

SOCIAL DEPRIVATION MINDSET

(BLACK PERSPECTIVE)

By Trevor Hercules



SYNOPSIS

The purpose of this article is to help society as a whole, understand from my perspective, perhaps a different perspective from those so-called (experts). How and why I, and many other black youth suffered from a Social Deprivation Mindset, back in the day, which once led us to prison, violence, feelings of alienation, not belonging, and a hatred of a society we felt did not want us or people like us.

I would like to put forward from my own personal experience of how and why it is, that such a high and disproportionate number of black youth are still being drawn into and adopting a 'Social Deprivation Mindset' way of life.

It seems to me the same as in my day, that society has still not got to grips with embracing black youth into our society, many of whom seem to be on the periphery still being seen and labelled as a problem, without anyone seeming to have any real knowledge or understanding of why and how to deal with them apart from sending them to prison.

With my vast knowledge of the 'Social Deprivation Mindset' and the 'Criminal Justice System,' I would like to put forward a few ideas which I think might be helpful in understanding, and embracing many black youth away from a 'Social Deprivation Mindset' and back into society without them having to be banged up in prison.

Having changed my life around and now being able to manage my Social Deprivation Mindset. For the past 16 years I have been trouble free, with the past 10 years working within the education system and criminal justice system. This does not mean that I have become docile and not standing up for what I believe to be right. It just means that the knowledge I acquired throughout my life led me to cease criminal activity as a waste, and going to prison as insane.

I would like to suggest that the education system and the criminal justice system along with probation, prison service, social services, the media, the government, society, and all others who may have some input into the lives of these young people. That they could and should be doing much more to bring these young people in from the cold.

Also that maybe not everything should be seen from a white perspective, and that perhaps black people do have different view of things, which needs to be heard and taken more seriously.

Finally being at peace with myself it is my intention hopefully, to help others understand how I reached that point, and to help society and these young people enable a change for the better within themselves. And that society opens its mind and ears to the cultural grievances

based on the colour of their skin being voiced loud and clear by these young people. Also that young black youth lead a happier and more productive life within society not only by avoiding prison. But facing up to and taking on responsibility for their own actions and the outcome of those actions. Yet to also be allowed by society to be treated fairly given the opportunity to shine and contribute with their vast array of talent and skills within every department of society, and not held back by deep rooted racism and a fear of them taking over. These young people have such wonderful contribution, that we can be the envy of the world.

It is my belief through my personal experience having been in prison written two books on the subject and myself being black. That with this increasing disproportionate of black youth being incarcerated and also adopting a 'Social Deprivation Mindset' things can only become worse for us as a society, and not really fulfil our true potential as a Multicultural society.

The truth is this country is changing its no longer white, it is a mixture of different people who have as much right to be here and flourish and belong as anyone else and denying them this. In my opinion will and has led to a hatred of those whom they believe rightly or wrongly have let them down.

INTRODUCTION

I was born in this country 62 years ago to a black Jamaican mother and a missing African father.

My life has been well documented in two of my books *'Labelled a Black Villain'* that was used by academics interested in 'desistance' and by trainee probation officers (Nellis 2001) and *'Rage Within'* (Hercules 2007).

Although, throughout my life I have tended to voice my opinions openly, and have even written books, concerning such subjects that were close to me which affected myself and friends personally and at times profoundly usually around race. This has been a common theme throughout my life and like many in our world I hate injustice. At the age of 62 I thought I would become mellowed and not so troubled by society and the world I live in. But working within the education and criminal justice system for the past 7 years I felt a moral duty to come forward to try and help. Putting forward my own personal experience and observations on the disproportionate number of black youth being excluded and incarcerated and why they are embracing the "Social Deprivation Mindset".

Engaging with young black men and women within the community in education and the criminal justice system just reinforced to me what I already believed to be true from my own understanding and personal experience and that of my friends. That not much had changed from my days of being in the clutches of the 'Social Deprivation Mindset' only by my observations it seemed things had gotten worse far worse and out of control.

What were my observations? I observed that many of those young people had what appeared to be a deep rooted anger and resentment, at a white society they believed did not like or want them. Many of the comments were of the order of 'them and us'. They felt alienated, discriminated against because of the colour of their skin, the same as I did many years ago. My observations also showed me that they were disruptive and challenging of most types of authority, mostly with no real, thought through process or agenda. Impotent anger. At a society they claim needed to change, nor did it represent them or their black skins. They felt there was no one representing them putting forward their grievances, and in if someone did it was only in the form of a watered down apologetic mumbling shoe shuffling "sorry to trouble you massa". Which was never listened to or taken seriously but just laughed off. They felt the media was also biased against them, and did its up-most at

every turn to show them in a bad light, but most all they said “no one listens” to them.

Yet I understood this and had empathy with them as I once behaved in a similar fashion and felt that impotent rage. I wrote.

‘The slipping into the light had become more frequent over the last few months, but always with it came the anger, that unmoving anger that intolerant anger. The anger knew it was right, and because it knew that I agreed it came more and more to the front, urging me to stand up for my rights, to stand up for my black identity, because it could never be free until my identity had been free’. (Hercules 1989)

Is there any real substance to support that society does not fully represent and discriminates against black people especially the young? Surely within our society everyone is treated or should be treated equally and there are now laws put in place to deal with such matters. Yet the overriding feedback I get from the black community along with my vast experience is that white society dictates the terms of discrimination and racism of what is and what is not. Which for many black people does not coincide with their idea and assessment of what ‘real’ Discrimination and racism is and its effects.

Many black academics and ordinary black people still believe that there is in operation although not officially sanctioned, a policy of “divide and rule” run on the same type of principle that was used during colonialism, which was used to divide different tribes and in effect drive a wedge between them, for them to concentrate on fighting each other thus leaving the colonialists to take charge. That many within the black community should have these feelings should be enough for us as a society to at least acknowledge that there would seem to be a problem that we need to address. Now!

HOW CAN SOCIETY MAKE A DIFFERENCE

It is my opinion and that of many within the black community, that not that much has changed over the years regarding schools and other such agencies in the negative way they address and tackle the education and cultural history concerning black youth especially those with a Caribbean background. The failure to highlight and acknowledge the wonderful contribution black people have made to the 'civilised world'. I believe is not fully enlightening nor empowering these young black people, with a sense of well being and pride. On the contrary I believe it is lacking and failing to educate these young people denying them an image of self worth of themselves and their people.

Throughout my Educational and Criminal Justice journey especially in schools I have yet to come across a concerted contribution put together in a professional sense that I could relate to and feel proud of achievements carried out by people who looked like myself, friends, and family, which mirrored our likeness. The point I am trying to make, is that history taught in schools does not compensate or I believe in any real way give a sense of pride a sense of achievement if you are black. You are bombarded with these great wonderful white heroes and heroines with rarely a sight of a black person unless as a slave or someone being conquered or belonging to a famine disease ridden country. For the black student there is no shining knight in black armour, there is no lifting up of self esteem feeling of achievement, but as in my day over fifty years ago you are left with an emptiness and feeling of shame thinking that your only 'real' history was that of slavery.

In the vast scheme of things one could be forgiven for making light of the matter as something trivial, but living in a dominant white society it can give you an inferiority complex, loss of confidence, psychological problems and not feeling as good as someone with a white skin, feeling that you don't belong feelings of alienation. These things may not be really happening to you but such is an overwhelming feeling that you and your people are somewhat flawed and tarnished and have not really or fully achieved anything special as have others.

I felt these feelings acutely when I was young and wrote about my feelings in one of my books Labelled A Black Villain.

"When I found black history books, or rather found history books written by black historians, it blew my mind. What was this I read, black people had great civilisations? I had to read on. Then was so astounded by the revelation that I ran as fast as I could to different museums to find out if I could confirm it. I was slightly dubious. I mean, had never been told

black people had a great historic past. The only thing my school history had taught me was that black people were slaves, dependent on the white man; and this was a constant thorn in my side. At school the minute they talked about black people it was time to get hot and slide down in your seat hoping nobody would look at you, damning every black man that ever lived for making you feel so ashamed. Another thing: If black people had these great civilizations, surely they would have taught us about them in school. So when up popped these black historians making these wondrous claims, of course I was a bit doubtful. But inside I was alive, I was on fire, my heart jumping, to think this might actually be true. Deep down I had always believed black people must have made some form of contribution, but the revelations were far beyond my wildest dreams. The new found pride I felt after discovering these claims to be true was there for everyone to see. I would ever so casually start conversations with friends, then just throw in the names of great black kings and queens. It didn't matter what the topic was, you could have just said "hello", and I would still find a way to get a conversation going about some ancient figure in black history. But it seemed that most black people didn't know their, history, so usually I ended up telling people about the wonders of past African civilisations.' With all this new-found knowledge came a pride and dignity that gave me a feeling of walking on air, and any feelings of inferiority had been replaced by superiority, whether rightly or wrongly, about my peoples civilizations. The Egyptians were black people, and they founded one of the earliest and greatest civilisations of mankind. It was the early seventies and I was bubbling." (Hercules 1989)

Then came an anger and a rage when I found out people lied about slavery and what it was really like, and in fact slavery was not the only history of black people, we did have a wonderful colourful past. These were the same type of things I was still hearing from young people who felt they had been cheated and deceived and that white society felt they were superior because of slavery. Yet I also observed behaviour that in many ways reflected what I was hearing and being told and much of it, although I am not a trained psychologist, seemed to be subconscious. The similarities to my behaviour growing up in the seventies and carrying on into adult life seemed to uncannily mirror that same attitude and behaviour. I observed they demanded respect as if that had somehow been taken away from them and imperative to get it back, but subconsciously as 'one', many didn't really seem to know why that was so important, they only knew that they had to get it back. When pushed for an answer they would say he 'Dissed Me' he Disrespected me'. Many young men and women of the hardcore persuasion within the

confines of the 'Social Deprivation Mindset' would and were prepared to commit violence to such an extreme that it quite often did and still will in extreme cases lead to murder.

I believe that much of white society is in denial concerning its past history concerning slavery, colonialism, imperialism and the negative knock on effect it still has to this day indirectly on the psyche and behaviour on many of those from Britain's slave and colonial past. Like so many within the black communities and many white people who do understand the devastating effects of slavery continuing to impact on a people who still seem to be finding their way in a world in which they feel or are led to believe they made little contribution too apart from being slaves. We as a society I believe will have to at some stage come together to reconcile this issue. This elephant in the room will not go away especially for black people.

We all need closure even those white people ignorant of the facts of history who's racial perceptions and stereotypes still prevail, and who are in positions where they, in many cases have great influence within in our society.

The attitudes and behaviour of the young throughout my journey in education and the criminal justice system just seemed to keep reinforcing many of the views and destructive behaviour myself and friends had throughout most of our lives, though I am not that same person now.

With knowledge and understanding came a willingness to try and change things for the better and a lot my frustration anger and rage at what I believed to be injustice I have now tried to harness away from the destructiveness of myself feeling alienated, lost, feeling like a second class citizen and (prison) helped by my understanding of what I termed a 'Social Deprivation Mindset.'

Yet taking all this into account black parents are part of our society and my experiences as a black man and father has led me to the understanding and first hand observations that black people themselves as parents are not exempt from criticism. I wonder what the majority of black parents would say about being in the lives of their children, I mean both parents. How much of an interest do they take in their child's schooling for example. If we took a poll what percentage would you say of both parents attending open days at school, both parents getting along together and putting the child's welfare first. What percentage of both parents knowing where and what their sons or daughters were up to after six o'clock in the evening -until the next morning if those children were 15-20. I believe many parents would have a lot of explaining to do concerning the whereabouts of their children. This is not to say all black

parents are failing but I do believe the issue between black men and women concerning the joint raising of their children at this point in time seems to be lacking. I make this point from having to deal with nearly every day young black men and women being around 90% the majority in school detention when they are only 20% in the whole school. The same principle seems to apply to prisons, detention centres etc.

I do know that I am giving the negative side of the situation and there are many positive things I could say. But for the purpose of this article I am only making the point that black parents should not feel they are exempt for shouldering some, and in many cases a lot of the responsibilities of those young men and women going off the rails and adopting a what we term a 'Social Deprivation Mindset.'

MAKING THE FIRST MOVE

If you want more confirmation of how far things have deteriorated within our society in regards to black youth and the commitment they and others have who were not indigenous to this land. I would suggest you take a poll of how many feel any allegiance to this country at all. On my Journey this question pops up frequently and the usual overwhelming reply is 'we have no allegiance to this country because they have non for us'. The question would you fight for Britain in most cases is met with howls of derision. I hasten to add that most of my observations and information has been gathered around central London and in mostly what we would term as deprived areas. There is also very obviously many other factors and variables that come into play when discussing these things with young people. Notably sticking together, bravado; and lashing out at a society they feel has shunned them alienating them and does not want them. In many ways this could be for many a cry out to be heard and a real need to come back into the fold but do not know how. Yet those of the 'Social Deprivation Mindset' hardcore I do believe mean what they say. In times gone by I and others who felt betrayed and angry at a country and society we believed did not want us or care for us, even though it may not have been true. Many years ago young lost and vulnerable and in the grips of the 'Social Deprivation Mindset' hardcore. I wrote.

'What I hated most was the idea of white supremacy, the way the world was governed by a minority of white people who controlled the world with their economic power. I realised it was a racial struggle for us black people to emerge out of this shadow of white supremacy and to be able to live as we choose, without this society continuing to label us blacks and a problem. I also realised it was also a class struggle too, and the months I had been in prison on remand had made this even clearer to me. I didn't hate white people individually, I hated how they allowed this powerful minority to oppress and manipulate them and turn man against man, brother against brother, just on account of the colour of a man's skin.' (Trevor Hercules 1989).

It's hard to explain one's preoccupation with the colour of their skin or anyone else's for that matter. But finding yourself in a white society that does not really represent you, and those that hold the reigns of power and those that decide your life look nothing like you. Their hair their skin their features lips nose eyes are different from yours. You will eventually get around to asking such questions as how did I come to be here, why do I not have a language of my own. Why are there

no adverts depicting that I was born and live here and need special toiletries for hair skin etc. How is that I have no real representation and the media depicts me as they wish while I have no recourse to answer. In essence what the hell is going on. It's then you begin to understand the impact of slavery and colonialism, and that the Caribbean is not where you originally come from but were taken there in chains in bondage from Africa against your will as part of the slave trade. The slave trade that made Britain and its citizens Europeans, white people very wealthy indeed. You then understand as a slave you were not permitted to marry speak your language but the slave masters, your family your wife your children belonged to the slave master to do with as he so pleased, to sell to whom he pleased.

This is the beginning of understanding that you are different, and I would argue with anyone from a different culture or race to have gone through that and not have issues that would to this very day bear scars on your psyche and the confusion and turmoil you must still be suffering from trying to throw off the cloak of an inferiority complex. Worst still the homeland where you were snatched from Africa in essence denies you, because you do not know what part you were stolen from what country in Africa, what tribe, nor do you speak any African language nor do you know your great history that your slave masters hid from you. You who were ignorant of your past until now. And the tears you cry and shed when you see Africans speaking their language and happy in the knowledge they belong have a culture and a history of their own, while looking at you with sorrow at a lost people.

It is my belief these young people are confused, angry, disillusioned, lost and severely damaged. These are all my observations of how and what they are feeling even though they may not be able to articulate them precisely. They insist society does not listen to them and, they do not have a voice an outlet in radio television radio etc, to put across images of themselves, their own programmes where people just like them are portrayed as good and wholesome like any other decent family. Many may ask what has all this really got to do with the disproportionate number of black youth incarcerated within our prisons, and how this is going to help solve the issue.

My argument to them would be, that they would need to face up to reality. That it would be time to confront the facts the 'real truth' some would say, the history of slavery and colonisation and Britain's part in it and how black people came to be here. Perhaps then many people may begin to understand that not everything is black and white in the

understanding of why such a high disproportionate number of black youth are being incarcerated.

If in reality we as a society really do wish to move forward in our fight against imprisoning so many disproportionate black youngsters, and engulfing those on the periphery of society back into the fold. Then we have a duty to at least communicate and really listen to what they are saying, regardless how unpalatable, and at times soul searching it might be.

This is my observation and I hasten to add many black peoples view. That many white people are ashamed of the past history of slavery and colonialism and by wishing it away it will in fact go away. Also that when black people understand what slavery was really like, and how Britain profited, they are liable to kick off big time, therefore they need to keep black people ignorant of their great past history it's a way of keeping them ignorant and passive. I would like to suggest that in my opinion as someone who has been damaged by the effects of slavery and colonialism. That we can all find a common ground. The mere fact that I am writing this article after ten years of imprisonment and a life fighting and disrupting this society gives hope that we as a society may be able to move forward. We need to talk.

White society and many brainwashed black people should no longer put barriers up against black youth simply because they are black and in many cases you may be slightly intimidated by them or by your standards, they look big black and threatening. Not at all like the light skinned straight nosed ones you usually hold up to let us know you are friends with black people. Black people are here to stay and those who wish it different even secretly, that is not the way it is. With much talk of immigrants, the people I refer to were born here, their parents and in many cases their parents were born here, they are British and that as far as I can see is not going to change.

Look across to America and the black people are entwined within every fabric of that country. Television makers and owners top politicians president owners of top corporate businesses. Yet compare them to the black people who live here who have nothing but the proverbial Michael being taken out of them with 20 year old re-runs of Will Smith the Prince of Bel Air. There is nothing for black people here nothing that sends out real positive messages and images on a constant level, to us in society, that black people play a positive role and are a positive light within our society and the world.

Those in power the Government, you can make the first move. You have a wonderful opportunity and I also do believe an obligation

to take in hand those in the media. Who never put black faces and families on the front pages or inside, and never have even sporadic black faces in their papers and who continually present negative images and stories against black people, and have been doing so as far back as can remember. Government why are there no black programmes on television that represents black families we live here we are British. And therein lies the rub, are we really ?. Because as far as my observations and that of friends and those I have met along the way, we all agree these are the issues we are concerned with when you talk about racism and discrimination. Conservative or Labour I see not much difference but do understand MPs Play a large part in the day to day lives within our society. Throughout my journey in the 'Criminal Justice and Education Systems,' I have found a real lack of understanding and initiative concerning how to deal with black youth. I have observed in many institutions especially the criminal justice system that they do not seem to want any black males who are articulate or have any articulate programmes designed for black prisoners based on an understanding of culture or race. Statistics shows the Criminal Justice System has problems with black youth I know all to well from experience, and what I have encountered white facilitators do not seem to be able to engage these young people, so now they call on black ex-offenders.

What they were looking for I observed was. They were only interested in black men like me ex-offenders, standing in front of groups of black youngsters to say I was a villain this what we did we are criminals. Which to me of course I could not and would not do, as to me it was just reinforcing a stereotype. They did not want me convey anything of real worth. to say anything positive. That is how I found the Criminal Justice System (labelling and stereotyping black youth and putting them in boxes,)

These young I people believe with all my experience needed to be told about love of self and how they were part of this society, and why and how they needed to contribute. These men needed someone like me to show them how and why they should be proud of themselves and take responsibility on and how to get along and avoid the pitfalls the anger rage and frustration I and many others went through. The Probation and the Prison service I found were the worst culprits not knowing how to handle these black young men, they had a stereotypical ignorance of them that was played out daily in the way they dealt with them. This in turn lead to a variety of responses from these young black men from being disruptive, angry, shutting down and more alarmingly, becoming even more entangled within the 'Social Deprivation Mindset'

Then what of these big Black organisation who got millions of Government and charity money. From my experience and that of the local communities that I have worked for and talked to over much of the country. We seem to be of the same assertion that most of these organisation especially in my opinion and from what I, saw almost amounted to conning the Government and charities. The ones I have had dealings with and who have crossed my path I am sorry to say. I found to be slick clued up professionals who knew how to con the system. Most had no real idea of the real inner city youth nor would they venture into such hostile territory, they sat far away sprouting words of 'what the black community need' and other such rhetoric while staying far away, they are not accountable to the community they profess to serve, but I feel they should be. While the real work is being done within the community by small organisation and individuals who are on the front line of all the troubles yet get paid in most cases nothing.

I do not put so much blame on the Government as these big organisations, said and did the right things. But what did they do with the money how do those in the real inner city profit, what changes will it make to their young lives, none as far as I could ascertain. Everywhere I looked within the Criminal Justice System I would say was much ineptitude. For example you have people writing out programmes for prison inmates and getting a fortune and you have all these people and organisations fighting over these pots of money for something I believe should be free. The Government should step in and stop these people making money exploiting us, society.

It was not all doom and gloom working within the Criminal Justice System, and along the way I met someone who made a profound impact on me. Her name is Justine Greening MP for Putney and she was my Conservative MP. She helped restore my faith in humanity, black and, white and all I can say of her are good things. Britain can only benefit from people like Justine Greening. My step-father a staunch Labour supporter must be turning in his grave.

By Trevor Hercules

