

NYT: At It Again

✘ I try not to read the opinion pages of the New York Times because when I do I come away from the experience feeling lousy. I remember when the Times was a great newspaper, when the columnists, whose politics I may not have agreed with, were smart and made me think.

The other day I did what I should not have done and came upon perhaps the shallowest piece I have ever read in the Times. Given how the paper has been in decline in recent decades, that's saying a lot.

The op-ed was by the Times' own Brent Staples, a black man who sees the world through a prism of race. The headline over the piece read: "Young, Black Male, And Stalked by Bias."

Here's how it began: "The door to the subway train slides open, revealing three tall, young black men, crowding the entrance, with hooded sweatshirts pulled up over downward-turned faces; boxer shorts billowing out of over-large, low-slung jeans; and sneakers with the laces untied.

"Your response to the look – and to this trio on the subway – depends in part on the context, like the time of day, but especially how you feel young, male blackness."

Actually, that's not true. My response to the look doesn't depend on how I feel about black teenagers. It depends on how I feel about *anybody* who looks like a thug. Besides, given the epidemic of black-on-black crime, a black kid getting on the train would also be worried if the door slides open and he sees three young black kids in saggy pants and hoodies. But let's give Mr. Staples the benefit of the doubt. Let's assume white people do have a built in *concern* when we see black teenagers on the street late at night, or on the subway. Why don't we have that same concern – fear is the more precise word – when we see a bunch of young Hassidic Jews hanging

around? Could it be because there aren't a lot of violent Hassidic Jews out there – and there are a disproportionate number of black kids involved in street crime?

“If it unsettles you – as it does many people – you never get beyond the first impression,” the column goes on. “But those of us who are not reflexively uncomfortable with blackness can discern the clues and tell who these kids are. They may be tall, but their hormonally pockmarked faces, narrow hips and the cartoon-patterned underwear show that they are probably 15 years old, at most. The grimy black book bags, barely visible against the black hoodies, make them students on the way to school.”

Oops, I didn't notice the “barely visible” book bags. And, geez, it never occurred to me that since they were probably only 15 years old, they couldn't possibly be up to no good. Guess I'm just a white bigot.

That's not sarcasm. It's Staples' main point –that if black kids make you feel uncomfortable you must be a racist, even if you don't know it. Does Staples understand that wearing your pants with your underwear showing is how black kids pay homage to black criminals? In prison you're not allowed to wear a belt. That's why their pants are falling down and their underwear is showing.

“Very few Americans make a conscious decision to subscribe to racist views,” Staples graciously tells us, before getting to the mandatory “but ...” “But the toxic connotations that the culture has associated with blackness have been embedded in thought, language and social convention for hundreds of years. This makes it easy for people to see the world through a profoundly bigoted lens without being aware that they are doing so.”

For a writer, Staples is profoundly devoid of introspection. Yes, some people “see the world through a profoundly bigoted

lens” and don’t know it – and Brent Staples apparently is one of them.

Imagine if the door to the subway train slides open and we see, not three black teenagers in faux prison garb, but three young nuns, all black. Or we see three young black men in suits and ties. Or, somehow, we see Kobe, LaBron and Carmello riding the subway. No one would feel threatened by their “blackness.” We feel threatened by the three kids with hoodies and drooping pants not because we’re racists, but because we’re realists: they look like criminals.

Brent Staples fancies himself an expert on race because he’s black. This is why he feels safe in writing nonsense like this: “Society’s message to black boys – ‘we fear you and view you as dangerous’ – is constantly reinforced. Boys who are seduced by this version of themselves end up on a fast track to prison and the graveyard.”

So whitey is not only a bigot, conscious or otherwise, but is also responsible for turning good black kids into gangsters simply because they are “seduced” by the image bigoted white people have of them. If only we saw them in a different light – a better, less bigoted light – they would have turned out to be productive citizens. That’s called wishful thinking.

The reason so many people – *black and white* – “fear you and view you as dangerous” is because a disproportionate number of young black kids either are dangerous or, at absolute least, just like to look that way, to frighten anyone they can. If the majority of black kids who don’t commit crimes get tainted by the others, is that really the result of racism – or are we just calculating the odds and arriving at not-so-unreasonable conclusions?

But why is Brent Staples devoting a column to this subject at this particular time? Trayvon Martin, that’s why. “By the time he went on neighborhood watch patrol with his 9-

millimeter piston and spied Trayvon Martin, Mr. Zimmerman saw not a teenager with candy, but a collection of preconceptions: the black as burglar, the black as drug addict, the black 'up to no good.' And he was determined not to let this one get away."

On this point, Roger Kimball, who writes at PJ Media, takes Staples' column and runs it through the shredder:

"Question: how does Brent Staples know what George Zimmerman saw or thought? He doesn't. He is just making it up. And the more we know about the shooting of Trayvon Martin, the murkier the episode seems. The man whom the *Times* branded a "white Hispanic" turns out to have been a conscientious good citizen who donated much time to public good works, including tutoring young black kids for free. In his hysterical campaign against the sin of un- or semi-conscious racism, Brent Staples liberally deploys insidious racialism to make a scapegoat of a man he knows nothing about. 'Young, Black, Male, and Stalked by Bias' is all of a piece with the *Times's* other reporting on race: whites are guilty until proven innocent, at which point they are still guilty of being white, but blacks get every benefit of every doubt, up to and including being employed by the paper's editorial page not for merit but for skin color. It's a case of the not-so-soft bigotry of racialist expectations. Brent Staples is indeed 'stalked by bias,' but it turns out that it's his own bias, underwritten partly by reflexive racialism, partly by stupidity."

What Brent Staples doesn't seem to understand is that it isn't white racism that is stalking young black men. It's black dysfunction. It's 15-year old girls having babies without ever having husbands. It's men who are fathers, but only biologically. In the entire recorded history of our planet, there has never been a greater voluntary abandonment of children than there is now by black men in America. More than 70 percent of black kids grow up without fathers in the house.

It's a short but all to predicable leap from fatherlessness to hoodies and baggie pants and menacing demeanors and worse. That's what Brent Staples ought to be worried about.

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