Race As A Four-Letter Word (A-I-D-S)

June 4, 2010 By Larry Bryant

During the **White House Meeting on Black Men and HIV (June 2, 2010)**, there were unfortunately few moments of clarity during the four hour discussion. The meeting, which featured participation from advocates, activists, and health professionals from across the country, seemed to flirt with purposeful and meaningful dialogue around the effects of racism, homophobia, and Faith on the HIV & AIDS epidemic among Black men. Seemingly reluctant or hesitant - or worse, disconnected - experts and professionals from the White House, Department of Health & Human Services, Center for Disease Control, Health Resources and Services Administration, Bureau of Prisons, and the DC Health Department didn't even say the word 'RACISM' until David Malebranche from Emory University dropped the "R" bomb more than two hours into the meeting.

When contemplating strategies, the mark is opportunity is often missed when considering the overall broken societal structure that puts men - Black and Latino, in particular - in a constant state of 'survival mode', grasping and scratching at anything to stay alive and breathing. It's not a coincidence that the men MOST affected AND infected are poor, undereducated, chronically homeless, victims and perpetrators of violent crimes, jobless, and mired in wars of substance abuse and mental illness.

As a Black heterosexual male, DC resident, and HIV positive since 1986, I have witnessed "discussions" about the deaths and dying of young Black men come and go over the years - many of these talks signify nothing and rarely translate to effective and sustainable strategies that save lives. Enough with the rhetoric, theorizing, and demonizing, this epidemic will not be defeated until we begin to address in a concrete, constructive, and measurable way the social factors that contribute. Failed (and failing) public school systems, absence of employment opportunities for skilled and unskilled workers, skyrocketing cost of living and housing for low income individuals and families... Whether you live in Memphis or Manhattan, Alameda County or Atlanta, the roads are paved with the dead dreams and dead bodies of young Black and Brown men and many in the community do not see constructive changes coming.

We know as Black and Latino men - part of a larger, broader, and infinitely diverse community - must take these conversations beyond the meeting rooms and conference calls and begin to make concrete steps to close the gaps in health disparities, as well as education and economical inequities. We must begin to close the gap in the participation and action disparities as well.

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