to succeed and become Minister Malcolm X and lead many civil rights events. In society today, the prototypical black male experience in America is extremely comparable to the life of Malcolm X.

Most black men are looked down on because of the various stereotypes that exist in our society today. Many believe that if black men aren't athletes or rappers, or if they aren't washing dishes or waiting tables, they have no purpose in society other than being seen as inferior. Each and every day a black man experiences discrimination, but the black men who have goals and aspirations will be the ones who will make a difference like Malcolm X did. Malcolm lived through a rough time, but he still managed to make it as can every other black man in the world.) Like Malcolm X, Washington too envied the lives of white due to the simple fact that there was absolutely no limit placed on his or her dreams and aspirations. During his years of adolescence, Washington was very aware of what it meant to be a black man in a white society. With this knowledge, Washington was very optimistic and assured himself that whatever dreams or goals he would accomplish would be the result of hard work and persistence. Washington wrote, " 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 overcome while trying to succeed.

Out of the hard and unusual struggle through which he is compelled to pass, he gets a strength, a confidence, that one misses whose pathway is comparatively smooth by reason of birth and race. " (Washington, 1901, p 39). Washington believed that if blacks strove to be impressive and

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distinctive they would be accepted in society. He believed that being black or any race other than the majority was an advantage because there was a better chance of achievement due to the fact that one would constantly try to overcome any obstacles.

He believed that through proof, blacks would be connected with the white society. Alongside assisting African Americans in attaining economic success, Washington also had accomplishments in the field of education, in becoming the first black educator at the Tuskegee Institute. Washington was very concerned about forming connections within both the black and white communities, and achieved his goal. I believe his argument is still valid for those who actually want to make something of themselves in life and are willing to go above and beyond in doing so.

Unfortunately black males are not always hardworking and persistent in trying to accomplish a goal. They tend to take the easy way out, and in doing so end up with the mediocre jobs unless they are playing professional sports or apart of an entertainment industry. Like Washington said success comes with overcoming obstacles, and I do not think blacks are willing to overcome the many obstacles they would have to face in order to become established. With the many stereotypes of black men, I do not think success would be as easy for the black man because they are already looked down upon from the beginning.) In recent years, terms such as crisis, at-risk, insignificant, and endangered have been used with increasing regularity to describe the troubles and conditions of black males. The grounds for using such harsh descriptions of conditions that black males face is provided by a broad range of social and economic indicators, all of which point to the undeniable fact

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that large numbers of individuals who fall within these two social categories, black and male, are in deep trouble.

Many perceive black men as being violent and aggressive law breakers regardless of their true nature. It doesn't stop there. Some stereotypes of Blacks include being arrogant, athletic, devious, dirty, dishonest, drug addicts, incompetent, inferior, lazy, unintelligent, noisy, passive, poor, primitive, untrustworthy, and violent, and “ having rhythm. ” Some black men have some of the same goals and aspirations as the white man, but they too have a deep fear of rejection due to the discrimination they continue to experience in their daily lives.

When the black man continuously gets rejected he is eventually going to subject himself to activities just to make ends meet, or he is going to start to believe the stereotypes set out for him. When you have a large group of black men in a society that rejects them, they are going to feel like they have no chance at success, and therefore they will feel like they have nothing to lose. With nothing to look forward to, they are going to unconsciously want to destroy their surroundings. Throughout Malcolm's he was seen as inferior, and eventually began to feel more like a “ mascot” or pet than a human being equal to those around him.

Malcolm had dreams of becoming a lawyer, but his teacher instead told him he should be a carpenter. One of his Malcolm's teachers laughs at him and tells the class that “ though the slaves have been freed, black people are still lazy and dumb. ” When an adult says something like that to a child, the child is more than likely going to believe the teacher and begin to think of him or

herself as being lazy and dumb. If a child begins to believe this negative stereotype, their performance in school could be effected, and cause them to drop out.

If they drop out they may begin to deal drugs or commit robberies and end up in jail. Dealing drugs or being incarcerated is the perception whites have for blacks today. Media also has a negative effect on portrayal when it comes to representing an entire race of people. No two people are exactly alike no matter what race they come from so there is no way one film can represent all peoples. Unfortunately, many people believe that a certain depiction of black people characterizes all black people, which is certainly not the case.

This is very dangerous because this perpetuates stereotyping and discrimination. Any form of media, whether it be a film, TV show, etc. , black males tend to play the role of the poor black man who lives in poverty and usually belongs to a gang. He usually has no goals, and has a mediocre job if he has one at all. They usually dress in baggy jeans with long shirts or “hoodies” and wear timberlands or sneakers. In media, blacks aren’t usually portrayed positively, and even if they were, many wouldn’t believe that is how blacks really live their lives.

For example, In *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, the Banks family is very well off, but many wouldn’t believe that all blacks are well off because 95% of the time blacks are being potrayed as being a threat to society. 4) *LaLee's Kin: The Legacy of Cotton* shows the disadvantaged life of residents living in the Mississippi Delta. The documentary shows how living in poverty and the lack

of education still effects the lives of many living in Mississippi even though slavery has been over now for hundreds of years.

The main character, Laura Lee (LaLee) Wallace, was an illiterate 62-year-old woman who had been living all her life in Tallahatchie County, Mississippi. She had one surviving son, nine daughters, 38 grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren. On a daily basis she encountered many difficulties from raising her grandchildren to receiving news about her son continuously being put in jail. LaLee received \$494 from her disability benefits and sold home cooked meals to workers at the cotton factory to make more money to keep the children clothed and fed.

In the movie LaLee said, " I cry sometime, I pray sometime, I sing sometime. " LaLee and her grandchildren struggled each day in trying to take care of each other. The images of barefoot children playing on abandoned cars outside dilapidated motor homes, and of families who get water for drinking and washing by filling plastic jugs from a hose were unbelievable because it took you back to the times of slavery when slaves really had to wash themselves with dirty water or walk around barefoot.

One of LaLee's grandchildren, nicknamed Granny was a very attentive and intelligent in school, but her grades began to fall due to the fact that she had household chores and had to care for her younger cousins or siblings which left little time for education. Paralleling LaLee's struggle was Reggie Barnes, the superintendent of the West Tallahatchie schools, who continuously struggled in trying to raise school standards, bring in qualified teachers and obtain school supplies.

If Barnes failed to raise the school from its current Level 1 status to a Level 2, the state of Mississippi has threatened to take over. Barnes and his faculty opposed this because they knew the state would not address the special needs of the children. With the illiteracy of the parents of the families of the children the children most likely will never be able to get a great education which will leave them illiterate when they get older. In LaLee's family the cycle of living in poverty and lacking education is evident, which makes it seem like slavery still exists to this day.