

To Be or Not to Be...That is the Question

In today's society we find that African Americans, young and old, are choosing role models everywhere. They are choosing them from the television screen to the movie screen and from the basketball court to the football field.

And while these may be individuals who are loved and adored by almost everyone, one must ask how "safe" is it to have famous role models? What effect does our choice of role models, especially celebrities, have on our ideals and personalities?

Here, *Ink* writers Mary James, Dion McLean and Chariss Sanders explore the advantages and disadvantages of having celebrity brothers and sisters as role models a little further.

By Mary James
Ink Staff Writer

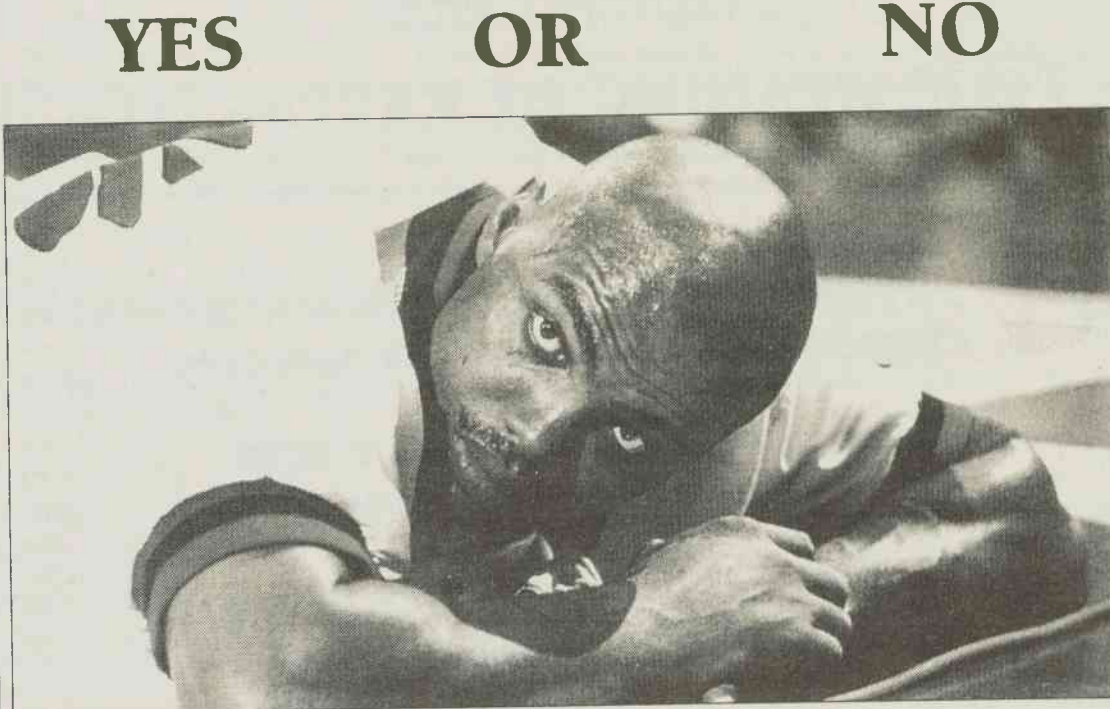
Michael Jordan. Charles Barkley. Magic Johnson. Shaquille O'Neal. These are just a few of the many sport figures adored and looked upon as role models by African Americans of all ages. And why not?

It is important to see black people on television in roles other than as drug dealers and prisoners. Our young black sisters and brothers need someone to look up to in hopes that they too, will be whatever it is they want to be.

While it would be better for parents or black college students to be role models for black youths, we must face the facts—many of these people are just not there. Parents are either at work or too busy doing something else to spend the "quality time" that children deserve.

Meanwhile, black college students are often too involved with doing what is best for themselves to think about giving back to the community. Who else, other than celebrities, are these children supposed to look up to?

Although I don't think what celebrities do in private is anybody's business but their own, they do have a responsibility



Barkley denies the responsibility of being a role model.

to the public.

Once individuals become famous and attain celebrity status, it is important for them to portray themselves in a way that youths can admire and strive to imitate.

No one asks stars to be perfect members of society, but doing little things like completing school and starring in public service announcements does count.

Until black college students, professors and other members of the community wake up and realize their importance as examples of achievement, the only people youth can depend on are these famous individuals.

By Dion McLean & Chariss Sanders
Ink Staff Writers

Michael Jordan. Charles Barkley. Maya Angelou. Oprah Winfrey. These celebrities, like many others, are thrust into the spotlight, idolized and adored by millions of fans worldwide. In addition to their popularity, these stars project an aura that is attractive to young people. Youth, in turn, choose these famous

"I'm not paid to be a role model. I'm paid to wreak havoc on the basketball court." — Charles Barkley

...
"...We don't choose to be role models, we are chosen. Our only choice is whether to be a good role model or a bad one." Karl Malone

sisters and brothers as their role models—people to fashion their own lives after.

As young African Americans, we place celebrities on a pedestal and give them near royalty status. We strive to act like they act in order to feel the success, and gain the attention that these famous people have struggled long and hard to achieve.

We must, however, ask ourselves the following questions: Are we, the fans, being fair to these celebrities by not only treating them as deities but by prying into their private lives as well? Why does the public harshly criticize them (through media, tabloids, and word of mouth) for their mistakes when we make the same mistakes with half the criticism? Most importantly, what about the role models who are *not* celebrities? Are they not as important?

Parents should raise their own kids. Leave Sir Charles Barkley alone. Nowhere is it written that those in the spotlight have a responsibility to the community. Nor is it written that Blacks who have "made it" have a commitment to black youths throughout the country. People

must take responsibility for their own children. Little Johnny is the ward of Big Johnny, not of Michael Jordan.

So what if Michael gambles? It's his money. Who cares if Latoya's entire body is made of plastic. It's her money. Why can't Sir Charles curse out the referees? Remember, he pays those fines with *his money*!! Yes, Snoop Dogg may have been an accomplice to murder and 2 Pac may have allegedly shot a cop. These are horrible acts, but this does not mean that if your child goes out and shoots someone, you can blame rap music. Try blaming it on a lack of home training.

Oprah Winfrey, Bill Cosby and all other blacks who have made it in a society geared to hold them back, do deserve to be applauded. Certainly their successes do not go unnoticed and neither do their failures, both public and private. But they don't owe a debt to parents. They have not signed a contract of partnership with parents to help them raise their kids.

Parents should raise their own children and leave Sir Charles to drink, Mike to tee-off and Latoya to do whatever it is that she does!

Ultimately, the decision is yours as to who you adore and respect.

Today in Black History:

Rosa Parks is born.

U.S. postal service issues stamp of Soujourner Truth as part of Black

Heritage Series