

The Tripping Point

Pimp and ho outfits for children available online? That's just one reason Cora Daniels says she wrote *Ghettonation*



Author Cora Daniels

ESSENCE: You say you knew you had to write *Ghettonation* (Random House, \$24.95) after hearing Paris Hilton, the hotel heiress, utter these words on her reality show, *The Simple Life*: "This truck is so ghetto." Explain.

CORA DANIELS: We're looking at all kinds of people using the word *ghetto*, from Hilton to Martha Stewart. When we adopt the behavior affiliated with being ghetto, we're actually lowering our standards and our expectations. That must stop.

ESSENCE: Many will argue that being ghetto is really about keeping it real and not trying to be fake.

C.D.: When we talk about folks being ghetto or keeping it real, that's a sloppy substitution for being Black. Ghetto is not being Black. We're the only community that treats ourselves with such disrespect.

ESSENCE: Among the many points you make in the book, one that stands out is that some rappers who act ghetto, in fact, are not.

C.D.: Yes, a certain image sells. Little Jonathan Smith, whom we know as Lil Jon, the poster child for Crunk, grew up in a stable middle-class Atlanta home, where his father was an engineer and his mother was an Army reservist. That doesn't mean he can't be ghetto, but in truth, he's aiming low.

ESSENCE: Are you sensing a backlash against ghetto behavior?

C.D.: You now have White middle-class kids drinking 40s and hosting Ghetto Parties on college campuses. They're pretending to be ghetto, but really, they're making fun of us. It's taken a lot of energy to launch this ghetto mind-set, and it's going to take a lot more energy and people speaking out to challenge it.

ESSENCE: Are you worried that some may accuse you of being judgmental?

C.D.: Some people will say that I'm pointing fingers. But ghetto does not mean we need to lower our expectations as a people. We all must battle the acceptance of low expectations.

—P.H.B.



Stranger Than Fiction



A journalist pens a juicy murder mystery involving the ATL's Black elite

Redbone (Amistad, \$24.95) by Ron Stodghill has all the ingredients of a blockbuster potboiler: a driven self-made millionaire who wines and dines Atlanta's most attractive women; a brutal bludgeoning in a gated community; accusations of corruption and bisexuality; and yes, gold diggers. But don't look for this racy thriller in the fiction section of your bookstore. *New York Times* reporter Stodghill's fast-paced suspense tale is based on a true story with so many scandalous details it will feel as if you're reading a novel. The author fashions a bawdy tale that takes us to pristine enclaves just outside Atlanta and through some of the city's high and low places before we discover the identity of the culprit.

The Sweet Smell of Success

We love a well-told redemptive story. One of the best reads in this genre is *Cooked* (William Morrow, \$24.95) by Chef Jeff Henderson. Everyday diners at the popular Café Bellagio in Las Vegas, Nevada, clamor for his imaginative (and did we say delicious?) fare. It's hard to believe that the inspiration for his culinary calling came from a prison kitchen. Henderson's book details one brother's determination to beat the odds and live his dream.