

Racial Profiling of Young African American Males: What We Should Learn From the Trayvon Martin's Tragedy?

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By

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In a speech before a group of managers on diversity, I explained that racism was still prevalent in America, not necessarily blatant but much more complex and subtle. A white participant raised his hand and insisted that racism no longer existed in America. He stated that once the baby boomers that faced racism in the 60s died, and could no longer engender claims of racism, the country would be at peace. I explained to the group that racism was alive and well and lurked just below, what I call, the "swallow waters" and could easily, without notice, raise its head and smack us in the face just when we

thought the issues of racism were diminished. The racial profiling of Trayvon Martin is a prime example of just when you think the issue of racial profiling of African Americans has ended; suddenly racism raises its head and shocks the conscious of the country.

It would seem that after a flood of racial profiling litigation, media attention, and endless culture diversity training, racial profiling of African Americans would be past history. But African Americans, especially young black males, face a world of negative stereotypical biases and prejudices which appears to be permanently engraved in the minds of most Americans, including other minority groups. The public and at times law enforcement officials, automatically view young African American males as "suspicious", thus casting them as criminals involved in illegal activities.

The mere swagger, dress, walk and speech of African American males are often viewed in a negative light. For instance, the wearing of hoodies by black males seems to instill fear and intimidation in the minds of the public. Young African- American males are victims to such suspicion and profiling by the public. This may have been the situation that Trayvon Martin faced.

From preliminary reports it appears that the only mistake that Trayvon Martin made was being a black male, wearing a hoodie and walking in a predominately white community. In his possession was a cell phone, skittles and a can of ice tea. Unfortunately, this is not the first young African American males to fall victim to racial profiling. This scenario of a young African American male being violently attacked while walking in a white community is reminiscing of two infamous racial cases from the 1980s, Howard Beach and Bensonhurst.

African American males are not only singled out while walking in white communities, but also while driving, schooling, eating, running for political office, banking, serving as a juror, getting a taxi, shopping, and just being a black male.

The horrific killing of Trayvon Martin was further compounded by reports that he laid in morgue for three days while his parents searched for his whereabouts. Almost three weeks passed

before a national call for justice was sounded. It required civil rights leaders, those baby boomers, to organize African Americans, especially young African Americans to rally and demand a thorough investigation of the killing and an immediate arrest of the shooter. Finally, almost two months later an arrest and charges have been filed against the shooter.

What do we learn from this tragedy? First, we must acknowledge that racism still exist in our society. Second, there is an urgent need to educate young African American males on how to respond to blatant acts of racism in a constructive manner. We may never know how Trayvon Martin responded when faced with racism; but what we do know is that every young African American male, regardless of economic status will face issues of racism.

Finally, there is also a need for the next generation, the millenniums, to be nurtured and developed as the new leaders in the movement for civil rights. This generation is technologically savvy but often lack organizational and leadership skills on how to face issues of racism which have become highly complex, political, and covert. However, their knowledge and use of social media, if guided, could be a very effective tool to attack future injustices.

As baby boomers, we have tried to protect our children from acts of racism, so their experiences with blatant acts of racism may be limited. But there will come a time, when racism will raise above those "swallow waters" when they least expect it. The question will be whether we have prepared young African Americans to respond individually or to join with others to combat issues of racism.

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