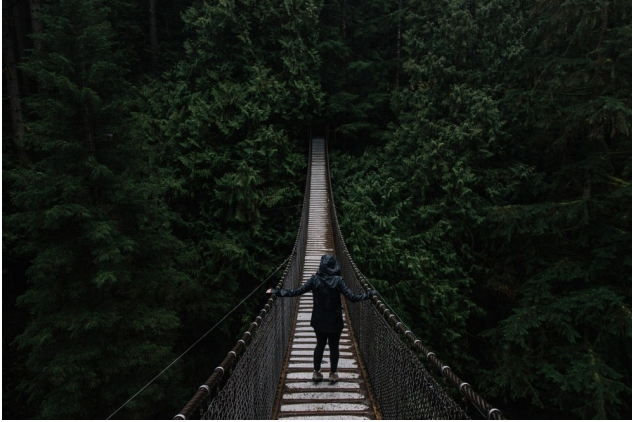


Bridging The Gap

Local Politics Matter

The Importance of Intellectual Property to the “Culture”



It's my First year at the University of Virginia circa 2000. I sit in my Computer Science 101 class and my professor opens up by boldly stating “By the time you all graduate, your degree will be obsolete. It will be the equivalent of a High School Diploma.” I instantly thought, “Well what is my purpose in being here at this Institution of Higher Learning which will leave me \$75,000 in debt?” At the fragile age of 17, I was forced to think what my life and the world would look and be like in 2004, 2008, 2012, 2019, especially for me as a Black woman and the first age of what we call Millennials.

Up until this point in my life, I thought I wanted to be an attorney. It's really the reason I went to college. I thought being an attorney or at least having a college degree was the ONLY guaranteed way I could always provide for my family and be successful. My baby boomer parents always instilled a hard work ethic, and the value of education in me and my brother. Both parents and my brother have Masters' Degrees. As a Black family in America, we did the “right” things to live the American dream. My father, my brother and I are private school bred, we are all college educated and “upper middle class”. Yet, as the only millennial in my immediate family, I still struggle. I still don't “feel” as successful as my white millennial counter-parts. I did everything right...where did I go wrong? Why do I still live paycheck to paycheck? Yes, I have two children and trust me, they eat a lot, but with my salary alone, I am “upper middle class”, yet and still I sweat in between checks, hoping my last \$50 will carry us through, praying the next field trip is reasonably priced so my children don't suffer.

I scroll through my

timeline on social media and I see something remarkable. I see people that look like me establishing streams of income outside of the “norm”. They don't wait for an employer to pay them twice a month, they make their own money. They have their own brands. Whether it's music, fashion, blogging, traveling, food, whatever, they have branded themselves and are successful without depending on anyone's education or an employer to tell them how much their talent and skills are worth. They have branded their life experience thus their narratives and are able to feed it directly to the targeted consumer. It's called Intellectual Property.

Who would have thought 15 years after I graduated college you could get a degree in blogging or be a “Brand Ambassador”? Blogging has become the new wave of journalism and people are making money by wearing their own brands. Now, ideas are what makes the money, not necessarily an acquired skill or trade, leading to a phenomenon of sorts, self-identification and ownership of your ideas are the keys to success. I see less of my folks going to college (alleviating massive student loan debt). Now, they're creating startups, online boutiques, music, content... all based in Intellectual Property. Don't get me wrong, I value my education and the sacrifices my parents made, but there is a shift in culture that has led to Black millennials and a sense of branding of our culture which in turn is creating an independent class of millennials that do not depend on the system or hierarchy of education, and Corporate America.

Prime example... Nipsey Hussle, real name, Ermias Asghedom. Baby boomers don't know who he is and probably couldn't

get past the cursing in his music, but if you listen in between the bars, he lays a blueprint for Black millennials that our baby boomer parents couldn't teach us. Nipsey owned the masters to his music, he branded himself and is actually the first person in the world to open up what is now called a “Smart Store” with his Marathon clothing line. Nipsey was from one of Americas toughest neighborhoods, the Crenshaw District in South Central Los Angeles, yet he became epitome of a self-made businessman and multi-millionaire. Unfortunately, his life was cut short and he was murdered at the age of 33, but to put it simply, his paperwork was in order. He owned the rights to all content he created; he bought the shopping center plaza located at the intersection of Crenshaw and Slauson; he owned the Fat-burger across the street, the Rally's down the street, invested in Vector 9 co-op spaces, and even owned land in Crenshaw where a school was later built. Nipsey didn't even have a high school diploma. What Nipsey had, were ideas and a hard work ethic and he invested in himself. He owned himself, which was the commodity and thus, all of his Intellectual Property. When he passed, his businesses were left to his immediate family and his children. They are all multi-millionaires. He created a legacy. He had a million-dollar life insurance policy and trust funds set up for his children. All of his music sales are funneled to the trust funds. Yet, here I am college educated, “upper middle class” and if I die today, my children will be in debt and will have to start from square one opposed to where I left off.

Nipsey was ahead of his time, but he lays a blueprint for us to follow and really consider as an alternative to the pathway to OUR American Dream. Let's be real, I'm Black! Corporate America will never pay me as much as my White or Asian counter-parts. Sure, our baby boomer parents fought for us and opened doors that would enable us to attend colleges that had been out of our reach and work a well-paying nine to five in Corporate America. But

again, we are trying to fit and force ourselves into a system that not only doesn't welcome us, but was set up against us and to keep us out or working for someone else. We don't even own our own skills which I'm in \$75,000 worth of student loan debt for. I have to interview and ask for this job and let someone tell me how much I'm worth instead of owning my own skills and forcing them to pay me what I am worth. Sounds a lot like slavery to me. This model leads to what? Debt, layoffs right before retirement age, living check to check? I think it's time the Black community stepped into the wave of the future. We must teach our children the importance of ownership, entrepreneurship, the importance of branding themselves and creating their own Intellectual Property for streams of income.

The first thing we need to do as a community is bridge the gap between the baby boomers and millennials. My parent's white counterparts have established a connection and network of legacy that they are able to pass down to their millennial children. White millennials can call in a favor and get a loan from the bank where their Dad's golf buddy is VP, or dip into the trust fund at 18 and build a startup. We don't have that luxury as Black millennials *but* if we play ahead of the curve our children will. We *need* to build our own Black network. Too many times Black gatekeepers in different industries are too busy telling millennials what they do wrong and don't appreciate or invest in what they do right, not understanding that Black millennials follow a different model. I have no business working in a law firm. I don't care about it and I definitely don't care about white folk's problems. I'm passionate about my music, my writings, poetry, fashion, building and branding myself and a platform that will inspire the generations to come while I build wealth off MY Intellectual Property. This is not a new idea, I was just led to believe that I couldn't do it, that it's impossible, it won't happen for you...but it happened for Nipsey, a gangbanging Rolling 60s

Crip from Crenshaw. Why do we as Black folk tell our children to “get real”? When did we stop pushing them to dream and not only dream but support their pursuit of the dream and their ideas? The first thing we need to do is respect the way in which the world has changed and connect the generations within the Black community to build a network of gatekeepers that invest in the leaders of the future and all their “crazy” ideas. The next time your child says, I want to make a VLOG or I want to make music, or I have an idea for a film, listen and invest! Help them build on it. We can't continue to let the rest of the world make money off of our culture, our ideas, OUR Intellectual Property.

Next, we need to think of unconventional streams of income that cut out Corporate America and the dependence of our community on what “they” say we are worth. Social media has enabled us to speak directly to the consumer, the people your brand is intended for and will reach. I have 3000 followers on Instagram and 5000 followers on Facebook. Imagine if I sold one T-Shirt design per month for \$20 directly to the people, I know would buy my brand. That's \$160,000 per month! Not saying everyone would buy, but with the reach of social media, your brand can instantly go global. Your idea can turn into a valid stream of income. Nowadays there are so many platforms to get your brand out there and make money off your OWN Intellectual Property.

One thing Nipsey had was family and a team that believed in him, rooted in where he was from. The community supported him; he supported the community. This is how we not only make the money but keep it within our community. We need to bridge the gap not only between the Black generations but also the different Black socio-economic communities. Rich Black folk need to invest in our communities and middle-class Black folk need to stay in our communities a little more instead of fleeing to the suburbs. Poor Blacks need to pull themselves up, keep our communities clean and stop killing one another so the rich and middle class stay and invest. We all need

to work together. We need Black folks with money to buy real estate, help counter the plague of gentrification and create affordable living situations people can pride themselves in. Nipsey did all of this and he did it by using his talents as an artist, having ownership of his brand and Intellectual Property. He invested every penny in his family and community and single handedly built a legacy and generated millions of dollars.

With all of that being said, our blueprint is different...we have to get out of the monotony of not valuing our identity, our culture and that extra magic Black folks bring, especially Black millennials. The rest of the world appreciates OUR culture and makes money off of US. It's time we do as well! Ownership, Intellectual Property, Content, Exchange of Ideas, Branding, Entrepreneurship...this is what we need to start teaching our children. I'm not knocking the college or the nine to five routes. But hey, I'm living it, and IT AIN'T WORKING FOR US. The majority of us still die broke and in debt with no trust fund for the babies.

We need to connect the dots, connect the generations, connect the different Black classes and create a network and community of leaders who not only own their ideas, but have the support of the community and community investors to generate OUR OWN STREAMS OF INCOME. We're already behind the curve...This is happening NOW, not in the future. Take the knowledge and experience of the baby boomers, coupled with the radical and woke thinking of the Black millennial and we will shift the tide and take back this world, which rightfully belongs to us.

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