



## **YOUTH DAY (Youth and Sex)**

### **CULTURAL RESOURCES**

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#### **I. Historical Documents**

##### **Sex and Today's Youth – A Survey**

In 2004, a report prepared by Motivational Educational Entertainment along with the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy looked at sexual trends among low-income black urban youth. The report also contained interviews with ten experts on sexuality. The project surveyed forty focus groups in nine urban areas. Youth ages sixteen-twenty were interviewed. Among key findings of the report were: Young black girls do not feel valued; “Becoming a teen parent seems more realistic than abstaining from sex, getting married, or having a successful future;” and “Parents can help but they often don’t,” and regardless of income race or residence the teens wanted parental support.<sup>1</sup> The report made clear that “these young people are products of the socio-economic and cultural influences in their environment.”<sup>2</sup> Although pregnancy rates are

decreasing, black youth are having sex sooner and are becoming HIV/AIDS victims in high numbers.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the report was the disdain for black females shown by males, and females. Reporter Thulani Davis of the Village Voice commenting on the report said, “As the authors put it, ‘Black females are valued by no one.’”<sup>4</sup> The report lists 15 negative names used by males and females to refer to females, but only four names used to refer to males which could be reasonably perceived as negative. Beth Richie, one of the scholars participating in the report said, “Young people today in lower-income black communities are facing...a whole set of stereotypical images of themselves-hypersexual, sexually irresponsible, not concerned with ongoing intimate relationships. They can’t help but be influenced by those images.”<sup>5</sup>

Though it needs to be mentioned that many African American youth are excelling in high school, going to college, and leading productive crime-free lives, those who are in trouble need help. Thus, my focus on how to address some of the negativity mentioned by Ms. Richie.

## **II. Negative Images of Girls and Women in Media**

Unfortunately, the formerly mentioned negative images are everywhere. They abound in popular culture (i.e. music, television, magazines, movies, etc.). For each generation the acceptable norms of social interaction have largely been governed by popular culture. It is no secret that today’s youth are inundated with references to sex and sexual intercourse in every area of popular culture. The media has found new ways to disseminate its messages to younger and younger audiences. Turn on the radio and one will hear explicit lyrics such as 50 Cent’s Candy Shop, “Wanna show me how you work it baby, no problem. Get on top then get to bouncing round like a low rider. I’m a seasoned vet when it come to this sh---. After you work up a sweat you can play with the stick. I’m trying to explain baby the best way I can. I melt in your mouth girl, not in your hands;” or the Ying Yang Twins’ Wait (The Whisper Song), “Hey how you doin lil mama? Lemme whisper in your ear. Tell you sumthing that you might like to hear. You got a sexy a--- body and you’re a-- look soft. Mind if I touch it? and see if its soft”; or Ludacris’ Money Maker,: “Shake, shake, shake your money maker. Like you were shaking it for some paper. Took your mama 9 months to make ya. Might as well shake what ya mama gave ya.”

All of these songs were popular, and not only gained unrestrained rotation on radio stations, but their accompanying videos were showcased regularly on Black Entertainment Television (BET) and elsewhere. These videos have played a large role in defining sex and gender roles for a number of years. They use a formula that consists of scantily-clad young women dancing and shaking their bodies in front the camera, while fully dressed men ogle or fondle them.

MTV (The Real World, Shot at Love), the CW (One Tree Hill, Girlfriends), and other major networks are homes to a number of reality and sitcom shows that project messages

of hyper sexuality and promiscuity in college-aged and younger segments of the population. The message has clearly been sent to both the youth and young adults of today that sex is a rite of passage into social acceptance and premature adulthood, not something to be valued or shared in marriage.

BET is so centered on the exposition of raunchy, soft porn videos that they devoted a segment of their late night programming to a show called BET Uncut. The show featured videos that were too explicit to be showcased during primetime hours. The controversy regarding the videos and images shown reached a fever pitch in 2003 when Nelly's video Tip Drill featured him swiping a credit card down a woman's butt. The phrase "Tip-Drill" refers to an ugly woman with a nice body, good only for sex; in what some see as reinforcing the stereotype of women as a cash-and-carry commodity. The video also raised questions about the sexual exploitation of black women and BET's responsibility in projecting these images. Although BET Uncut was cancelled in 2006, its featured videos can still be viewed on internet sites such as YouTube.

In recent years, publications such as Essence magazine have begun to challenge the images and language of popular music. In 2005, the magazine launched its "Take the Music Back" campaign, which was designed to provide a platform for discussion about popular music's extreme images of black women; explore the effects of such imagery on our children, especially our girls; to seek greater balance in how black women—and black men—are portrayed in popular music and culture; encourage readers to examine their own attitudes on the subject; and promote artists who deliver positive alternatives so that readers can vote with their dollars.<sup>6</sup>

But the fight against such images is not resigned primarily to secular entities. Elder Craig G. Lewis heads Ex Ministries which not only addresses the sexual images and lyrics present in popular culture, but also the social pressures facing most youth. Urban contemporary gospel has also become a way in which these issues have been addressed. As alternatives to negative secular hip hop and R&B culture, the gospel music community has infused the language, visual art style, dance, and production of the music into several sub-genres of contemporary gospel. Called the "sound and beat of the street," the urban contemporary gospel style can be broken down into a myriad of genres including hip hop gospel (defined by the work of Ricky Dillard, Kirk Franklin, Brent Moss, J. Moss, Mary Mary, Karen Clark Sheard; Kierra "KiKi" Sheard, and Youthful Praise), where hip hop in the form of samples, rap, and performance aesthetic is combined with lyrics that draw on personal experience with God or from scripture; reggae gospel (this is where a gospel message is set against reggae rhythms, (Papa San, Infinity, and Christafari, are purveyors of this style); and gospel rap or what some now call holy hip hop which utilizes similar performance practices as mainstream hip hop, but with a gospel message. The biblically inspired messages of these artists and genres have been furthered reinforced through videos, artists' showcase, and television shows such as "Bobby Jones Gospel" and "Lift Every Voice" (both on BET).

### **III. Standing Up for Black Females Against Nellie's Tip Drill Video**

Moya Bailey describes her reaction to Nelly's video in, "Dilemma: Students at Spelman College Protest Nelly's Video 'Tip Drill'"<sup>7</sup> "Over Christmas break I was up late one night on the phone. As I passed the den I glanced at the TV and what I saw made me stop. Nelly and the St. Lunatics were throwing money at nearly naked women... Then I saw Murphy Lee [Nellie] sliding a credit card between a woman's butt cheeks. I was too disgusted to even speak and got off the phone quickly.

When I came back to school, along with the usual "How was break?" and "What'd you do?" came the soon equally familiar, "Have you seen 'Tip Drill?'" My Spelman sisters and Morehouse brothers alike were shocked by this recent low in depictions of African American women on the small screen. Our critique of the video was not isolated. Fellow Historically Black College/University (HBCU) students at Howard had protested in front of Viacom to show their outrage towards the video in mid-December. It became apparent to me, as Spelman's Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance (FMLA) President that this was something that we, too, needed to address...

I saw Asha Jennings, The Spelman Student Government Association (SGA) President carrying a big box... Asha explained that in the box were flyers for the Jes Us 4 Jackie bone marrow drive that was set to take place on April 2. Spelman SGA had been working with Nelly's foundation to bring a bone marrow registration drive to campus. The problem was readily apparent.

How could Spelman, a historically black women's institution, have Nelly on campus after his heinous depiction of black women in his lyrics and videos? Asha had been previously unaware of the video and had just seen it. She now stood at the crossroads of what to do. Should she cancel the drive, knowing that the issue of minority bone marrow registration would go unaddressed? Should she uninvite Nelly... and allow the foundation to come? Should students remain silent altogether and not bring up the issue of "Tip Drill?"

Asha presented her dilemma to our Feminist Theory class, citing that her other classes were in favor of participating in the drive, and then writing Nelly a letter which would uninvite him from the campus. Our professor, Dr. Guy-Sheftall, was the voice of reason and pointed out that writing a letter does not carry the same weight that protesting or canceling a drive have. If we were upset about his portrayal of African American women in the video, our actions had to be equally powerful. Additionally, sending a letter does not ensure that Nelly will read it. He has people who read his mail for him and he might never know our concern. Finally, you cannot separate the man from his foundation. It belongs to him and should he decide to come on campus, he could do so with his foundation...

The students heavily debated Nelly, his lyrics and their impact upon the community and society at large, and the morality of inviting Nelly, someone whose position was insufferable, but who offered some riches by way of the foundation, or uninviting him and his foundation. The following is a summary of what eventually transpired.

“Fliers were up all over campus and the Nelly "Tip Drill" controversy was heating up. However, it was not until the Tuesday night FMLA meeting that everything came to a head. Asha informed the group that the foundation had pulled out of the drive. Apparently, the foundation had been to campus earlier that week and seen the signs that the FMLA put up all over campus. They scheduled an emergency meeting with SGA and requested that no protestors be at the drive. SGA could not meet the ridiculous demand of assuring their request. The foundation then left the room so that SGA could vote on whether or not the drive could continue if, at the foundation's request, Nelly agreed to participate in a forum to address student concerns. Despite a unanimous vote to continue with the drive under the new stipulations, when the foundation came back they had already decided to cancel the drive. The foundation was apparently so upset about this issue that they went to the press, saying that Spelman canceled the drive because of the video "Tip Drill." Unfortunately for them, their plan backfired and the media coverage blew up and ended up depicting them negatively....”<sup>8</sup>

#### **IV. Testimonies About Being Positive Role Models for Young People**

##### **A. Gospel artist Kierra”Kiki” Sheard on being young and saved**

“I really love being a role model. I love being an example for the youth. At the same time, being a teenager, there are some things I might do that I have to be careful of, because of the doors that God has opened and because of my name. There is a lot of expectation from the people around me and those watching me, but I am staying on top of it. Tomorrow is not promised y’all! You have to take advantage of everything He has to offer while you’re young. I mean, why not do it? What’s to wait for? He is coming back so soon, and it will be unexpected. We have got to live saved. The people you are trying to impress and hang around? It’s time out for that, if they are not living saved. Spirits can transfer; I’m a witness to that. Why would you allow the spirit of the enemy to overtake your mind and your life? The enemy will go as far as to use the people who are closest to you to bring you down and before you know it, you are in a mess. He is THE best thing that could happen to you.”<sup>9</sup>

##### **B. Gospel artist Kirk Franklin on his struggle with pornography**

“There's always the boy who has the big brother who has the magazine under his bed. That's how it starts. So the first time I ever saw one, I was around eight or nine. I saw my first magazine, and from there I was addicted. It's weird because you're talking about the dude who was the minister of music at a church when I was eleven. I have to check myself because there's an anger that rises up in me. I get evangelically ticked off by the fact that I wished somebody would have taught me a long time ago about the repercussions of sex and flesh and lust and vanity and pride and ego. I wished somebody would have been holding my little behind accountable years ago. But let me tell you what happens to the gifted. The gifted in the church slip right through.”

As his popularity grew, Franklin’s issues with pornography threatened to derail his success. So after many years he sought spiritual counseling.

In 2006, he announced his struggles and his subsequent healing on the Oprah Show. “If I have been set free from this one, anybody can be set free because I questioned for years whether I could be set free. Dude, I was doing albums, albums that people were getting blessed by, and I was struggling with pornography. ‘Why We Sing’ came out in '93, and I was struggling with pornography. ‘Stomp’ came out in '97, and I was struggling with pornography. These albums God was speaking through and everyone was getting their victory except for me. I used to question and almost began to wonder, ‘What's going on? What was happening, and this might help people’: my victory didn't come by my emotional experience; my victory came through truth. When I was taught truth, that's when I got my freedom.”<sup>10</sup>

## **V. Songs that Speak to the Calendar Moment**

### **My Body**

Who do you think I am?  
I don't play these games  
Not goin' out like that let me explain  
Tryin' to save myself  
Don't pressure me.  
My spirit leads me to celibacy  
I have to just be real and I know it's fair  
I wanna please my God and I don't care  
You can just leave now, but if you stay  
There's gonna be no other way.

### **[Chorus]**

If this is love then you can take it  
If this is not then don't ya fake it.  
My body is the Lord's temple  
Don't mess with me----God's property  
It ain't that bad if you try to see  
His perfect will is all that I need  
My body is the Lord's temple  
Don't mess with me----God's property.<sup>11</sup>

### **Let It Go**

#### **[verse 2]**

Sex was how I made it thru  
No one was teaching love so how did it I do?  
See where I'm from they call you gay and say you ain't a man  
Show them you ain't no punk  
Get all the girls you can.”<sup>12</sup>

### **Wrong Things**

Thought of people callin' me  
Tryin' to get my attention  
Do some things I ain't suppose to,  
Lead me in the wrong direction  
But the only road for me  
Is to wherever You are  
I will follow You wherever you are  
No matter how near or far.<sup>13</sup>

## **VI. The Enough is Enough Campaign**

Similar to the campaign against sexually explicit and derogatory rap music led by Reverend Calvin Butts, pastor of the historic Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem in 1993, in fall of 2007, Reverend Delman Coates, Ph.D., pastor of Mount Enon Baptist Church in the D.C./Maryland area began a campaign against use of song lyrics that degrade black women and men. According to Coates, "The global marketing of negatives images and stereotypes has created an environment in which portrayal of black men as "pimps, players, gangsters, thugs, drug dealers, etc., and black women as strippers, whores and objects for sexual exploitation are becoming mainstream, acceptable in the American popular imagination." Coates led congregants, and others, in a march to the home of Washington D.C. resident Debra Lee who is the chairman of BET, and outside the home of Philippe Dauman, the president and chief executive of Viacom Inc. which owns BET and several other media entities. According to Coates weekly demonstrations would be held.<sup>14</sup>

"Additionally, we are focusing on the FCC to do more to enforce its mandate on indecency on the public airways between 6am and 10pm," he continued. "We are also looking for Congress to allow consumer choice in the cable industry; more popularly known as ala carte cable. We believe this is important because, currently, even if consumers change the channel, their cable bill is still going towards subsidizing those outlets that produce content that they don't desire or support. (On top of that), the FCC put out a report in 2006 that said ala carte cable will help reduce cable bills by 13 percent...."

"I'm a child of Hip-Hop music. I grew up on Run DMC, KRS 1, Afrika Bambaataa, A Tribe Called Quest and Del La Soul," said Coates. "I am a child of Hip-Hop music and I believe that it's not just those that are 40 and over (protesting). There are many young adults, and many teenagers who I believe are equally concerned and, to a large degree, disgraced by the representation that's being shown..."

It's really about the kind of world that we want to leave to our children and grandchildren," Coates reasoned. There has been a growing coarseness in American popular culture. If we, as Americans, don't begin to balance between our freedoms and dealing with them responsibly we will destroy our society from within. Right now we are battling a war against those who seek to destroy us from the outside, but if we don't move now we stand in jeopardy. We stand to destroy ourselves from within. As African

Americans and as Americans we are destroying our minds, souls and hearts. It's more than just music. These lyrics are destroying the minds and ambitions of our future generations.”<sup>15</sup>

### Notes

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