

JAH BLESS THE STARS

Can we be honest for just one moment? The Starvel Junious I knew while teaching English at Balboa High School here in The City was often an exceedingly angry young person. He also had a razor-sharp mind. His quick eyes would size up the surrounding environment at school and beyond, and his tongue would often render the most withering, though astute, critiques of the educational system that failed him and that he failed to negotiate. Starvel was also, in my opinion, a very handsome young Black brother with an untapped potential that, all too sadly, will never be realized. He belongs to the stars now.

What was happening when he belonged to us? I don't purport to know the specific events that immediately preceded his grossly premature death, other than what made the papers. I do know, however, that who killed him isn't nearly as important as the underlying societal issues that led up to his killing and that of his companion. If we could, for once, get past the glint of the guns and the stereotypical gloss on rap music, maybe, just maybe, we'll finally address the cold, hard economic realities that far too many students and other young people in San Francisco, and the surrounding Bay area, must stare down every day.

How would you know unless you've been there? The two sides of this coin are that you already do and yet you don't. Not to point fingers, just to point out facts: If you are White and/or reasonably well off, you already know which parts of The City to avoid and where not to buy a house. In addition to missing out on some pretty lively people and neighborhoods, you also avoid spending time and dollars that are needed in these communities. This is fairly obvious, but often neglected. If you are of color and/or not as well off, you already know this. Starvel was acutely aware of this situation, and it contributed greatly to his anger.

Are you worried about the risk? Of course you are. Well, you needn't. In an educational system that is mostly devoid of the overwhelming contributions of people of color to the world and American society, you can rest assured that Black, Latin and other youths will continue to aim their guns at themselves only. In an economic system that values dollars only (and those who make more of them), you can be reasonably assured that if anything happened to someone of means while they happened to be in Hunters Point, an all-out manhunt would've taken place by now and the perpetrator apprehended. Thus, your fears are largely unfounded.

How does anyone make it out of these places alive? Many people do every day and they return. Many get up, just like you and me, and go to work. I know this because I live in a neighborhood similar to HP. While on my frequent morning or midnight jogs and walks in Visitacion Valley (near the Cow Palace), I see many hard-working people of all colors coming and going and it is so beautiful, even if the neighborhood's veneer isn't. A little gentrification and this place will be as hip as the Mission. It's already beginning to happen—and I may be forced to move out because of it—but Starvel will never see it.

And, lastly, I have to ask our elected officials a question: Where are you? If the honorable mayor can make it over to the Mission for fundraisers during his campaign, then he can risk his suit and make it down to Bayview/Hunters Point now, where an overwhelming percentage of people voted for him, hoping for change. My sense is that Starvel probably didn't have this hope. It would explain why he wasn't in school on that fateful day last week. Is anyone else willing to help prove him wrong?

--Michael A. Pipkin, San Francisco