

STEREOTYPES ARE DANGEROUS

Written by Jeffrey L. Boney, Associate Editor
Wednesday, 17 April 2013 00:00



Out of all the people in the world who should be slow to jump to conclusions about people, Black people should be at the top of the list. As many times as Black people have been falsely accused and convicted of things, we should be extremely empathetic and reserved in our immediate judgment of others.

Take for instance this recent bombing that took place at the Boston Marathon this week. Three people were killed and at least 176 were injured, according to Boston Police. At least 17 of the wounded were critically injured. President Obama has indicated that he is committed to using all federal resources to find out who did this. I have heard countless people jumping to conclusions, automatically blaming the bombing on someone of Middle-Eastern descent. That is so stupid. People should never jump to conclusions and blame a particular race or culture for select crimes or negative issues. Not all people of Middle-Eastern descent are terrorists.

Remember the Oklahoma City bombing? The Oklahoma City bombing was a terrorist bomb attack on the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995. It is considered to be the most destructive act of terrorism on American soil prior to the 9/11 attacks. The Oklahoma blast claimed 168 lives, including 19 children under the age of 6, and injured more than 680 people. Timothy McVeigh, a White male and Gulf War veteran, had detonated an explosive-filled Ryder rental truck parked in front of the building. He was motivated by his hatred of the federal government. McVeigh's co-conspirator, Terry Nichols, another White male, had assisted in the bomb preparation.

What about the Centennial Olympic Park Bombing? This terrorist bombing took place on July

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27, 1996 in Atlanta, Georgia, during the 1996 Summer Olympics. Two people died, and 111 were injured. Security guard Richard Jewell, a White male, discovered the bag and alerted Georgia Bureau of Investigation officers of it. The bomb detonated before all spectators could leave the area. Though Jewell was initially hailed as a hero for his role in discovering the bomb and moving spectators to safety, four days after the bombing he was named as a “person of interest.” Jewell’s home, where he lived with his mother, was searched and his background exhaustively investigated, all amid a media storm that had cameras following him to the grocery store. Eventually, Jewell was exonerated and Eric Robert Rudolph, another White male, was formally named as a suspect and arrested on May 31, 2003. On April 8, 2005, the government announced Rudolph would plead guilty to four bombings, including the Centennial Olympic Park attack.

In both the Oklahoma City bombing and the Centennial Olympic Park bombing incidents, you see that White men were involved and not people of Middle-Eastern descent. Stereotypes and jumping to conclusions, not only destroy people’s lives, but create unhealthy societal problems. There are countless examples of incidents happening, whereby select cultures and groups get tied to certain actions.

Be honest, when a terrorist attack occurs, what race do you think committed the act? When a serial killer or serial rapist is on the loose, what race do you think about? When you hear about drug transactions or a homicide occurring, what race do you think committed the act? Stereotypes, although they are perpetuated by the media and popular culture, are unhealthy and dangerous.

I know you remember the sniper attacks that took place in Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia in 2002. Ten people were killed and three other victims were critically injured in several locations throughout the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area and along Interstate 95 in Virginia. It was widely speculated that the sniper was a White man with assumed military experience, but it was later uncovered that these acts were perpetrated by a Black man, John Allen Muhammad, and a Black minor, Lee Boyd Malvo. You know that you thought that there was no way that this act could have been committed by a Black man, because of stereotypes.

Think about the young man, Brian Keith Banks, who was a standout high school football star at Polytechnic High School (Poly) in Long Beach, California, and in 2002 had verbally committed to play for USC. In the summer of 2002, Banks was arrested and charged after a classmate, Wanetta Gibson, said that he dragged her into a stairway at Polytechnic High School (Poly) and raped her. Faced with a possible 41 years to life sentence, he accepted a plea deal that included five years in prison, five years of probation, and registering as a sex offender. In March

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2011, Gibson contacted Banks on Facebook, met with him, and admitted that she had fabricated the story. Banks secretly recorded Gibson's confession, but she refused to tell prosecutors that she had lied so she wouldn't have to return the money she and her family had won in court. Nevertheless, with Gibson's taped admission and help from California Innocence Project attorneys, Los Angeles County prosecutors overturned Banks's conviction on May 24, 2012. Banks has since signed with the Atlanta Falcons on April 3, 2013, to fulfill his goal to become an NFL football player. It wasn't until this young woman was secretly recorded, that the truth that this star, Black male athlete, was not guilty of raping a female. Stereotypes made it seem too much like the truth that he had raped her, but it turned out to be a lie.

The Bible, in Matthew 7:12, aka "The Golden Rule," says that "in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you." I believe that people should think twice about judging people too quickly and too harshly and should sincerely give people the same respect and benefit of the doubt that they would want if they were in their shoes.

Jeffrey L. Boney serves as Associate Editor and is an award-winning journalist for the Houston Forward Times newspaper. Jeffrey is a Next Generation Project Fellow, dynamic, international speaker, experienced entrepreneur, business development strategist and Founder/CEO of the Texas Business Alliance. If you would like to request Jeffrey as a speaker, you can reach him at jboney1@texasbusinessalliance.org.