

## “No More of the Same”

by

B. B. Robinson

In 1996, Jennifer Eberhardt and Susan Fiske, experts on stereotypes and stereotyping, had the following to say about “targets” or the “stereotyped” in a paper on “Motivating Individuals to Change: What Is a Target to Do?”

Targets have received such limited attention in the social psychological literature on stereotyping and prejudice quite possibly because targets typically are not seen as causal agents who can impact their social environment in a meaningful way.

Probably the most stereotyped group in America is Black males. When one thinks about Black males as targets, one uncovers four very common stereotypes: Lazy; athletic; musician; and preoccupied with sex.

Recently, the news media has had a field day with these stereotypes. Last week, *The Washington Post* issued another in its series of under-the-microscope analyses of Black males; this time focusing on Black men’s “Working Drought.” The subtle message was, “Black males are lazy, and that’s why they don’t work.”

In addition, last week, the media reported on the trial and sentencing of Christopher McCowen, a Black male accused of raping and murdering a White fashion writer, Christa Worthington of Cape Cod, Massachusetts. The news story stated that police concluded that McCowen was the rapist because a White, educated, fashion writer would never have agreed to consensual sex with a Black, uneducated, garbage man—a defense that McCowen had lodged.

Both of these stories are loaded guns for Black males. In the first instance, and to an uninformed non-Black public, it is difficult to rationalize how Black men can’t find work when the rest of the nation is working. The former do not understand that self-fulfilling prophecy is at play here. The media informs the public that Black men don’t have jobs. The implication is that this outcome results from Black males’ laziness. The public is reminded of this stereotyped character trait, and then uses it as an unconscious or conscious rationale for refusing to hire Black males when they come calling for work.

In the second instance, police build a case that is reminiscent of the Emit Till story. Instead of “I dare a little Black boy ever get it into his head that he can whistle at the forbidden White female,” this time the inference is “I dare an uneducated garbage man (not trash collector) to think that consensual sex could ever be possible with an educated and forbidden White female.” If the whistler or garbage man had been White, would the same chain of events have unfolded? Most likely not! Often, Black males are victims simply because of stereotypes.

It goes without saying that it is inappropriate for one to step into another's space or to violate another's person. When this occurs, laws mandate corrective and punitive action. But must these laws be called to service so disproportionately against Black males? Stereotypes must be recognized as an important component of the answer to the question.

This is a 400-year saga in America. How and when can Black males—the stereotyped—interrupt this nightmare? In my view, if Black males don't take action now to turn back existing and newly developing stereotypes, then the only uncertainty about our ultimate demise as a group in America is the precise date and time.

Black males—rich and poor, educated and uneducated, working and nonworking—must identify stereotypes against which to take action. (If you are uncertain about how to challenge stereotypes, then please ask a friend or contact me; [blackconomics@blackconomics.org](mailto:blackconomics@blackconomics.org) .) We must challenge verbally and in writing the purveyors of stereotypes on all fronts. If we do not, and think that we are immune to the devastating effects of stereotypes, then we should not be surprised to find ourselves accused of behavior that we do not commit, or to find ourselves without a source of livelihood. It is a simple truth, “stereotypes will do what they are designed to do, unless we stop them.”

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