

Reflecting Reality

Black and Underprivileged

By Roop Raj



“These people just need to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and find a way to succeed. Oprah did...” How often have you heard this? Every time crimes happen in inner cities, this cliché suburban conversation hits social media.

We have to stop. This dialogue widely ignores a problem; gives no room for solutions and is plain nasty. To make my point, let’s travel way Far East for a quick look at a centuries old problem. You’ve read about class issues in India - A caste system. A social ladder in which people are placed in boxes and told what they will become in life. If you’re born into a caste in which people make clothes, then you will end up doing the same job and, probably, be cajoled into marrying someone who makes clothes too.

Sure, there are people who rip free from the caste system. But millions more are stuck. It’s all because of who they were born to and where Indian society, with careless complicity, allows people to land.

That’s happening 10,000 miles away. But let’s not pretend it’s not happening here. It is. It’s happening right here in Detroit, New Orleans, Chicago and many other AMERICAN cities. Young boys and girls are born into poverty and are growing up without air conditioning, clean water, books and most importantly, they’re often born into a society that won’t give them a chance.

I was recently covering the murder of a young man on the streets of Detroit. It was Memorial

Day. While you were likely grilling or attending a parade, a young 17 year old man who watched his friend get killed ran out of any hope he had when he woke up that morning. He yelled, crying while putting his shirtless chest up against an officer. He asked him to shoot him. He asked them to arrest him. This is a teen who faces the same reckless abandonment the neighborhood homes are facing. Blighted homes and wrecked childhoods share the same street corner. There were beer cans and syringes littering the sidewalk.

Working hard and not having a lot growing up is one thing. Growing up in a neighborhood that is short on hope and high on drugs, knives and guns is different. We should all care. If we can't do anything to help, let's at least make sure we aren't marginalizing the real struggles these kids face. After all, most people rolling their eyes at inner city kids have had three meals a day and a bed to sleep in. Easy to say when your belly is full and your clothes are clean. Oprah is amazing. But she's an exception. Let's not forget about the rule.

Compare and contrast. I grew up in Troy. The



The late Bill Bonds came to my high school back

in 1994. I interviewed him from the \$36 million dollar newly built Troy High School. He asked a question that haunts me every time I cover a crime scene. "Ask yourself, would you be where you are today if you grew up poor and Black??" the newsman asked. We have to ask our privilege and ego to step back to get a clear answer.

only syringes I saw growing up were at the doctor's office. The only empty beer cans I saw were the ones people recycled at Kroger. I didn't have to deal with what this young man has to see. I had AC, heat, books, computers, and three square meals a day. Level playing field? What game are we playing here? So before we pull out our favorite "he pulled himself up by HIS bootstraps" token stories, let's think about the fact that some people don't have shoes, much less bootstraps to pull themselves up by.

Back to Memorial Day. I wish that young man well. Detroit Police exercised amazing restraint even as they were being pushed. It took friends and the teen's mother to calm him down. I went home, slept, woke up and actually wondered if that teen would survive this summer. I pray he does. I wish for him one thing. It's something I wish was as easy to find as the drugs and guns loaded in his neighborhood. I wish him hope.

(Roop Raj is a Fox news anchor/reporter at WJBK in Detroit)