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## *A Need for Black Introspection: Beyond Trayvon Martin*

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

*Does any snowflake in an avalanche ever really feel responsible?*

In light of the verdict of not guilty handed down by the Black-free Southern jury in the George Zimmerman case, many people are calling for soul-searching, the always predictable but never initiated, let alone completed, national discussion on race, etc. I will not write about the disgust I felt after the verdict. However, one respondent brought a lot of thoughts to my mind

The hardcore rapper Ice Cube, formerly of the notorious rap group, NWA (aka, Niggas With Attitude), tweeted his disgust with the verdict. I thought, how ironic! To Ice Cube's way of thinking, and in the minds of most African Americans, this was clearly a case in which a young African American male, simply minding his business, was racially profiled. Yet, lost on many young African Americans, in particular, is the fact that the images and messages created, promoted and loved by young African Americans greatly contribute to the racial profiling they despise and condemn.

According to the late NWA rapper Eazy-E, NWA made a conscious effort to react to the socially conscious and intensely political messages of the rap group Public Enemy. Presenting empowering messages to Black people simply was not a part of NWA's mindset. "Fuck all that," said Eazy. "We wanted to get in everybody's face." How enlightening!

Ice Cube performed at a concert in Rochester, New York in July 2013 featuring old-school rappers LL Cool J, Public Enemy and De La Soul. Ice Cube praised NWA and performed some of their songs, much to the delight of the crowd.

Before NWA, there was Philadelphia's Schoolly D, L.A.'s Ice-T, and other gangsta rappers. However, NWA popularized the genre. It was, and is, all about the glorification of guns, drugs, criminality, prison life, etc. Rap music is one of the most influential musical genres in the world. In Ethiopia, many young rap fans believe that most young African American males are violent thugs. When I was in Kenya, I tried to convince a young Kenyan woman that most young African American males are not thugs. She was not having it. She had known too much about hip-hop culture to take me seriously.

I remember watching a television talk show several years ago. The topic was race relations. One White person from the audience said that most Black people are violent, citing as evidence, rap videos. Rather than seriously question their beloved popular culture, most of the Blacks in the audience simply booed the messenger.

Those of us seeing racial profiling in the Zimmerman case might ask ourselves if his views of Black people could have been influenced by the destructive and negative images that we create and romanticize ourselves. After all, we are always quick to blame the White media for demonizing us.

We blame the White media for having created such degrading programs as “Amos ‘n’ Andy,” “Beulah,” and “The Beulah Show.” However, are the likes of NWA, 50 Cent, Li'l Wayne, et al really less harmful to the collective image of Black people than was Stepin Fetchit? Does the color of the creator of the offensive image really matter?

Zimmerman is a young man in his twenties. He certainly could have been influenced by hardcore rap music. This raise another point. There is no shortage of people that will tell you that rap music can have a positive influence, as evidenced by some positive lyrics from Tupac, Nas, Kanye West and numerous others. However, if rap music can have positive influences, why is it not obvious that it can also have devastatingly negative consequences?

Rappers claiming that they are simply “keepin’ it real” only make the problem worse. They profess to be not merely acting, but telling true stories of violence and criminality. Is this really a justification for the assassination of the Black male image? Furthermore, why must they make Black criminality look so attractive and exciting?

Hardcore rappers are drowning in ignorance and self-hatred. They glamorize the most destructive Black stereotypes known to humanity. Their supporters talk about the root causes of Black suffering such as poverty, racism, corporate greed, etc. To use an analogy, they will say that hardcore rappers did not start the fire. However, they have certainly thrown much fuel on the fire helping it to rage out of control. At some point, those fueling the fire become at least as responsible for it as those that started it.

It is time to stop with the foolish rationalizations. Our dearly beloved popular culture is aiding and abetting our destruction. If we do nothing to reverse what we can control, we have no one but ourselves to blame.