

## “Black Men and Public Space”

Brent Staples

*Brent Staples is an American writer and journalist. This essay was first published in 1986 in Ms. Magazine, and has been read and taught as a foundational piece on racial relations in the United States.*

### Vocabulary...

affluent (adj)	impoverished (adj)	discreet (adj)
inflammatory (adj)	cast (v)	billowing (v)
glimpse (n)	earnest (adj)	unwieldy (adj)
quarry (n)	wayfarer (n)	dismayed (v)
accomplice (n)	tyranny (n)	seeped (v)
gulf (n)	foyer (n)	errant (adj)
elicit (v)	avid (adj)	taut (adj)
solace (n)	alienation (n)	retrospect (n)
bravado (n)	perilous (adj)	posse (n)
cursory (adj)	bade (v)	smother (v)

### Reading Questions...

1. What problem does Staples encounter when he takes walks at night? Why?
2. What are two things that Staples does to make other people more comfortable around him?

### Discussion Questions...

1. What is the effect of Staples' first sentence? Does Staples show sympathy for the women he makes uncomfortable? Why or why not?
2. How does other people's treatment of Staples change the way he occupies public space? Should he change his behavior for the comfort of others?

### Activities and Assignments...

1. Write a short essay on your own “bear country.” Are there places where you feel uncomfortable and/or fear for your personal safety? Are there places where you think you make others feel that way?
2. This essay was originally written in 1986. What changes would need to be made to update it for today? Re-write the essay to make it relevant to today's world and political climate.

