

OUR VIEW

Out With the Old, in With..

The end of one year and the beginning of a new one typically brings talk of new year's resolutions. We start by taking inventory of ourselves—our minds, bodies and spirits, personal, professional, financial and social stations. Then we look at where we went right and wrong with regard to the previous year's resolutions. Once that's done, we create a set of goals for the pending year, pep-talking ourselves into believing that we'll stick to our guns and make the resolutions come to fruition.

Maybe it's time for us to look at new year's resolutions a different way. Resolutions require resolve, that you be resolute in accomplishing a goal. Let's start with exchanging "resolutions" for "goals." Besides having fewer syllables, goals create a more tangible image in the mind. A goal can be measured. "I want to lose 20 pounds in six months." If by the fifth month, you've only lost five, then you might have to go on a month-long fast. In creating a goal, be it long or short term, you're consigning yourself to be resolute, to show resolve.

And another thing: Don't aim too high or too low. Resolutions fail often because they are unattainable or can't be measured. "I want to read the Bible or Qur'an more this year." If you only cracked one or the other open twice last year, all you have to do is beat that. That goal is too easy. Nor should you expect to be able to debate theologians by year's end, particularly if you're not studying religion in a structured, academic setting. Measurable goals would be: Attend church or mosque every month; participate in prayer groups; go to one religious conference. Same thing with money, relationships, professional advancement—set practical goals. Your ability to achieve them will, in many ways, be tied to your resolve, how resolute you are.

One thing that can't and shouldn't be measured is embracing the human experience. The people you care about, you shouldn't put a limit on telling them how much you love them. Those who've influenced you, you shouldn't wait to let them know how much they mean to you. The people you barely talk to but who may have prayed for you, offered a welcome smile, a needed hug or kind words, you shouldn't wait to tell them thank you. Even your enemies deserve praise: They've made you stronger and, yes, wiser. Lift them up if only in prayer. If you need reminding of why it's important to be expressive, consider the people who left us this year, people who've shaped the African-American experience:

Kenneth B. Clark: Died May 1. His work as a psychologist critically influenced the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to ban segregation in public schools.

Shirley Chisholm: Died Jan 1. Chisholm was the first African-American woman elected to Congress and the first to run for president of the United States.

Johnnie L. Cochran Jr.: Died March 29. He's more remembered for defending O.J. Simpson, but less for being an ardent champion of justice for all people.

Ossie Davis: Died Feb. 4. The fabled actor and human rights champion graced stage and screen (big and small) with equal aplomb.

John H. Johnson: Died Aug. 8. It's because of Johnson, publisher of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines, that we were able to read about ourselves in a positive light.

Rosa Parks: Died Oct. 24. This humble seamstress became the face of the movement to empower Blacks with inalienable human rights.

Richard Pryor: Died Dec. 10. This actor-comedian used personal tragedy to entertain and agitate a racially and socio-economically polarized country.

Luther Vandross: Died July 1. 54. Even better than the Grammy Award-winning singer's tremendous voice was his compassionate heart.

August Wilson: Died Oct. 2. 60. Black America's playwright chronicled our experience like no other.

How about this for a new year's goal: Be better this year than you were last year.



Hip-hop has bad rap in legal realm

By Dora LaGrande
Sentinel-Voice

Are rappers the new target of the American criminal justice system? Is the American criminal justice system failing them?

As issues have been swirling over the past couple of weeks in the national debate about invasions of privacy relating to the controversial Patriot Act and news that President George Bush had authorized invasions of privacy as a response to combat terrorism (so he says), the hip-hop world once again finds itself on the cutting edge of raising awareness about social injustices that ultimately affect all American citizens.

The *Source* magazine has been conducting an investigation for the past seven years into discrimination against hip-hop artists who have been targeted by local, state and federal law enforcement organizations in what may be deemed an unconstitutional and unlawful manner.

They have discovered that the FBI has reportedly been conducting a widespread and costly investigation of the hip-hop industry for several years, and district attorneys across the country have built and are building careers by prosecuting and persecuting the Hip-Hop Generation.

They have found that district attorneys and prosecutors get especially anxious when famous rappers get charged by the police. Bring-



ON THE RECORD

By Dora LaGrande

ing them to trial is a no-lose situation: Rappers are predominantly young, famous and, most importantly, Black. The system keeps touting that justice is color-blind, yet, once again, America's history of racism is very much at play in courtrooms across the country.

Recently, news broke in Miami and New York that police departments have admitted to using special task forces to gather intelligence and keep tabs on hip-hop artists and their entourages. The mere existence of these so-called Hip-Hop Task Forces proves that there are serious consequences of the misleading and damaging stereotypes that exist in mainstream society regarding hip-hop music, culture and the millions of young people across the globe who make up the Hip-Hop Generation.

Critics charge that it is a throwback to the FBI's COINTELPRO program of the '60s and '70s which was used to destroy Black empowerment movements.

Research shows that many scholars and legal rights activists connect recent police department admissions that they target hip-hop artists and their followers to the historical pattern of tar-

geting musicians, civil rights leaders and anti-war protesters.

David Cole, a Georgetown University law professor, told the *Miami Herald*, "Law enforcement agencies historically single out political groups because of their speech. Here, their targeting of [rappers] reinforces the stereotype that because you're young, Black and male, you're likely to be a criminal. That has a damaging effect on the Black community at large."

Profiling hip-hop artists and youth is damaging to the public interest. The Hip-Hop Generation is almost single handedly responsible for the economic and cultural resurgence of South Beach, Fla., over the past five years.

Law enforcement agencies that buy into harmful stereotypes are at best guilty of racial insensitivity, at worst of flat-out racism. We must work hard to educate the law enforcement community properly on the \$10 billion hip-hop industry.

Hopefully, the admissions on the part of the New York and Miami police departments will force America to confront its misguided fear and hysteria with respect to young Black men in our society. I don't think any of us will hold our breath waiting for that to happen.

Corporate rap soundtracks promote lifestyles (that are actually death styles) which foster the perception of lawlessness that leads to criminalization of our Hip-Hop Generation. Most of the perception of hip-hop as a violent industry and culture can be linked to the fact that many of the artists come from impoverished and highly disadvantaged

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