

## The plight of the Black man

Written by Darren D. Moore, Ph.D., LMFT  
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Last Saturday night, I went to see the new movie "Fruitvale Station."

I cannot begin to tell you how powerful the story is. Michael B. Jordan (depicting Oscar Grant III) really captured what I call or consider the plight of the Black man. The main character was an African-American male who was killed by a policeman at the Fruitvale Bay Area Rapid Transit Station. Grant had some struggles in life and he definitely was not perfect. Grant had some previous run-ins with the law, but he was trying to get his life together. He was trying to stay on the right side of the law in efforts to stay out of jail and protect his family. What happened to Oscar Grant, being victimized and brutally murdered at the Fruitvale station, was unreasonable and simply uncalled for.

What I saw in the film was a Black man that was trying – trying to get his life together and trying to take care of his family. He had multiple demands on him in that he was expected to take care of his girlfriend and daughter, and also was responsible for providing some financial support to his sister. As an offender, I am sure he struggled to obtain and maintain gainful employment, which makes it difficult for one to support their family. What does a *man* do who cannot take care of or protect his family?

He becomes emasculated, less than, a failure, and broken down.

One of the things I learned over the years is that all behavior makes sense in context. What this means is that I can understand how Black men often find themselves in the very predicaments that they are in. In many ways the path that they (we) travel is rigged with potholes, bumps, glass bottles and deer running across the road. In many situations we have been set up to fail. We are have been chased, robbed, killed, fired, accused, victimized, and broken down into many pieces. These pieces have unfortunately not only hurt the Black man, the Black male's ego and the Black man's spirit, not to mention the Black male psyche, but it has also negatively impacted the Black family system.

While many people have negative things to say about Black men – how Black men are dogs, no good, deadbeat, or that they simply have no goals in life, there are many Black men that are trying to improve their lives. When I saw the film, I kept thinking about Trayvon Martin and the unnecessary killing that took place in Sanford, Fla. What bothers me the most is that regardless of what people may say, race is still an issue here in America. I myself would like to think that in a post-Obama world, anything and everything is possible for Black men. To a certain extent it is true, in that Black men can be anything they want to be. However, at the same time, Black men are and have always been an endangered species. We are constantly being taken away from our families and being lost to murder and/or the prison system. If we happen to escape death and end in prison, then we struggle to obtain and maintain gainful employment when we are released ... the plight of the Black man.

Please make no mistakes about what I am saying. I am not in any way, shape, form, or fashion saying that Black men are perfect or that Black men are always innocent, because we are not. I am just saying that some Black men are out here in the world and trying to improve their lives. I am also saying that it is extremely difficult for Black men in America. I was just talking to one of my family members about this very thing. I am a Black man with a Ph.D., but who cares? At the

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end of the day, when I walk around, people see me as a Black man. Not only do they see a Black man, but they see a tall and dark skinned Black man. They prejudge me before I can even open my mouth. They automatically assume that they know me, and that I am nothing but an ignorant Black man. It does not matter that I have a Ph.D., because I am still a Black man in America.

We as Black men have to deal with a variety of things – driving while Black, walking while Black, eating while Black, sitting while Black, and sometimes in my case, even teaching while Black. If I listen to rap music, then I am a thug, if I drive a BMW (which I do) I am a drug dealer or I am doing something illegal. It makes me think of how I was always told by my grandmother to smile often when interacting with people of different races. She told me this to protect me, saying that people will automatically see me as a threat; as a tall, and perhaps angry, Black male. In order to set people at ease and not evoke fear in others, I am supposed to smile so that people see me as gentle, calm, and not aggressive. It is a shame that this lesson had to be taught in the first place, but it is something that I have come to understand more and more as I get older.

It is also a shame that Black women have to fear on a daily basis, that their beloved Black man may not make it home alive if they are pulled over by the police. I myself have been pulled over, for reasons I still do not know. I have been asked where I am coming from, where I am going, and what I am doing out driving at 10 p.m. at night. In one particular situation, I remember thinking in my head, "I did not know it was a crime to drive at night," but I simply replied, "I was working late in my office." Then I was interrogated and asked where I work. When I told the police officer, he acted as if he did not believe me, so I told him that I am willing to show my license and my faculty ID. I had to be very careful and had to make sure that the officer was aware that my license and ID was in my wallet, which was located in my right back pocket. I asked for permission to reach in my back pocket out of fear that I would be accused of having some type of weapon and innocently shot dead on the spot. These are the things that I and many other Black men have to deal with on a daily basis. It can be hard to be a Black male in America as we carry extra-burdens in life that others may not have.

At the end of the day, I think the movie "Fruitvale Station" is a must see, for all Americans regardless of race. It is a reminder that while there have been some improvements in race relations, we have a long way to go before we can say that things are equal in our society. The movie made me feel a variety of emotions, but most of all the feeling that I had was sadness –sadness for Oscar Grant and his family, sadness for Trayvon Martin and his family, sadness for all Black men and Black families, but hopefully one day we shall overcome. I remember walking out of the theater thinking, "Black men are truly an endangered species." I do not know what else to say – the plight of the Black man. *Need I say Moore?*

Thanks for reading, I hope to hear from you soon, but until then, "Stick around, there's *Moore* to come."

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