

Live and let live: Michael Vick too

Written by William Reed
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Michael Vick's reinstatement to the NFL and recent signing by the Philadelphia Eagles is a bit of victory for those who tire of seeing American mainstream society make Black American athletes "public enemy number one" when they screw up. If you are in synch with values and a mindset that accepts as fact: Allen Iverson is 'edgy', Michael Irvin is some kind of criminal and Terrell Owens is a malcontent, you are a part of an American tradition of vilifying Black athletes.

Payback is a mother, so it only seems appropriate that Vick signed his contract in a city like Philadelphia. It is said that Philadelphia sports fans would boo a cancer patient. During a game in 1998, they threw snowballs at Santa Claus. And, in 1999, they cheered when the Dallas Cowboys' Michael Irvin injured his neck and had to be carried off the field. Though he received offers to other NFL cities, the City of Brotherly Love is where Vick will make his comeback. And Eagle fans sure as heck aren't going to pay much attention to animal rights protestors blocking their path to a Super Bowl. In a city like Philly, where the slogan is: "If you win, we forgive all," Vick should be right at home.

In 2005 the Atlanta Falcons signed Michael Vick to a 10-year; \$130 million contract extension that guaranteed him an NFL-record \$37 million in bonuses. That made Vick a successful and wealthy young Black athlete. Many Blacks hold the belief that it's because of this stature, fame and his Blackness, Vick is being made to suffer society's scorn. On his signing, it was a humbled Vick that said: "I think everybody deserves a second chance. You only get one shot at a second chance, and I am conscious of that".

Chances are Mike Vick won't ever be able to live down events of Bad Newz Kennels, the dog fighting ring that landed him in Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary for 18 months. Despite once being the NFL's highest-paid player, Vick is now bankrupt. His deal is one-year for \$1.6 million, with a team option for a second year at \$5.2 million. None of the money is guaranteed, so the Eagles face no financial risk if Vick doesn't make the team.

In 2007 Michael Dwayne Vick, alias "Ookie", was convicted for strangling dogs that didn't show enough promise in the ring. Vick is 29 and an example of American Black men between the ages of 20 – 34; one in nine is incarcerated. It's a sad social statement that 10 percent of the

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Black male population aged 25 to 29 is incarcerated. Self-righteous Americana is tone-deft to this situation; the number of Black men in prison is the largest of any racial or ethnic group. More African-American men are in jail than in college.

A sad indictment on society is its ongoing persecution and disdain of young Black men like Vick. Twelve percent of Black men between 16 and 34 are in jail or prison. Like Vick, they are spending the most productive times of their lives displaced and behind bars. Out of that genre Vick got a job. To keep it Vick will give money, raise money and beg money for animal rights. As part of his employment, Vick is required to meet with inner city kids twice a month to talk about his personal experiences with dog fighting and why it's wrong. Russell Simmons, an avid supporter of protection of animals endorsed Vick's reinstatement.

Vick rushed for 1,039 yards in 2006, the most by a quarterback in a single season in NFL history. So, don't be surprised if the "Negro felon's" return brings the NFL bonanza TV ratings. In the world of entertainment, and putting butts in seats, the NFL is King. For league owners, it's all about Benjamins and Vick's first game is likely to be on pay-per-view. It's a win-win situation: Philadelphia Eagle's owner Jeffery is going make money, as will owners of other NFL teams, by bringing Michael Vick back on the field of play.

(William Reed – www.BlackPressInternational.com)