

FORUM

Don't believe the hype

Nigel Alston
Motivational Moments



rect. It's hype - misleading, exaggerated and a extravagant claim. In 1991, there were 378,000 black males aged 18 to 24 in college and only 136,000 the same age in prison!

When you think about media coverage of violent crime and people on welfare whose face comes to mind, Chances are it is a black, female one.

Ask anyone which group is most apt to use drugs and chances are they'll say blacks. Truth is African Americans make up 12 percent of the nation's drug users. The rest, 70 percent are white.

Are you surprised? Probably.

It isn't surprising then that a major finding of a race relations study in Forsyth County indicates that blacks and whites consistently differ in their perception of race relations and racial harmony. Incorrect, obsolete and misleading information contributes to this difference of perception.

The media bears part of the blame and Americans by-and-large are unaware of how images of minorities are manipulated.

Sixty of 62 comments from a focus group were also negative regarding media coverage that were race-related.

"I blame the news media for portraying negative images which feed the stereotypes," said a white respondent.

Back to the quiz. According to a 1993 study, what percentage of network news about African Americans is negative in tone? What percentage of newspaper reporters are black? What percentage of U.S. newspapers don't have any black reporters on staff.

Sixty percent of the news is written from a negative slant. But that's understandable when the you take into account that only nine percent of reporters at major papers are black. What's worse, 45 percent of the nation's newspapers have no black reporters.

This quiz and the challenge to digest it lead me to read "Don't Believe the Hype - Fighting Cultural Misinformation About African-Americans," by journalist Farai Chideya. She is also the author of the recently released "The Color of Our Future."

"What we know about one another," she writes, "is often secondhand, passed through a filter - the filter of the media."

The book is intended to provide factual ammunition to combat stereotypes and misinformation often accepted as the truth.

"Perhaps naively," she continues, "this book can help blacks and whites understand each other a little better."

I agree with her assess-

ment that the problem with skewed presentation is not simply that it is incorrect.

There's much more at stake than correctness.

"The larger dilemma is that many white Americans have little to base their knowledge of African-Americans on but what they see, hear, and read in the media," Chideya writes.

But perceptions in the media don't equal reality, she says. There really is no such thing as a reporter with absolutely no bias. Journalism is one of the most segregated professions in America. Journalists and others in the media are human - they work from that which they know. It's easy to get stories from the ghetto. White journalists are presumed to be objective; black journalists, quite often, are presumed not to be objective about racial issues. And, once something becomes "conventional wisdom," and is presented in the "paper of record" it's hard to correct.

"The media belongs to all of us," Chideya says. "If we want it to work, we have to work. The worst crisis we face today is not in our cities or neighborhoods, but in our minds."

Don't believe the hype.

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I used to think that eleven o'clock on Sunday (morning) was the most segregated hour in America because that's when we all dressed up and went to our own churches. But I've changed my mind... The most segregated hour comes at about four p.m., when (newspaper editors) sit down and decide what is news.

- Ben Johnson, St. Petersburg Times

"Interesting," it began. "Just a little information for you to think about and digest."

That was the introduction to a quiz sent to me recently. The series of questions were guaranteed to test your racial issues IQ.

I am still digesting it and thinking about the misinformation communicated daily. Intentional or not, misinformation is often taken as the gospel.

It fuels inappropriate behavior and perceptions.

It's the mother of stereotypes.

You have probably heard that there are more black males aged 18 to 24 in prison than in college. According to the quiz that found its way into my mailbox, this is incor-

Caucus continues to build strength

Rev. Carlton Eversley
Guest Columnist



The next meeting of the NAACP Education Caucus will be held March 2, 1999, at Dellabrook Presbyterian Church, 115 Dellabrook Road.

It will be over at or before 9:30 p.m. We are precise about time because we are organizing the entire Black community on matters of public education; and it will take at least five to ten years to win the most important victories for our children. In order for you to commit to this long term struggle, the Caucus cannot afford to waste one minute of your time in long, boring, unproductive, repetitive meetings of whining and complaining. We are men and women of action, not mere talking and we are determined to succeed. Therefore, we are injecting a higher and better level of organizing than most black people have ever seen or experienced before.

In two short months the

Caucus has: A. committed itself to five long term goals (high and equitable expectations of students, equitable discipline, hiring Black teachers at about a forty percent rate, more Afrocentric curriculum and extracurricular activities and annual, mandatory racial/cultural sensitivity training for educators), B. organized into nine sections (parents, teachers, students, administrators, professional and vocational support staff, pastors and other religious professional, legal action and business) C. committed to two short term goals-suing the school system for desegregating and; most importantly, organizing the entire black community to embrace and enhance virtually all black schools in our neighborhoods, D. fundraising, lobbying and volunteering.

These are ambitious goals and we need you.

Secondly, I wish to inform you of the revival of the One Hundred Black Men. Any positive Black man, Black boy age five to twelve or Black male teenage 13 through 17 is eligible. We're meeting Satur-

day, Feb. 20, at the Dellabrook Church. We will meet every third Saturday at the church.

The meeting will open with prayer and there'll be a half hour orientation to the organization. We will briefly visit the Special Occasions Bookstore to meet Mr. James Cameron an 84 year old escapee of a vicious lynching in Marion, Indiana in 1930. He's since established an African American Holocaust museum to reveal the evils of lynching. Our main activity from about 10:40 until at least 11:15 is a tour of The Chronicle. After that's over we'll go the McDonald's on Martin Luther King Drive where participants will receive, at no cost to them, a sandwich, small fries and a drink.

That is the general outline of the monthly One Hundred Black Men's program. The goal is to expose our boys and teens to places and people where African Americans are doing positive things. Previous visits have been to Radio Station WAAA, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem State University, a house

being built by a Black contractor, a Black owned transportation company, Special Occasions Bookstore, Contract Office Furnishings, Econoline Insurance Company, etc.

Our philosophy is simple. No one can teach black boys and male teens how to be black men other than black men. Manhood has to be defined, not by how many women one can have sex with or how much liquor, nicotine or other drugs one can consume, nor by how much money one makes, formal education one has or how many other men you can beat up or kill. Rather manhood has to be child centered in the sense of preparing boys and teens for manhood. Again, we invite all serious brothers (no uncle Toms, whiners, complainers, do-nothings, non-recovered addicts or child molesters) to come and help.

The Rev. Carlton Eversley is pastor of Dellabrook Presbyterian Church.

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