

Sadly, the N-word Will Never Die

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

Many African Americans hate it when people refer to “nigger,” “nigga,” or “nigguh,” as the N-word. They believe that it is a word that must always be uttered without any hint of self-consciousness, shame or discomfort. It is an identity that many African Americans perversely embrace as a (highly tarnished) badge of honor. It has become so popular among fans of rap music that even some Whites, Latinos and Asians refer to each other as “nigga.”

In recent years, books have been written rationalizing the use of the term, however one wants to spell or pronounce it. In his book titled *Nigger*, author Randall Kennedy expresses disappointment with the White rapper Eminem because he refuses to use the word. Rapper Kanye West invites White fans to join in a rap using the word “nigga,” as does the rapper Jay-Z.

Recently, the term made the news in a big way. The Washington Post featured a lengthy story on the word (www.washingtonpost.com/sf/national/2014/11/09/the-n-word-an-entrenched-racial-slur-now-more-prevalent-than-ever/) In response, Piers Morgan wrote a piece condemning the word (www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2829080/PIERS-MORGAN-black-Americans-want-N-word-die-kill-themselves.html)

I learned as a child that it is a waste of time trying to argue with African Americans that insist upon rationalizing the use of a slur that was thrust upon them by their slave masters and others that truly despise them. Many claim that the adoption of this term actually gives them a sense of empowerment. If this is true, it is a *false* sense of empowerment. They believe that they can rescue, reclaim or rehabilitate the term. However, in reality, they can no more clean up the word than they can sanitize human feces and turn it into deodorizer. No sane person tries to sanitize human feces, just as no sane person should be about the business of trying to “reclaim” a slur that describes their own wretchedness. The word “nigger” ought to be abolished, just as the enslavement of African Americans was abolished in the U.S. As the Black South African Mark Mathabane wrote in his excellent book, *Kaffir Boy in America*, “If Abraham Lincoln had reformed slavery rather than abolished it, there would still be plantations all over the United States.” (p. 271) Likewise, those African Americans that see themselves as “niggas” are in many ways mental slaves.

Historically aware and conscious people are not supposed to embrace the slurs of their oppressors in some pathetic and desperate attempt to empower themselves. On the contrary, they are supposed to reject such slurs and create and define their own labels, forge their own identity and destiny, and demand and command respect from themselves and others – especially those that have historically oppressed them. This is why Black leaders that take themselves seriously – and who want to be taken seriously by others – have never founded organizations with names such as the Universal Nigga Improvement Association or the Organization of Nigga American Unity.

Those African Americans that are serious about adopting the term “nigga,” and even having non-Blacks use it as a “term of endearment” should follow their position to its logical conclusion. For example, many First Nation People (or Native Americans) are offended by the slur “Redskins” in sports. How about if African Americans were similarly “honored” by a team named the Newark Niggas? Or perhaps we could embrace President Obama as the first nigga president. Wouldn’t it be great if every February all Americans could celebrate Nigga History Month? That would certainly bring us all together!

Perhaps it should not be surprising that so many African Americans have been conditioned to accept an identity thrust upon them by their slave masters. After all, we have been subjected to centuries of racist abuse by the majority popular culture, mainstream media, music, art, advertising, education, science, etc. We have been taught that we are the ugliest, dumbest, laziest and most worthless people in the world. Therefore, many of us have a love/hate relationship with our people. Even many of our leaders and intellectuals are not very comfortable in their own skin. They struggle valiantly to accept themselves as Black people, but a never-ending struggle it is.

Some people blame rap music for why so many African Americans have succumbed to the identity of “nigga.” However, many Black people had been accepting this term ever since White supremacists introduced it. The main difference is that hard-core rappers were the only musicians to make use of “niggas” de rigueur in any genre of music. Again, this should not be surprising. Hard-core rap is the music of Black dysfunction, self-loathing and self-destruction. Blacks are niggas, women are bitches and hoers, a trip to prison is a rite of passage, Black-on-Black murder is cool, etc. (That in itself should tell you something about the use of the word “nigga.”)

The bottom line is that “all the wisdom and genius in the world” will not dissuade most Blacks that rationalize the use of the word “nigga” from doing so. Like flies, roaches, and pestilence, the term “nigga” is here to stay.