

# To TRAP or not to TRAP

## HBCUs can be instrumental in aiding young African American males to choose college

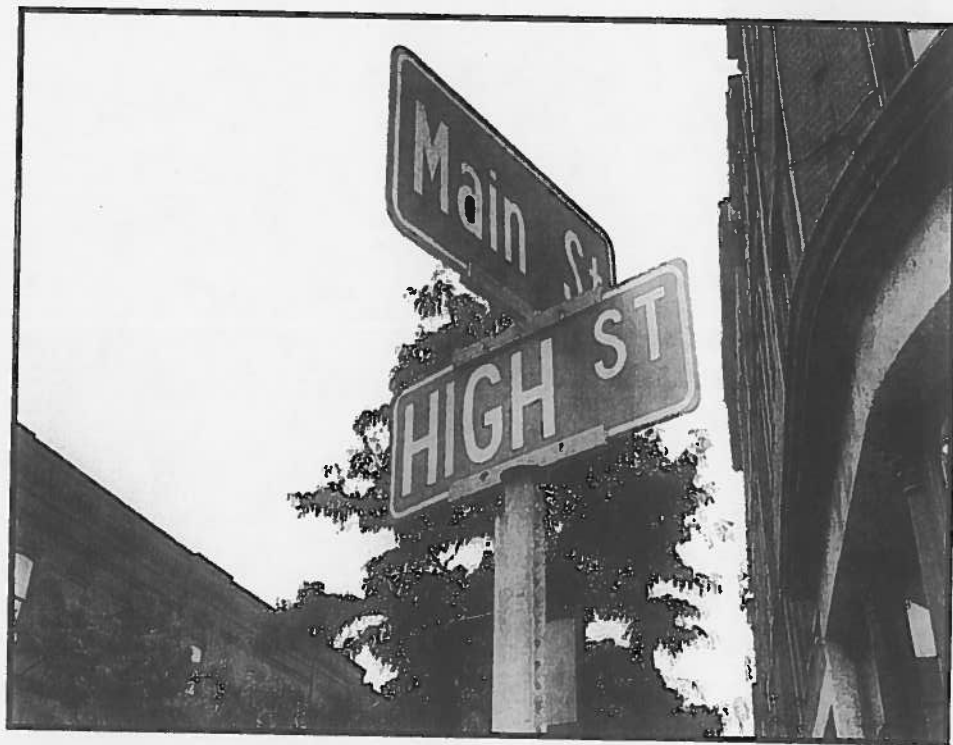
GRAMBLING, LA - The Urban Dictionary defines the term trap as “the area where drug deals are carried out.” For numerous young African American men, trapping holds a double entendre. For many it is the lure of street life, which can be a drug in and of itself. Street life is often viewed as the epitome of hanging out, music, partying, shopping, dressing in the latest urban fashions, sexual exploits, camaraderie and acceptance. Majors and Billson validate this notion by suggesting that the draw of street culture for some young Black men is simply too rewarding to give up. Artists Drake and Trey Songz state, “I want the money, cars, and the clothes...I suppose...I just want to be...I just want to be successful.” In other words, on the street and/or in their small corner of the world, these are the standards by which a lot of African American men measure success. The alternate interpretation of the “trap” appeal implies a great deal about the outlook of these individuals and the ultimate hopelessness they experience after being



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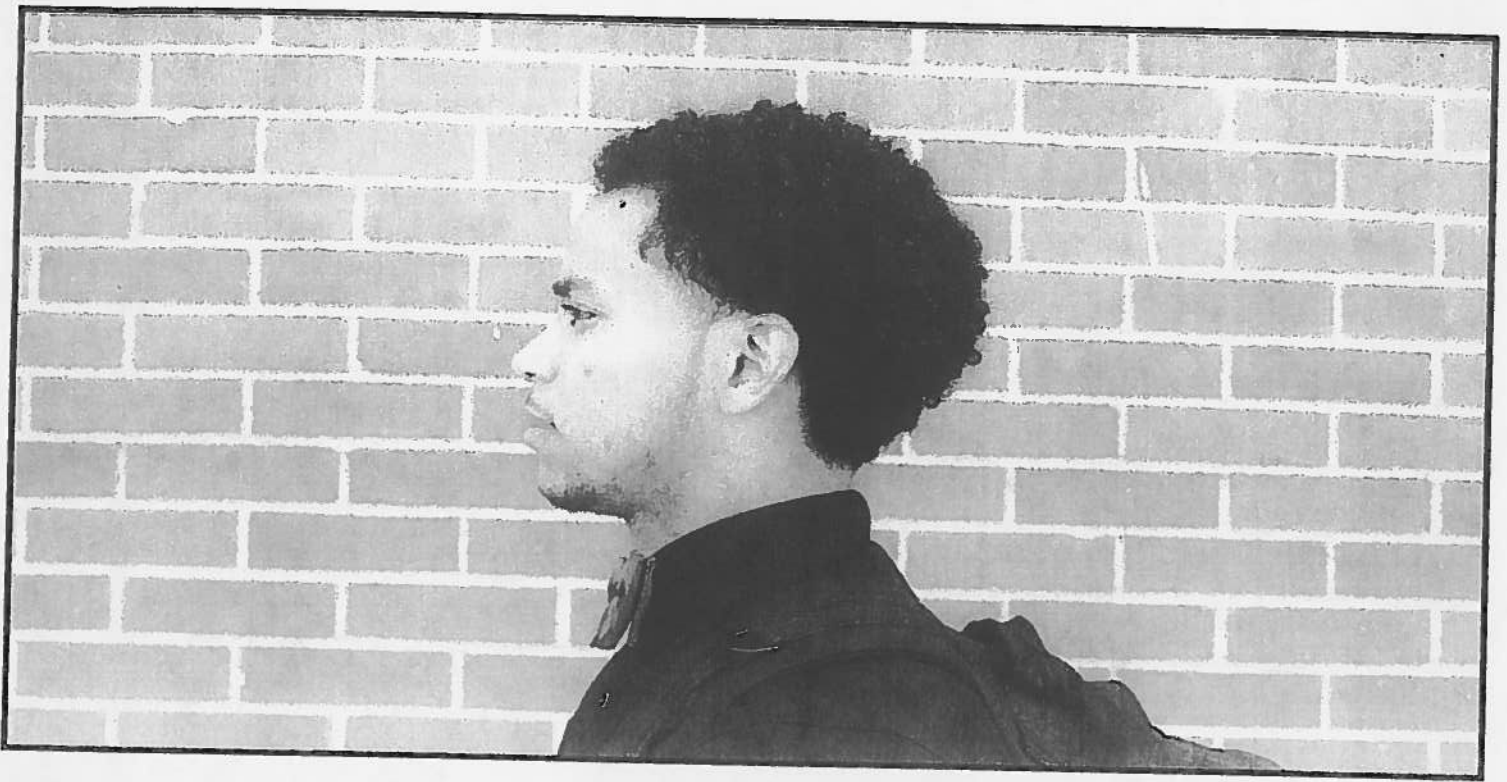
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pulled into trapping activity.

While the lure of street life is seen as a significant influence, many other cultural factors add to the hopelessness facing young Black men, further heightening the trap’s profile. These contributing factors include the disproportionate number of young Black men who are expelled and suspended longer and more frequently from high school than other students as supported by statistics. Data also indicate that Black men comprise the majority of students enrolled in special education programs, from

which the majority dropout. This data then directly links to Black men ultimately generating a larger percentage of illiterate and unemployed—leading to more Black men being sent to prison versus enrolled in college. Rampant poverty, lack of parental support and/or role models, peer pressure, and more are all critical challenges, which are indicative of the trap epidemic.

So how can Historically Black College/Universities, or HBCU’s, help young Black men avoid the trap snare? How can we



effectively prevent and/or reverse a cycle that has embedded roots? We believe that it begins with cultural competence or requiring an understanding of what the trap culture perpetuates. The trap culture influences the views, values, hopes, loyalties, social choices, and uncertainties in their lives. Still, we believe that many of the young men who exist in the trap culture have the skills and intellectual ability to change the world in fundamental ways. That said, we believe they have not been approached in a way that creates the value propositions that they deal with on a day-to-day basis. So, in this regard, there is an obvious disconnect between the trap culture and the HBCU culture. It is anticipated when individuals of different backgrounds interact, undoubtedly conflicts will arise due to misunderstandings and misconceptions. In order for HBCUs to successfully intervene, they must first learn to interpret the environmental context of communication appropriately within the trap culture.

This will alleviate instances of miscommunication and confusion or stress when attempting to make a case as to why young African American men should go to college. HBCUs must be able to recognize and adjust to this social reality by giving administrators, faculty, and staff the necessary training in adapting skills and interventions when approaching the trap population.

Some of you may remember the television show "The Wire." It was a hit series on HBO that many considered so socially relevant and forward thinking that several colleges and universities taught courses tied to the television series. For example, Harvard used it in social science courses to help students understand the roots of the social conditions in America's inner cities.

Russell 'Stringer' Bell supposed: "You know, Avon, you gotta think about what we got in this game for, man. Huh? Was it the rep? Was it so our names could ring

out on street corners, man? Naw, man. There's [a] game beyond the game."

Higher-education professionals, staff and those involved in mentoring relationships and programs, or anyone who engages with the "Stringer-Bell types" of the trap culture, must have a dual perspective in this cross-cultural work. An understanding of the cultures is necessary in order to achieve successful cultural convergence when interacting with these prospective students.

Consequently, we argue that social connections must be the conduits through which the trap culture and the HBCU culture converge. The influence of HBCU culture on the trap culture cannot be a fad or temporarily fashionable. In direct contrast it must be essentially real, communicable and contagious. HBCU administrators must abandon their biases and fears and commit to engage, influence, and steer these young men toward new avenues of growth, prosperity and long-term stability.✂