

OP/ED



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Young Blacks Optimistic About Race



Ben Chavis
Guest Columnist

Over the past 11 years, I have had the opportunity to work closely with the Godfather of Hip-Hop, Russell Simmons. We co-founded the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network (HSAN) in 2001. We have convened more than 75 Hip-Hop Summits across the United States, Canada, and in South Africa, all dealing with such empowerment issues as education, financial literacy, civic engagement, housing and cultural transformation.

One of the essential findings that we experienced in those youth summits was that young African Americans today who consider themselves to be in the hip-hop generation see the question of race from a more transcendent and optimistic perspective than from the views of their parents or from generations the past.

Consequently, it was not surprising that a recent study by CNN found that African-American children were more optimistic on the issue of race than White children of the same age categories. Although the study that was commissioned by CNN's Anderson Cooper 360 was widely distributed through the news media, it was strange to hear that somehow the "groundbreaking" results provided some new revelations about racial progress in America. The timing of the release of this study was ironic given the latest national divide on the issue of race in the wake of the killing of Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Fla.

How a 6-year-old child



feels about race or how a teenager or a young adult understands the significance of race in society is often determined at a very early age by what the child experiences or observes from parents and others who interact with them.

According to the study, "A white child and a black child look at the exact same picture of two students on the playground but what they see is often very different and what they say speaks volumes about the racial divide in America. The pictures, designed to be ambiguous, are at the heart of a groundbreaking new study on children and race commissioned by CNN. White and black kids were asked: 'What's happening in this picture?' 'Are these two children friends?' and 'Would their parents like it if they were friends?'"

The study concluded that there was a significant "chasm" and difference between the racial perspectives of the youth involved in the study who were as young as age 6.

CNN reported, "Overall, black first-graders had far more positive interpretations of the images than white first-graders. In fact, only 38% of black children had a negative

interpretation of the pictures, whereas almost double - a full 70% of white kids - felt something negative was happening."

The study also revealed that by the time Black children reach the age of 13, their views about race become much more pessimistic, similar to the views of White children their age. An explanation was offered by the study's author, Melanie Killen of the University of Maryland: "Experiences of rejection and the harsh realities of race relations most likely explain the trend."

The burden of eliminating racism and the ideology of White supremacy from the institutions of this society and from the mindset of people is not consigned to one racial group versus another racial group. In a multiracial society, there has to be a full commitment and serious responsibility for all people to work together to bridge the nation's complex racial divide.

There is no question that we have made racial progress during the past 100 years in the United States. There is also no question that we have not overcome yet. Our youth are intelligent and conscious of the ways that race still is a discriminating factor that can determine one's quality of life. All youth, not African American youth alone, have to rise to the historical and contemporary challenges that must be faced and transformed. We all must remain vigilant and active. There is much more progress to be accomplished.

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Suicide as a Political Act

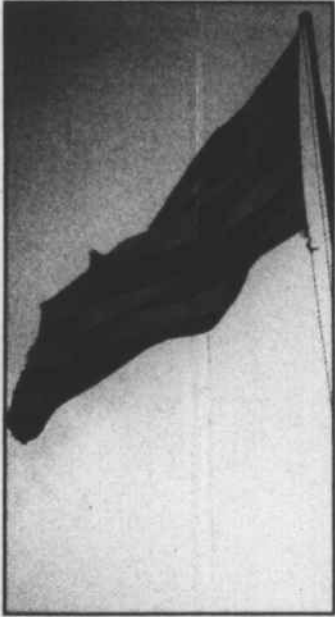


Julianne Malveaux
Guest Columnist

Dimitris Christoulas was a retired pharmacist whose neighbors said he had enormous dignity. At 77 years old, he looked forward to life. He had saved during his 35-year career and did not expect government to be involved in his pension. But the austerity budget that Greece has imposed on its citizens reduced Christoulas' pension. So he killed himself after writing in a suicide note that he would rather have "a decent end" than forage thorough garbage to find enough "rubbage to feed myself." Neighbors say he wanted to send a political message. They say the law-abiding man was a committed leftist who was so meticulous that he paid his condo fees ahead before taking his life.

The Christoulas suicide has mobilized many in Greece, some of whom describe his act as one of fortitude, not simply despair. Some describe it as a "political act" because it took place in a public square during the morning rush hour. Generally, Greece has a lower level of suicide than the rest of the countries in the European Union, but last year suicides rose by 45 percent, giving it one of Europe's highest rates. Many attribute the increase in suicides to the economic crisis. Anecdotal cases are reported: of the anchorman who killed himself when his contract was not renewed, and of a man who set himself on fire when a bank foreclosed on his home.

The United States is threatening an austerity budget. We are threatening, like Greece, to



balance the budget on the backs of the least and the left out, of the poor and the needy. We have maintained the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy even though we do not need to, largely because Republicans want to respond to their donors, not to working people. And as I read that the Newt Gingrich health think tank has gone bankrupt, I wonder why this man would dare run for President of the United States when he has set up a fiscal firm flam house (one of his creditors is his wife).

President Obama had it exactly right when he railed against Republican values. The most recent statistics show that poverty is on the rise. And even those living above the poverty line are struggling. Too many Americans live in hardship. The unemployment rate in Greece is 21 percent. The actual unemployment rate in Black America exceeds 25 percent.

Yet, we Americans are docile recipients of our poverty and unemployment. Except for the Occupy movement, there has been extreme silence about our current conditions.

Still, the Christoulas suicide makes me wonder what silent acts of desperation Americans are experiencing because of economic austerity. How many robberies or suicides are economically motivated? How many are unreported because they don't take place in the public square? How many seniors are actually foraging for food, or lining up at soup kitchens because they don't have enough to eat? How many young brothers feel that they improve their lives by going to jail where they at least get "three hot's and a squat?" How many folks care enough to explore these questions and find answers?

Dimitris Christoulas has a bevy of friends who say he didn't really commit suicide, that killing himself was a message and an act of protest against the ways that Greece's financial crisis has an unequal impact on the wealthy and the poor. While killing oneself is an extreme way to protest economic inequities, it has also been a way to rivet Greece's attention on the hardships that too many in that country are facing. What does it take to mobilize people in the United States, with unemployment still unacceptably high, with foreclosures still out of control, with too many people managing "underwater" mortgages? What would happen if the economically aggrieved showed up in a public square? Would Mitt Romney or Rick Santorum even pay attention?

The Christoulas suicide shines light on the human effects of austerity budgets, not just in Greece but also in the rest of the world. We should take heed on his public action, as it is repeated, though silently, behind closed doors.

Julianne Malveaux is president of Bennett College for Women in Greensboro.

Film

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and returned to performing after a long absence, is one of more than 100 films that will be screened around the city during the film festival from April 13-22. In addition to screenings, RiverRun will offer panel discussions and lots of parties.

Gale began his musical career in 1988, playing open mic events in Austin, Texas. His folksy, flamenco guitar style quickly made him a favorite. But Gale said his confidence often failed him, so much so that he would often cancel appearances. A 1995 a trip to California to try to make it big in the music industry ended badly. Gale said his musical creativity had simply left him.

"Writing songs isn't just a matter of finding a rhyming scheme ... it's coming from a spiritual place or something, and it was gone, no matter how much I wanted to ... It just wasn't there, I was trying to, but I had nothing but the old songs and even those didn't feel the same," said Gale.

Before his creative drought, Gale caught the ear of film student Jay Duplass while performing at Chicago House in Austin. Gale dazzled Duplass with his creativity and became a personal hero to the director, who scoured the Internet for years looking for Gale's next performance. Of course, Duplass' search came up with nothing because Gale had stopped performing. Eventually, the filmmaker tracked Gale down and began chronicling his story.

The two become good friends and travelled to Spain, the birthplace of the flamenco guitar, together to shoot footage for the documentary. During the trip, Gale says he rediscovered his creativity and began writing songs again in his hotel room.

These days, Duplass is well known for well-financed mainstream films like "Cyrus," starring Jonah Hill, which he co-directed with his brother, Mark Duplass, and the recently-released "Jeff, Who Lives at Home" with Ed Helms and Jason Segal. But for "Kevin," his first documentary, he used the fundraising web site Kickstarter to finish the deeply personal film.

"For me ..., what happened is first a life experience that Kevin and I shared, and a movie second," said Duplass, in an interview with the magazine "Filmmaker."

A rough cut of "Kevin" premiered at South by Southwest Film Festival in March 2011, and Gale played his first concert in 15 years after that screening. Gale has played at dozens of showings of the film at festivals across the country since then. At RiverRun, Gale will perform three times - after each screening of the film. It is a first for him. At past festivals, he performed just a single show. Gale said he is learning more about himself and his music as his comeback continues.

"It's a fascinating process for me, and I don't want to



James Armstrong, "The Barber of Birmingham."



Twin Poets Nnamdi Chukwuocha and Albert Mills.



Award-winning director Ava Duvernay

refugee and her struggle to learn to read and write. It'll be among the short documentaries shown at 1 p.m. on April 20 and at 4 p.m. on April 21 at a/perture.

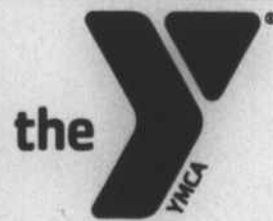
"The Barber of Birmingham: Foot Soldier of the Civil Rights Movement," an Academy Award nominated short documentary capturing the reflections of barber and civil rights activist James Armstrong. It'll be among the short documentaries shown at 4 p.m. on April 20 and at 12:30 p.m. on April 21 at a/perture.

"Under African Skies," a documentary about Paul Simon's return to South Africa to reconnect and play with the collaborators of the hit CD "Graceland." It'll be shown at 6 p.m. on April 20 at UNCA's Main Theater and at 4 p.m. on April 22 at UNCSA's Gold Theater.

"Why I Write: The Twin Poets," a documentary about artists and social workers Nnamdi Chukwuocha and Albert Mills and how they are introducing children in their Delaware neighborhood to the art of spoken word poetry. The screening, at 7 p.m. on April 20 at the Hanes Brand Theatre, is free and sponsored by the N.C. Arts Council.

Also, Ava Duvernay, who became the first African American woman to win the Best Director Prize at Sundance Film Festival for her sophomore effort "Middle Of Nowhere," will take part in the Women in Cinema panel at 2 p.m. on April 21.

For a full schedule of events and/or to buy tickets, visit 2012.riverrunfilm.com.



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