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OPINION

Troubling Rites of Passage in Sports

Correcting an abusive culture

BY HAKIM HAZIM

Currently it's impossible to have a conversation about social ills and not bring up the issue of bullying. Previously, this conversation was limited to our schools but in recent years, it has expanded to include research on the means and objectives of bullying and the environments in which it takes place.

In short, bullying happens everywhere. The story of Miami Dolphins offensive tackle Jonathan Martin is the latest revelation of the troubling, acceptable rites of passage that shape young people.

Rites of passage are activities designed to test young men and prepare them for adult life. Historically, many cultures across this globe designed a series of steps that their young men had to under-



take—and succeed at before they could be considered men. Failure led to being shunned by everyone in the village or one would be driven out, assigned a place with other children, and never allowed to marry.

You were considered less than a man and undeserving of any further responsibilities. As societies evolved, these rites of passages were no longer agreed upon or codified in a social context. Young men were left to figure this out for themselves. Military service, employment, athletics, sexual prowess, physical and material acquisitions and numerous other things were held out as examples of manhood. I chose athletics.

On a personal level, I understand, let me say—overstand, the culture of sports. Although no one in my family ever played professionally, five of us did secure NCAA Division One scholarships. The attention and recognition given to people who are stand out athletes is in my opinion unwarranted and symptomatic of our obsession with sports in America.

To be sure, I love athletics and I'm guilty of being too emotionally involved with the teams I root for. What's really interesting is how I become verbally abusive at the television screen when players don't perform to my standards.

Words like "loser," "buster, sit him down" effortlessly pour from my mouth, feeling justified in my

quired belief.

The situations covered in the previous paragraphs brings us to a Stanford educated black man who seemingly snapped under the pressure of trying to live up to the image of what is a tough athlete.

Another level of incomprehension is the nature of the dysfunctional relationship between the men-

one to fit in. Once you belong, you must perpetuate the groupthink. Martin obviously had enough. Although some call his motives dubious, one thing is clear: he no longer wanted to participate.

There are many troubling things and details emerging from this story, but perhaps the most disturbing fact: is how Miami Dolphins players are circling the wagons. The good old boy system is in full effect. If Martin ever returns to football, he will encounter an even more difficult time fitting in.

In sum, I scratch my head to understand how the field of dreams has become a nightmare to so many athletes. As a black man, I reaped many benefits from excelling at sports. I also acquired some attitudes I later shed over the years. Penn State, Rutgers and the Miami Dolphins have taught us a great deal about the team: how to handle in-house mentality of high level sports culture. The lesson? It doesn't work.

Hakim Hazim is the founder and author of *Relevant Now Musing*.

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wrath. As a former athlete, I heard all of these derogatory words slung directly at me and others by players, teammates, fans and coaches. I never thought anything of it and I learned how to deal with this. I questioned the physical toughness and mental fortitude of those who appeared to be weak or unqualified for high level competition. To this very day when I lose in competition, I feel inadequate. Unfortunately, it's an ac-

tor, Richard Incognito, and Martin, the mentee. Incognito's blatant and unapologetic use of the "N" word toward Martin, demonstrates a lack of personal respect and boundaries on Martin's part.

I believe the rites of passage that brought Martin to this point are similar to gang initiations, cult indoctrination and other forms of mental abuse and boundary erosion techniques used to force some-

Supporting Our Community on Black Friday

Engage in a season of resistance

BY DR. RON DANIELS

The X-mas season (the commercialized, corrupted, capitalist version of Christmas) provides an excellent opportunity for Africans in America to engage in a season of resistance.



men like Trayvon Martin are not immune to the seductive appeal of the X-mas season.

On Black Friday, black consumers will lineup with liberated white folks in the reckless race to give our hard earned and precious

less buying frenzy, the white corporate establishment would come running, asking what concessions they should make to end the economic sanctions.

Black people have more than \$1 trillion of consumer buying power in our hands. The question is whether we have the consciousness, commitment and discipline to use it to promote and defend our

vendors and businesses can be assembled under one roof to display their wares for sale.

The second principle of the utilization of consumer power is to leverage with businesses and corporations that depend on black consumer dollars. It is reasonable to expect and demand that businesses and corporations that we patronize reinvest dollars back into the black community in the form of jobs, advertisement in black media, sponsorships and contributions to worthy causes.

We absolutely cannot permit businesses to grow fat off our

dollars without demanding reinvestment in our communities. Those who refuse to do so must face the wrath of economic sanctions, and there is no better time to target offending businesses and corporations than the X-mas season.

Let us transform it into a season of resistance -- Remember Trayvon Martin: Boycott Florida, and buy black on "Black Friday!"

Dr. Ron Daniels is president of the Institute of the Black World 21st Century and distinguished lecturer at York College City University of New York.

There is no better time to renew a spirit of resistance than the present. At a minimum, seek out black businesses and purchase as many gifts as possible from them to bolster the black economy.

dollars to the oppressor! We are addicted. We must educate and organize to kick the habit.

Black Friday should mark a critical point when black consumers utilize the billions of dollars in our hands as a weapon to advance the freedom struggle. I have often said if black people would commit to "keeping Christ in Christmas," focus on the spiritual and family aspects of the season and consciously refuse to participate in the sense-

interests.

There is no better time to renew a spirit of resistance than the present. At a minimum, seek out black businesses and purchase as many gifts as possible from them to bolster the black economy.

Veteran activists have long advocated "support black business" days as a means of building a strong economic infrastructure to employ black people. In addition, communities can organize expos where black

THE LAW OFFICES OF Patrick John Sweeney, P.C.

Patrick John Sweeney
Attorney at Law

1549 SE Ladd
Portland, Oregon

Portland: (503) 244-2080
Hillsboro: (503) 244-2081
Facsimile: (503) 244-2084
Email: Sweeney@PDXLawyer.com

The corporate retail establishment in this country is heavily dependent upon the holiday season for consumers to participate in a frenzy of buying to buttress their bottom line.

The unofficial kick-off of the "shop until you drop" season is the Friday after Thanksgiving, which has popularly come to be known as "Black Friday," the day when the corporate retail giants begin an all out effort to induce, seduce, bribe and otherwise "persuade" consumers to buy enough goods to enable companies to "break into the black" and achieve profitability for the year!

Unfortunately, the sons and daughters of formerly enslaved Africans in America, who complain about the oppressive conditions of stop-and-frisk, joblessness, the War on Drugs, crime, violence, fratricide and the murder of unarmed black