

O.G's Perspective
By: Rickey D. Cummings, Jr.

"They need to get off IG and find themselves an O.G."

-Business mogul and founder of Rap-A-Lot Records, J. Prince, commenting on today's youth.

Today, the once revered title/rank "O.G" has become over-saturated. What was once only ASSIGNED to individuals who have put in an adequate amount of "work" in/for the neighborhood while, simultaneously, displaying UNWAVERING respect, loyalty, honor and integrity -NO MATTER THE COST-, is now being tossed about freely. Being referred to as an "O.G" was once an honor because you knew that it was truly earned by one's true dedication to the cause. Now, though, it seems that one's age, "muscle", lineage and/or the size of their "bag" (bank account/cash flow) alone can "earn" a person "O.G status", even if said person is piss poor morally. This, unfortunately, has led to our neighborhoods being in disarray because, too often, in the streets it's the blind "leading" the blind; and, because of their own lack of true knowledge, wisdom and understanding, REAL knowledge is no longer passed down properly before individuals are allowed in the "game"; rules and safe zones are no longer respected and, worst of all, our most vulnerable: the kids, women and our elderly, are no longer protected. To make matters worse, there's no repercussions for violators. Instead, they are able to "knock dents" in the "game" and keep playing as if nothing has happened.

There seems to be a "free-for-all" in the streets and, for reasons I can't understand, the REAL O.G's, not all, but definitely too many, are sitting idle as our youth crash and burn. Is it because they are so far removed from the streets that there is now a disconnect between them, the community and the youth? Is it because they no longer have any control of the streets? Or, are they simply afraid of the youth? Regardless of their reasons for not stepping up, the sad truth remains the same: our youth are dying senselessly, and our communities, as a whole, are suffering because of it.

It's time for the REAL O.G's to step up and the unfit perpetrators to move around. So order, respect and honor can be restored in our communities. It's time for the men and women who have acquired wisdom from receiving their share of bumps and bruises from the "game" to share said wisdom with the youth, which could deter them from making the same mistakes. It's time for individuals to stop being afraid of our youth; to stop manipulating them for personal gain; and, to stop misleading them with lies and half truths. It's time to stop turning a blind eye to the self-destruction, self-hate and the self destruction, because the silence and inaction is akin to giving consent to the destruction, hate and disrespect that's being projected onto others in our communities.

Will the REAL O.G's stand up? Or, will you all continue to dishonor the title/rank you worked so hard to earn by watching the neighborhoods and its inhabitants, which are supposed to be loved and protected, be destroyed?

Donnell "O.G" Jackson is one of the REAL O.G's who have decided to step up by sharing his acquired wisdom with the youth in his community. While the characters and conversations in "O.G's Perspective" are fictional, each story are based on REAL issues that plague our inner cities across this (America) nation. Follow along as "O.G" drop jewels on the youth, be entertained, but, most importantly, become the person who passes REAL jewels to the youth in your own communities.

www.iamrickeycummings.com

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"Morning Rituals"

It's six o'clock on a spring morning and, as always, when the weather is nice, Donnell "O.G." Jackson could be seen sitting at a small table on his porch. From his position, he has a view of his whole neighborhood block, but, at the moment, that's not what has his attention. O.G.'s focus is on the "battle" playing out before him on his chessboard, which he engages in daily against himself. Today, he's operating from the black side and is currently down two pieces; which leaves him with his king on h8, bishop on g6 and a queen on c3. His "opponent" has a king on d1, rook on a1, bishop on e2, knight on b3 and a queen on e7. It's his (black) move, and O.G. recognizes that if he doesn't make it his best one, white will checkmate his king by pushing the rook to a8.

Right as O.G. was about to make his move, bishop to c2, to place the white king in check, he heard a voice call out,

"Look out, O.G., do you mind if I enter?"

Looking up from the game, O.G. saw that it was one of the youngsters from the neighborhood standing outside his gate. With a smile he replied,

"Peace, young king! No, I don't mind at all."

The youngster knew that would be O.G.'s response, being that he always held space when any of the neighborhood youth wanted a moment of his time, but a "jewel" that O.G. dropped on him and his friends: 'If you do not have nefarious intentions, it's always best to announce yourself and seek permission before you invade someone's space. Especially, if you see them preoccupied, because you never know what a person is dealing with, or have been through in life, that could cause an innocent act to turn into a tragedy.' Since that day, the youngster has decided to move with more caution and respect when dealing with others' personal space.

After standing and extending a fist to "knock rocks", which is how O.G. refers to fist bumps, O.G. offered the youngster a seat at the table and asked,

"I see you're out and about pretty early, how are you doing, young king?"

After taking his seat, the youngster replied,

"You know how it is, O.G., 'the early bird gets the worm'. To your question though, I'm maintainin'. What about you, how you livin'?"

After looking O.G. in the eyes while speaking, the youngster averted his down to the chessboard before him. He didn't know how to play himself, but after seeing O.G. in this same spot playing on numerous occasions, he found himself wanting to learn how to play.

"I'm in good health and spirits. I'm Black, alive and free, too; therefore, I'm doing pretty good,"

O.G. replied. If he wanted to, the youngster could have spoken O.G.'s response for him verbatim, because he has given the same answer for the past seven months; which is how long it's been since he was exonerated and freed from Texas Death Row. These days, considering all that O.G. has been through, he lives by the philosophy: Every second alive is a blessing. Therefore, he spends less time complaining, and more actively trying to make the best out of each situation. Also, with his second chance at life, he has decided to be intentional about righting some of his wrongs by being of help to others. Instead of shooting a slug (joke) about O.G.'s repetitive response, the youngster just smiled and shook his head.

"So, what's on your mind, young king? I know you didn't decide to stop by just to look at my chessboard; unless you got it on your mind and want some smoke, that is,"

O.G said with a smirk and raised eyebrow.

"Nah, I don't want any smoke, but don't think I'm dry ducking that fade, either. I just don't know how to play, yet. When I learn, though, I'll be stopping by for some action,"

the youngster replied, being sure to let O.G know what his intentions were. Continuing on to answer O.G's question, the youngster told him,

"I was on my way back to the spot when I saw you sitting here, and it hit me that I've never asked three things that I've been wondering for a while."

Looking down to make the move he had decided on earlier, O.G asked,

"Oh, yeah, and what's that?",

before moving the white king out of check to cl. After watching O.G make his move and trying to make some sense out of it, he replied,

"Well, first, I've wondered why you're so generous with your time and advice to those who seek it? I mean, even if a person doesn't seek it, I've seen you give the former to people you see in need, and you're always dropping jewels on me and the homies when you see us. I'm not sure if you've noticed it or not, O.G, but most of the "old heads" out here aren't doing that; especially, if they don't feel like they can capitalize off the situation, or us. Truth be told, half of the time they act as if they are afraid of us."

Before speaking, O.G sat back and thought on the youngsters' words. He believed in the old proverb: The Most High gave us two ears and one mouth for a reason: so we can listen more than we speak. So, anytime someone came to him with a question or problem, he made sure he listened closely so he could fully process everything, and give a proper response.

"Dig this, young king, when it comes to you and the rest of the youth in the neighborhood, I'm generous with my time and advice because, at one point, I was in y'all shoes. Now, I don't like speaking too much about my past because it's too easy for words to be misconstrued and, when dealing with impressionable youth, if they are interpreted as if I'm glorifying the life I once lived, I could easily lead one of them astray. I'd hate for that to happen. Some of you know my resume, though, and have heard stories about how I left my stain in those streets. I said that to say this, when I see y'all, I see the man I was. I know what it's like to be 'thuggin' and lovin' it'; to feel like I'm spiraling out of control; to hit rock bottom and be in need of a helping hand and true guidance, only to be ignored, feared and/or led further astray by the "old heads" in the hood. When I was locked in that cage on Texas Death Row, they had me in complete isolation, young king; which gave me a lot of time to think. Going through that ordeal feeling neglected by family, homies and those I considered "O.G's", those that I broke bread with and put in work for, opened my eyes to the realities of the lifestyle I lived, and how it affected my community and those who live there. That's when I decided to 'shed my old skin' and evolve into a better version of self. I made a promise to The Most High and myself to, WHEN I made it home, be the person I needed when I was in the streets for you all. You know, the person who would provide a safe space when things got too thick and help unpack my troubles; who, despite my shortcomings, would accept me as I was, but still hold me accountable and push me to do/be better. And, who would be a constant and reliable source of wisdom. How I see it, If I provide you all with the things I lacked, and share the wisdom I gained from bumping my head a time or two, I could, hopefully, prevent some of y'all from ending up where I was,"

O.G. answered while looking the youngster in the eyes. Nodding his head, he replied,

"I can dig that, O.G, and, trust me, we appreciate it, too,"

speaking for himself and the other youngsters from the neighborhood that O.G has blessed with his time and wisdom.

"The second thing I've wondered is this; why do you always refer to us 'young kings and queens'? Let me find out it's because in your old age you can't keep up with all of our names,"

the youngster said with a smirk, causing O.G to chuckle a bit. Granted, to the youngsters' 18 years of age, O.G is technically old enough to be his father, but he's only 35 years old. In addition to his street credibility, this is another reason why the youth in the neighborhood enjoy building with O.G and find him so relatable: he's old enough to drop solid jewels on them, and he's young enough to understand the youths' lingo and the current culture. To them all, instead of coming across as an overbearing adult, O.G gives off big brother vibes. As O.G pondered over the question, he was also studying the board. After recognizing his next moves, he called out,

"checkmate in two;"

which caused the youngsters' eyes to go back to the board. He watched as O.G moved his bishop to b3, taking the knight off the board and, simultaneously, placing the white king in check with his queen. After making his move, he shot a slug of his own.

"I see you have jokes this morning. I didn't know you decided to stop trappng to become a comedian. Who you think you are, T.I or somebody? Let me know when you have your next show so I can pop up and heckle you the whole time,"

O.G joked, causing them both to laugh at his reference to one of his favorite rappers decision to try his hand at comedy. After the laughter died down, O.G said,

"Nah, but to answer your question, I refer to you all as young king and queens to inform and remind you all that you are more than who American society says you are or who you can become. Your history doesn't begin with your ancestors being enslaved, and there's more options available to you all than being an entertainer, ball player, d-boys and gangstas. Your history is rich, and your potential is limitless. I refer to you all as I do because, despite how you all are living now, I'm able to see what and who dwells within you all. I've told you that there's power in the tongue and our thoughts, young king; well, it's my hope that by contiuing to call you all as I see you, I'll plant seeds in your minds that will one day sprout and fructify through your actions. Dig this, though, at the end of the day, it doesn't matter what I see or call you, you all have to see yourself as such and act accordingly, you feel me?"

O.G asked, receiving a nod back from the youngster. Continuing on, he said,

"Earlier, you made the comment about how the 'old heads' act as if they are afraid of you all; can you blame them if they were? Nah, you can't. You know I'm going to always keep it a hundred with you, a lot of y'all lack proper respect and are moving reckless out here. Sometimes I wonder if sitting in the house as kids playing HALO, Call of Duty and Grand Theft Auto for hours on end has desensitized you all to the realities of the world and death. You all are shooting and killing everything moving as if y'all are living in an alternate universe, as if there aren't real consequences. At least that's what the news is showing everyday. As I've told you all, to most, perception

is reality. So, if all the "old heads" see on the news is you all dropping bodies left and right, then they come outside and see some of you showing a lack of respect for self, others or the community, what they see on the news will become their truth. It's not fair to paint you all with a broad brush, but if you don't present yourselves as being different from the rest, how will they know? So, you all have to choose to embrace the titles 'young kings' and 'young queens', then embody them with your deeds. You all also have to decide what type of monarchs you will become: one who rules with an iron fist or a benevolent hand. Personally, I choose to be the latter because I want the same for you all that I want for myself; hence why I'm so generous with my time and wisdom."

As O.G looked the youngster in his eyes he could see the wheels turning behind them. This is why he loved with him, he could tell that he asked questions because he was sincere about gaining knowledge. Another reason is that, despite the youngster living the street life, O.G could tell that he wanted more for himself. He, just like many other youngsters in the streets, just need someone to show him how to apply the same hustle and grind he dedicates to the streets towards something legit. It's O.G's desire to be that person because he is tired of seeing so much potential being lost to an early grave and the penitentiary.

Turning his attention back to the chessboard to see if he could find a way out of the inevitable, he broke the silence,

"You said you've always wondered three things, what's your last question?" before moving the white king to b1, out of check. While looking at the board the youngster asked,

"O.G, I've lost count of how many times I've seen you sitting here playing yourself, why is that? What is it about this game that you love so much?"

O.G wasn't expecting that question from him, but he already had an answer because he had been asked that same question numerous times while on Texas Death Row by guards and inmates alike. With a smirk he said,

"You know that extra question is going to cost you, right?"

Had he been dealing with anyone else, the youngster would've taken heed to one of the jewels O.G dropped on him: Always weigh and consider everything before agreeing to, or getting involved in something, because every action has a reaction. And, unfortunately, not everyone will have your best interest at heart. But, he knew that if O.G ever placed him in debt, when it was called on, it would be something that would add to his tool box, not take from it. So, with a smile he replied,

"That's a bet, now, what's up?"

"To your latter question, I love this game because of the way it can be broken down to imitate life and its' many facets; whether it's the family structure, war, corporate America or the street life you're currently living. We'll get to that later, though,"

O.G said with a smile. Continuing on, he explained,

"I also love this game because it's a thinking mans' game. To become a master at the game I have to be able to see the whole board and be methodical with my moves; meaning, I have to be able to visualize my next three moves and anticipate what my opponents will be, just as I have to do in life. As to your former question, I play myself to keep my mind sharp. Also, because I realized a long time ago that I, like many others, can sometimes be my biggest obstacle. I'm sure you've heard the chess analogy 'make your next move

your best move', right? I feel that this metaphor is used the most in our culture because we know that as Black men and women in this country we have many obstacles in our way and, in order to get in the door, to get ahead, hell to survive period, we have to make each move count. This game keeps me in the practice of doing that. It forces me to make the best move possible, to see all traps before they are laid and to stay out of my own way. As I said, this game imitates life. And, just in life, I have to protect the king, which is myself, at all times on this board. If I don't, I'll find myself being placed in check, or being checkmated; which, in real life, for me and you, young king, can look like our ending up in prison for a crime we did or did not commit, or murdered in these streets by cops or the "apps", as you youngsters now call your rivals. Checkmate,"

O.G called out after moving his black queen to c1. The youngster looked down at the board for a while, then up at O.G, nodding his head the whole time, as if he could feel the weight of the jewels that was just placed in his crown (head) by O.G. Extending his closed fist, he said,

"That's game, O.G."

Reaching across the table to knock rocks, O.G replied,

"Nah, that's life, young king."

As the youngster was about to make a comment he was interrupted by his cell phone alerting him to an incoming text message. Seeing that it was a play he needed to catch, he stood to leave and said,

"Alright, O.G, I need to go secure this bag so I'll catch you later. As always, I appreciate the conversation and jewels you dropped on me. Before I go, though, tell me, what do I owe for that extra question?"

With a smile, O.G told him,

"I want you to set aside some time for me this weekend so I can teach you the basics to chess, and explain how this game can represent the lifestyle you're currently living."

Reaching out to knock rocks one last time, the youngster replied,

"That's a bet, O.G, I'll stop by on Saturday, around two in the afternoon, if that's cool with you. Until then, stay up and enjoy the rest of your day."

As they walked to the gate together, O.G confirmed that the date and time was fine, then he sent the youngster off the same way he welcomed him,

"Peace, young king."