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The Stereotypes of Urban Kids In America
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It seems that in today's lifestyle and culture, the portrayal of African-Americans is predominantly and repetitively negative. The repetition of negative images and/or events in the mass media continues to influence and fuel the production of negative stereotypes of urban kids in particular, and the African-American culture in general. While these exist, African-American culture will continue to be degraded. It's true that stereotypes of African-American are fueled by negative images in the mass media.

The mass media have an extremely powerful influence and control over the production of negativity overshadowing the African-American culture and community. One of the main tools used in this continuous "onslaught" of the African-American lifestyle through the media is the television. Television mainly focuses on the negative views of African-American life. This is exemplified through the images constantly produced by television programs. Music videos and movies frequently portray average African-American males as drug dealers, thugs or extremely poor urban community civilians.

Another leader in the production of negative stereotypes of urban kids and community is the music industry. The messages in music have and continue to degrade African-Americans. "It's hard to visualize something better when all you see and hear is negativity." This is especially true in today's music, as the lyrics in mainstream music constantly intertwine African-Americans with drugs, poverty and violence. Along with

this obscene fact, the negativity projected through mainstream music today is usually directed *toward* African-Americans *by other* African –Americans. The music containing more negative and demeaning lyrics is the music being put more heavily into rotation for the mass public to hear. The media seemingly disregard music containing the more positive messages of African-Americans.

Another problem with the mass media concerning African-American culture is the lack of successful yet positive African-American role models. Role models provide guidance. Perhaps this is correct now more than ever because of the demeaning and harsh environments in which urban kids are forced to grow up and live. Along with the negative stereotypes being repeated in the media, the mass media also fail to publicize positive events, actions and the simple portrayal of positive yet successful African-American individuals. The common images shown to the public at large are street hustlers, gangbangers and rappers of today's society. Rarely are African-Americans who have gained success positively by other means shown in mass media, especially when compared to the rate at which successful, positive whites are publicized. More positive images of urban kids, adults and society are needed in the mass media so that common and clichéd stereotypes regarding African-Americans can stop.

These constant stereotypes enslave the minds of white people into thinking that all of the negativity in the media accurately reflects African-American culture entirely. These stereotypes hypnotize African-Americans into believing these negative perceptions are all there is to live for, ultimately weakening and lowering the standard of African-American humanity. As a possible solution to these problems, major figures in the mass media, such as musical artists, should focus more on projecting and publicizing the

positive aspects of African-American culture: our potential; our accomplishments; our impact on the world; and our dreams. I believe that this would work because the more publicity the good aspects of something receive, the greater the residual impact it will have on the people watching, listening, and/or receiving the information. We, as artists and consumers, can help negate the bad with the good, with repetition. If the mass media starts to project much more positive, constructive and inspirational images, programs and information into consistent repetition and rotation, negative stereotypes of African-Americans will gradually lose their foundation of poor and degrading information. Stereotypes of blacks will be less powerful and consistent. Positive results are possible but the mass media, artists and consumers all have to work toward a productive and peaceful resolution. Change is most definitely possible now; we just have to make our move.