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**Trying to be Exclusive, but Acting like Everyone Else
From the Fringe**

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In recent times, a trend seems to have emerged. I call it the second wave of the not-always-so-Talented Tenth. This is constituted by an increasingly visible and vocal contingent; they are the crop of African-Americans, generally ages 23-40, who have christened themselves "professionals."

This isn't necessarily professional in the conventional sense of careers – those who are doctors, attorneys, academicians, or even specialists in technology, communications or business. Instead, these professionals are anyone who has a job in an office, who may have a cubicle or their own office, whose employment is not manual or service-oriented in the ostensibly basest sense. These professionals are not washing dishes, taking fast food orders, laying bricks or trimming hedges. They work in offices, dress like they're going to a megachurch service and take pride in their status, even if they spend their days answering calls, making copies or booking travel arrangements for their superiors.

Yes, these are *the* professionals. And seemingly everyone now wants to be part of this elevated caste.

And so imagine my surprise when I recently attended an event targeted to such professionals, to those with a bit of extra change left over after paying our bills – our inflated mortgages, monthly notes for cars with a certain cache and organic groceries from places like Whole Foods. The organizers, who have built their empire on such higher class black support, just knew that this faithful following would come out and pay preciously for a concert featuring underrated and railroaded artist Bilal.

Doors were set to open at 8, but no one gained entry until at least 30 minutes later. Folks were frigidly keeping their cool in temperatures that had descended into the 50s in late spring. The line weaved through a parking lot as ticket-holders looked nonplussed, engaged in conversation with their fellow professionals. Once the doors opened, the line continued to bottleneck, as organizers manually checked IDs and

printed-out tickets against a paper roster, having ticket purchasers sign their name next to their previously processed online order.

So much for being professional and progressive with technology.

Once seated, most attendees waited an hour and a half until the opening act came on and performed an entirely too long set that tested the patience of the listless audience. The "poet" talked about the dearth of professional black women who can cook homemade meals complete with fried chicken, greens and hot water cornbread, among other topics, which contained our struggles in pop culture analogies, with Beyonce as a memorable, uninspired allusion. He also predictably reminded us of our past glory as African royalty. People started shuffling around, taking bathroom breaks and, in some cases, left the building.

Sigh.

The reason for the extended performance was made clear upon conclusion, when organizers announced with feigned disappointment and astonishment that the evening's host (and presumably, in the minds of the concert-goers, co-headliner) songstress Jaguar Wright had accepted another engagement and would not be in the house. People who had paid up to \$150-plus for tickets were getting two-thirds of what they expected, with a bunch of headaches and nonsense in the process, and no concessions or apologies, to boot.

Though we were told it would be 15 minutes, at least 35 minutes passed between the opening act and Bilal's set without clear or reasonable explanation. As they waited, the professionals went to the bar for drinks, checked their Blackberries and rubbed their eyes, likely thinking about waking up the next morning for work.

Bilal put on a respectable hour-long performance, one much better than that put on by the orchestrators of this event.

It may feel good to be a professional or to be called one. It may enhance our egos to be thought of as exceptions, as the upper crust who have weathered and risen above the undercurrent of mediocrity and negative statistics.

But oftentimes, we act like we're exclusive when, really, we're acting just like everyone else.

Such an event is a reminder that true professionals don't pay for pretense. When dollars are at stake, they expect the real thing and will not compliantly scamper away into their burrows of complacency without complaint.

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The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog


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