



Our culture is killing us

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### *A Sick Village Raises Sick Children*

The village is entrusted with the raising of children, however, if the village is sick—then the village will raise sick children. Most of the problems occurring in the community that threaten the success of that community to raise its children well are at the root—self-worth related issues.

The negative behavior that is prevalent in crime, drug and illegal substance abuse, promiscuity and its inherent spread of sexually transmitted diseases, juvenile delinquency, child abuse and deprivation to name a few, are usually accompanied by a general lack of education and training.

If we look deeper, we will find that the self-perpetuating syndrome at the root of our educational deficit is lack of self-values in the community, the home and in the individual.

In a village where sexuality dominates the culture, you will have a higher incidence of children mimicking the behavior of adults who subscribe to and foster this culture. In a culture where fashion is important, children will be obsessed with the need to wear designer clothes. In a culture where violence is glamorized and considered manly or for that manner womanly, we will find the most violent young people in history.

It is the nature of children to mirror their environment.

## WHEN THE STUDENT IS READY, THE TEACHER WILL APPEAR

my classmates, were it not for that bag of school supplies, I would have had none. The people I lived with would not waste money on something as trivial as school supplies, not for me.

*Blue Horse* would supply the composition books, *Scripto*, the rubber erasers. There would be items from other companies but most of the items would bear the *Coca Cola* trademark. The Coca Cola Company would supply the tablets, the pencil boxes and most poignant to my memory, all those pencils. The pencils would be everywhere. They would also be just about the only chance of a pencil being in my house.

Pencils in my house were used mostly to write the numbers. The numbers were the illegal predecessor to the lottery. The people who raised me were involved in the numbers racket, among others.

I did not begrudge the fact that our goody bags were not filled with candy, I valued education far too much for that. School was my refuge and learning was my favorite pastime. As much as I valued education it goes without saying that I also valued the instruments of education. The tablets, the chalk boards and the chalk. The books, the rulers, the erasers and yes, all those Coca Cola pencils.

Quite naturally, I developed allegiance to the companies who facilitated my having those instruments of education. In my home today, my family and guests often laugh at my attitude when someone brings a Pepsi into my house. I act as though the person blasphemed. My loyalty to Coca Cola, because of all those pencils is life long and I feel a deep and sincere allegiance to that brand.

What then, I ask, is the corporate world thinking? What greater way to build customer loyalty to a product or brand than to be a very visible presence in that most important aspect of any American's life, the educational environment?

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She said that if I ever found the world that I lived in too ugly, that I could escape any time I wanted to. That I could go any place in space or time. She said that I could have friends from all walks of life. That I could walk with kings and presidents and that they would teach me all that I cared to learn. She said that if I studied them that I could be just like them and that I could have anything that they had.

Then Mrs. Moore placed the small hard-backed book on the desk in front of me. She said that *all* I had to do was find a quiet place to go and read.

Just like that, with that old, worn, dog-eared copy of *Ivanhoe*, my life was transformed. Through the years, I would often get into fights because I got caught reading, or simply carrying a book, by some of the bullies in the neighborhood. But I never forgot those words she said that day. That I could go to any place and time. That I could walk with kings and presidents. Mrs. Moore not only changed my life that day, she saved my life.

Not only did I read *Ivanhoe*, but I was so proud of myself that I had read an entire *grown-up* book that I could almost bust. Most of all, in additions to the lessons in character and loyalty that were introduced to me by this book, I could not wait to read another book. The library (they are called media centers today) became and still is my favorite place in any school. I developed a passionate love for reading that has never subsided.

I know that I passed this love on to my children. We probably have the strangest looking dinner table around. We will be sitting there eating and every one at the table will be reading something. Oh, there would be conversation, mostly about what we were each reading, but everyone's head would periodically disappear behind the pages of a book.

My love for reading along with several other character

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accountable for the damage that is done with its irresponsible use of language.

There is also an anti-achievement mentality in our community that is more pervasive in the black community but is common in all walks of life. The *nerd syndrome*. Anyone who attempts to conform to the simple principles that are proven to lead to success is called a nerd. A person who demonstrates skill and talent with computers is called a computer geek.

In this *mindless*-set, anyone who studies, dresses modestly, practices punctuality, obeys rules and makes an attempt to achieve positive goals is an outcast. In the black community this person is often said to be *acting white*. If they practice proper grammar they are trying to talk white. How is it that trying to do things the right way has become associated with being white?

I often show youth a picture of a bespeckled Donald Rumsfeld along side several figures who are dressed in current fashion and ask them to pick out the nerd. The young people unanimously choose Rumsfeld. They are shocked when I point out that this man is in charge of the greatest military in the history of the world.

I point out to them that they will spend a great part of their lives working for nerds, that they will vote to elect nerds to positions of authority over their own lives. That nerds wearing robes in court rooms will often make decisions that have undeniable effects on their lives. We are being misled in our culture when it comes to choosing people to admire and to emulate.

Our growth is stifled because many of us prefer to view our selves in the image of people who to us look *good*. Madison Avenue sells these images to us and we line up at checkout counters by the millions so that we can look like the people that we admire, while people who look nothing

## CALVIN SIMS

they are just overwhelmed by the positive voices and our selective listening.

This control can be developed. It is the most important of all of the personal development characteristics. To diminish the defeatist voices while promoting the uplifting voices requires training and practice. Practice, fortunately, is something that we can do at all times. By simply monitoring our activities and making sure that we are constantly having encouraging, motivating conversations with ourselves, it will gradually become easier to suppress voices of doubt and uncertainty.

Once positive voices dominate, we will become the very definition of a self-disciplined person and our achievements will attest to that fact.

*Work Ethic*

Many young people view work as a form of punishment. Their approach to work is negative and they try to avoid work at all costs. I believe that hip-hop culture is partly to blame because it teaches that working is for fools and only nerds enjoy working.

Often, hard working artists of the rap genre are workaholics, yet it is the nature of their product and their target demographic that they promote a lifestyle of leisure. They go through great lengths to belie the hectic pace that they submit to in order to be successful in this highly competitive industry. Our young people are being misled by this fantasy world spin that is part of all things hip-hop.

Given the simplest of tasks to complete, the typical young person will do a mediocre to unacceptable job. They are often lethargic and slow, they often do sloppy work, yet these same individuals desire high wages for that sloppy work.