

BETWEEN THE LINES

Police and Blacks: Perception of Misconduct is Oft-times Reality

By A. Asadullah Samad

We live in a society today where the prevailing frame of thought is that "perception is reality." Regardless whether it's real or not, if you can make people believe it, you've won half the battle. This premise drives major industries and social interface. The strong are strong, many times, not because they are, but because they make people believe it and the weak of thought follow suit because they think they don't have the power to challenge the strong or to change their reality. Perception now dictates public response. Madison Avenue believes it. Hollywood believes it. Wall Street believes it. And unfortunately, what many of these industries believe, so do the public. Except when it comes to law enforcement.

Law Enforcement is an industry of skewed realities. Heroes that can do no wrong—to some, villains that can do no right—to others. The Jekyll-Hyde "twisted sister" mentality of law enforcement only seems to surface under certain conditions, in certain circumstances, most frequently with a certain segment of the population. And for years one segment of the population felt that other's perception of reality was a figment of that segment's imagination. Why? Because in their reality, the collar of authority was thought to be unchallengeable. Largely because it is supposed to be beyond reproach at all times, in terms of its conduct, honor and responsibility to the citizenry. It wasn't until the last few years that it was recognized that one segment's perception was reality. The question as to which citizenry law enforcement is responsible to and what perception of law enforcement is really real is now quite clear. One segment of the population is "handled" differently than the other. This "handling" many times is abusive and, either broadens on or actually is, misconduct. And it's widespread, as if its some sort of policy, thereby making a large segment of Blacks' perception about police very real.

A month ago, on the same day as a whistleblower went to the D.A. to charge Los Angeles County Deputy Sheriffs for planting evidence on blacks, the Beverly Hills police was in the mainstream propaganda press for its racial biases against blacks. A week later, this columnist received a letter from an 18 year professor that was arrested under so-called mistaken identity by community college "campus police" (toy

cops, no less) and has since been under constant harassment for requesting an apology. It has become quite clear that the plurality of perception directly correlates with a plurality of treatment.

A very confrontative treatment that increases the likelihood for conflict and confrontation. This mentality is even spreading over into private and localized security enforcement where "toy cops" are emulating real cops. Toy Cops are acting worse than the real ones and with privatization of municipal services, like the privatization of prisons, juvenile detention centers, hospitalization services and damn near everything else, "private cops" are the wave of the future. And their behavior is getting worse because they are really not under a similar collar of authority or code of conduct as real cops.

This different standard makes their activity less likely to be monitored and less likely to be reprimanded if reported. It will be like the slavemaster turning the whip over to the overseer. The lick one gets will be at the discretion of the overseer with the backing of the master. What's scary is "the crime" code word people like Gov. Pete Wilson float, and the more restrictive punishments they are prepared to hand out, are more likely to play themselves out on our people. That's their version of "reinvigorating" their culture. That's not just a perception. This is real. Small police departments and localized departments, like airport cops, who may not necessarily really be "toy cops," have a toy cop mentality because they have some kind of complex where they feel they have to prove themselves.

Everybody wants to be a "gangsta," even the po'lice. Former L.A. Chief of Police Daryl Gates used to refer to his department in gangster terms, like "the family." Unfortunately, many of the people that come in contact with this mindset are not gangstas, but are treated like one regardless. Whether the citizen was stopped right or wrong, they still have rights. Many of the gangstas in blue forget this though. And it ain't always a racial thing. One of the biggest problems in the black community is the increasing number of black cops who act worse than the white ones, feeling they have to play out their complex on another brother for no reason. And don't let the partner be of a different racial persuasion, then its like they earn brownie points for degrading their own. Brothers and sisters

in law enforcement have enough to overcome without some "N-Word" (this is the politically correct reference these days—after 440 years) distorting the perception of their collective commitment to "make things better" to make law enforcement more reflective of the society at large.

Greater sensitivity to the people of the street is supposed to be one of the benefits of increased ethnic diversity in law enforcement, but in many cases—a brother might be better off with the other man than a "N-Word" with a badge. This is the

TO BE EQUAL

Black Men, Women Are Coming Together

By Hugh B. Price, President, National Urban League

In the last few weeks and months, two events, the hit movie, "Waiting to Exhale," and the Million Man March, have captured the consciousness and dominated conversations among African-Americans. And for good cause.

While some critics may shrug off the movie as a soap opera about the bonding of four black women, and the men in their lives—most of them insensitive scoundrels—it was more than that. With humor and poignancy, the women manifested real hopes and concerns about finding the right kind of men to help share their lives. Important social messages were evident.

The movie, adapted from Terry McMillan's best-selling book, portrays modern, progressive and upwardly mobile black women, a far cry from their frequent castings as docile servants, drug addicts, prostitutes or worse.

In cities throughout the

part of law enforcement nobody wants to talk about, but is very, very real in terms of blacks' perception about police. It ain't all on white folks (though much of it is). It's a real game of Russian roulette and now it very well could be, white face—you lose, black face—you lose worse. It's a terrible predicament for our people to be in, but it's a reality that won't change until law enforcement changes. But don't be fooled by skewed perceptions. Yes, police have a tough job, but they manage to handle the other segment of the population with a

greater amount of respect and discretion. Even though the risk is just as great. But because perceptions of blacks are skewed, treatment of blacks are just as skewed. Even for many black cops.

It's time for the police (and the "toy cops") to check its dual standard of law enforcement. Now that the public recognizes what's up, you need to "recognize" (as the youth say). The perception of misconduct and abuse behavior when dealing with blacks is not going to go away. Why? Because, in this case, perception is a reality.



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country, black mothers and daughters queued up to see the movie; women in groups gathered in the lobbies of the movie houses, sat in restaurants or in their homes afterward to discuss the movie and how their lives may or may not have resembled the lives of the women on the screen.

It is no secret that relations between black men and women are strained. The black family, especially in poor areas, is in tatters, and households with fathers are a rarity.

For black women who want to marry, the pool of available, educated, skilled black men, who can support families, is shrinking.

High death rates and incarceration in prisons have claimed so many young black men, potential husbands and fathers, that the concept of a two-parent family seems like a fantasy for too many women.

The women's plight strikes at the core of what is commonly called the breakup of the black family. Simply put, how can you

talk about family values when there is no family to speak of?

Now, for the connection between "Waiting to Exhale" and the Million Man March: both were gender oriented; and both outdid even the most ambitious forecasts for attendance. Men, some with their sons, sitting on their shoulders, cried at the outpouring of brotherhood at the march, just as women sympathized and joined in a camaraderie with their sisters on and off the screen.

While the film spoke of black women's hopes for meeting their Mr. Right, the march spoke of black men energizing themselves to "do the right thing" by their women. The women hoped to establish families; the marchers promised to return to their homes to help build and strengthen their families.

It is too soon to tell what the follow-through will be from "Waiting to Exhale," but many of the marchers, in growing numbers, are joining the National Urban League and NAACP



HUGH B. PRICE

affiliates, churches, fraternities and civic organizations, seeking to mentor and even adopt black children.

Fears that the march would exacerbate differences among black men, and that the film would further strain relations between black men and women, have thus far not been justified.

These were separate events, true, but they exemplified a coming together, a sense of oneness, that has been severely lacking among African-Americans.

Now, when black men and women start talking to each other—and the dialogue seems to have begun—we'll have the beginnings of the family we so desire.



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