

FORWARD

A
NEW
WAY

HEALING WHAT'S HURTING BLACK AMERICA



EDITED BY SUSAN L. TAYLOR

A National CARES Mentoring Movement Initiative

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EDITED BY

Susan L. Taylor

National CARES Mentoring Movement, Inc.



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The National CARES Mentoring Movement is devoted to closing the huge gap between the relatively few Black mentors and the millions of vulnerable Black children on the waiting lists of mentoring and youth-support organizations. As of this writing, we have a presence in 57 U.S. cities. National CARES is not a mentoring organization in and of itself; we are a movement that seeks to recruit and connect Black volunteers with their local youth-serving programs.

To that end, we have created A New Way Forward, an innovative mentor-recruitment initiative designed to create an ocean of gravely needed mentors who are practicing principles of wellness in body, mind, spirit and community, and who are devoted to seeding a consciousness of self-love and high achievement in the minds and hearts of the children they mentor. A project of National CARES, A New Way Forward will provide volunteers with the information and training needed to serve Black children and other under-resourced youngsters at the highest levels.

This effort has been made possible by the generosity of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Fannie Mae, Inc., and the indispensable time, talent and treasure of the people who make up our Braintrust.

This manual is a work in progress and is intended to ignite direct action for us, as a people, to move through our collective hurt and cultivate effective pathways to healing and wholeness. The manual and its companion training are being piloted, evaluated and refined as we receive vital feedback from participants across the nation. In your hands, the work comes alive. Pilot sessions are taking place in Oakland. As National CARES raises additional funds, more trainings will be held in other cities. We are committed to offering this transformational training wherever our children are suffering—beginning in the 57 cities where our devoted CARES mentor-recruitment leaders are working each day to save young lives.

A New Way Forward Braintrust



A Pledge to Rescue Our Youth

By Dr. Maya Angelou

Young women, young men of color, we add our voices to the voices
of your ancestors who speak to you over
ancient seas and across impossible mountaintops.

Come up from the gloom of national neglect;
you have already been paid for.

Come out of the shadow of irrational prejudice;
you owe no racial debt to history.

The blood of our bodies and the prayers of our souls
have bought you a future free from shame and
bright beyond the telling of it.

We pledge ourselves and our resources to seek for you
clean and well-furnished schools, safe and
non-threatening streets, employment which makes use
of your talents, but does not degrade your dignity.

You are the best we have.

You are all we have.

You are what we have become.

We pledge you our whole hearts from this day forward.

Written by Dr. Angelou expressly for the
National CARES Mentoring Movement

For their phenomenal work in setting the course of this project by molding the first drafts of material from nearly 60 scholars, practitioners, activists and advocates, we thank the following writers:

Sheila R. Rule, team leader

&

Rev. Yvonne Samuel
Akoshia Fatimah Yoba
Dr. Noel S. Anderson

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Susan L. Taylor

National CARES Mentoring Movement CEO and founder Susan L. Taylor is the architect of A New Way Forward, a National CARES healing initiative and training manual, for which she served as editor-in-chief. Susan is pictured here at home in the summer of 2010 with her granddaughter, cousins, nieces and their friends. Clockwise from noon: Bakari Taylor, Ania Hughes, William Plummer, Zakiya Moore, David Wright, Amina Suzanne King, Nisa Bandele, and Malaika Taylor.

ONE LOVE

One of the truths I have most relied on in my life is that which tells us how our ancestors triumphed over tragedy. Beyond doubt, we are the people who refused to die. Enduring heinous acts of violence and assaults to their psyche and soul, our foreparents donned their spiritual armor—a walk-on-water faith—and kept moving forward. Bequeathed to us from them is a powerful legacy it often seems we have forgotten. We are not on the rough side of the mountain—it has been traversed by those who pushed ahead while lifting the children over terrain more jagged and steep than we will ever know. Let us lift up that legacy and navigate what, in comparison, are hills.

Like you, I ache over the state of emergency in Black America: that we able adults are allowing our vulnerable young to fall. That we are leaving outside our sanctuary doors “the least of these.” That legions of our children are without textbooks, art and technology training in failing schools. That 85 percent of Black fourth-graders read below grade level and a million Black males are on lockdown. That there is no strategic alliance among Black leaders, no agreed-upon agenda. That we’re so stressed, moving fast, but losing ground in every quarter critical to Black progress.

We have no time to waste.

The work is ours to do, and the call to action is now!

In 2009, the National CARES Mentoring

Movement organized an intergenerational group of some of the finest minds to create a consciousness-changing curriculum to anchor Black people solidly in our Highest Self, help us heal our hurt, depression and self-denial, rarely named or recognized but internalized over generations—and today prevents us from caring well for ourselves and our vulnerable young. A New Way Forward is for our transformation. It is a healing and wellness training for our body, mind, spirit and community, an offering of restorative principles and practices to help African Americans stand strong in love and unity, and repair the village. The trainings are to help “reculture” us—to invite us back home to our beautiful selves.

They are for a critical mass of willing, community-loving Black people—the high and the humble—who *want* to de-stress and fortify our spirit, who *want* to lead healthy, peaceful, productive lives, who *want* to mentor and advance our struggling young and imperiled communities.

A New Way Forward is created to revitalize us, to heal the incalculable damage done to our body, mind and soul by more than three centuries of slavery, Jim Crow practices, and racism. It is to root in us what our ancestors knew: No matter how rough the course, we must believe the promise. We are not at the mercy of outside forces. Our power resides where it has always been—within us, with our God, and in unity.

*“Human progress
is neither automatic
nor inevitable...
Every step toward
the goal of justice
requires sacrifice,
suffering, and struggle;
the tireless exertions
and passionate
concern of dedicated
individuals.”*

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

asha bandele

is the executive editor of this manual and has worked with the National CARES Mentoring Movement since it's inception.



CREATING A WORLD

In 2005, after 80 percent of New Orleans was drowned, Susan L. Taylor put out a call, which, five years later, has become a movement to link arms and aims for the benefit of our children. I am honored that in the process of Susan's shaping the National CARES Mentoring Movement, and now its innovative training initiative, A New Way Forward, she has asked that I stand beside her as we work to create the kind of world in which all of our children can live out the full measure of the gifts they were born with.

The manual you are now holding is meant to be a road map on a path to freedom. It represents an 18-month journey we took with nearly 60 of our smartest, most loving and committed scholars, activists, educators, entrepreneurs and faith leaders. We came together at Susan's home for a historic meeting on October 30, 2009. It was a moment, in its generosity and hope,

that truly was love with no limits. There, we determined that if we gathered all our work and drew upon all our wisdom, if we set our egos aside and remembered that our children matter more than anything else, indeed, we could begin to chart a way out of the hell that enfolds too many of them.

Now we are beckoning you to join us on this walk back into full humanity, real peace and complete well-being. The chapters contained here will help guide you on this exciting new passage toward healing. All the writers and editors toiled over every word in order to provide you with useful advice, practical tools and strategies that, when used consistently, will serve as a road to our recovery.

Zora Neale Hurston once admonished us to "jump at the sun. You may not reach it, but at least your feet will be off the ground." The work before us is mighty, but the possibilities? Well, there's just no telling.



Dr. Joel P. Martin and Dereca L. Blackmon

Joel (left) is a New Way Forward's director of training. Dereca is our project manager.



LET THE HEALING BEGIN

Join us as we bring to life the contents of this book through transformational retreats, learning communities and practices. We are gathering the willing and making them ready, not only for the work of saving our children and reclaiming our communities, but also for the vital and necessary prerequisite of truly healing and loving our people as we heal and love ourselves.

Our transformational program is built on, though not confined by, innovative models of radical healing, leadership and action learning used successfully over many years. We will shine the light on what is right and good about our very audacity to endure.

What are the secret places where our pain bridles our hope? How do we confront and forgive the past so that we have a present worth loving and a future worth acting on? What does it take for us to sustain the practices that manifest the legacy of our ancestors? How do we foster loving

relationships that result in strong Black children? What is the vision that calls us forth, that compels us to reinvent ourselves as transformational leaders creating this new way forward? These are a few of the many questions we are asking.

We promise to create safe places where Black leaders can seek answers and go deeper than ever before to unearth optimism and liberate a generous and hopeful spirit. We promise to include education and inspiration. And we promise to include caring professionals as our guides.

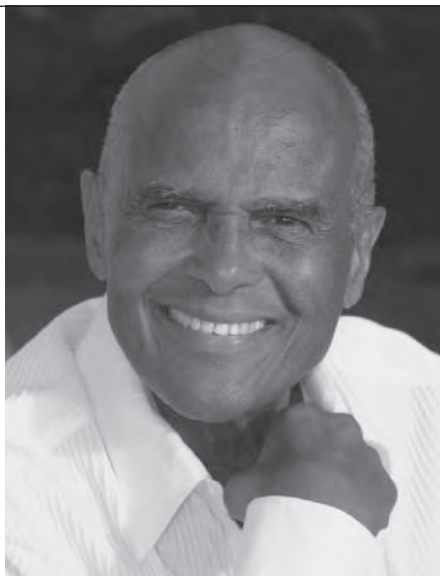
After our retreat pilots in Oakland, we move on to a few other pilot cities, and then to the rest of the nation where our CARES Circles are recruiting mentors and priming the pump for this work. Our children deserve to live in a world where we are proud, honored and able to serve as role models. We are dedicated. This is our work.

*“The older I get,
the better I know
the secret of my going
on is when the reins
are in the hands of
the young who
dare to run
against the storm.
We who believe in
freedom cannot rest.”*

Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon

Harry Belafonte

Legendary artist and human rights activist Harry Belafonte reminds us that our children are central.



FOR OUR CHILDREN

For a quarter of a century, I have served the needs of children all over the world as an ambassador for UNICEF, and I have seen children at all levels of the human condition. Whenever I am asked to consider the spiritual and emotional well-being of our children, I do so from a place of concern. Our children have been and continue to be the victims of our greed and, most often, our indifference. We will never be able to fix what most affects them until we finally fix what most affects us. If we stay on the path we are currently traveling, we will not leave our children the sort of legacy given us by people who committed their lives to making this world a more joyous place.

The creating of a legacy that honors our children begins with each of us having the courage to make a change. It is only when we have realized the imperative and have

gathered the collective will to truly know our history, to understand why we've been oppressed, and to understand what our own role in our oppression has been—it is only then that we can begin to carve out a future of equality and justice.

Dr. King is not a holiday.

But despite all the hardships, the disappointments, the failures, I wake up each morning with hope. Rewarded with another day of living, I know I am given, once more, the opportunity to fix the things I have found so difficult to correct. That I am given that chance with each new day is a gift. And it's not only my gift. It's everyone's: No matter what came before, we have the choice to shape what comes next. The power to heal our children lies entirely with us.





HERITAGE

“History is a people’s memory..” —MALCOLM X

OUR HUMANITY

Five hundred years of oppression did not destroy our soul

BY DR. JOYCE E. KING AND DR. WADE W. NOBLES

We are a magnificent people, awesome beyond measure, ancient as the origins of humanity itself in the womb of Mother Africa and deeply rooted in spirit—in traditions of familyhood and kinship, where we individually and collectively affirm our humanity and the connection to spirit by recognizing the humanity and divinity in others. It is here that we find humanity and perfectibility as expressions of the Divine.

From South Africa to South Carolina, from St. Croix to St. Louis, from Sudan to Suriname, from Mali to Mississippi, from Kemet (Egypt) to Kansas City, from Ouagadougou to West Oakland, from Brixton to Brooklyn, we have been and have borne visionaries and the valiant, peacemakers and power brokers, scholars and seers, the heavy hitters and healers. Our ancestors' accomplishments throughout the African continent—from Kemet in the North to Nubia in the East to Great Zimbabwe in the South and the classical civilizations of Ghana, Mali and Songhay in the West—laid the foundation for mathematics, science, medicine, astronomy, philosophy, the arts and literature. The knowledge, labor and skills of African peoples throughout the Diaspora

not only breathed life into the New World but also produced the vast wealth that enriched European monarchies and New World nations, making it possible for the latter to claim their independence from colonial powers.

The African presence is documented on every continent: In Europe, the Moors ruled Spain for seven centuries; and in Asia, there were African roots in the Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties of ancient China. When we listen to almost any variation of music that originated in the Americas—the work songs, spirituals, blues, jazz, the American popular song, gospel, R&B, rock 'n' roll, hip-hop in the United States, and samba, salsa, rumba, mambo, reggae, calypso, meringue, bomba and plena, maracatu and other forms in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Brazil, Trinidad and throughout the Caribbean and South America—we are listening to the rhythms of African people. Some of Europe's most celebrated artists copied or drew heavily on African motifs—often without acknowledgment—to produce works widely considered innovative and “modern.” Likewise, American “modern dance” has benefited from African influences. Since the time of Imhotep, the Father of Medicine, African and African American scientists, math-

emancipators, physicians and inventors have achieved pioneering breakthroughs in these fields that remain excluded from the curriculum at all levels.

The world owes a debt to our Motherland.

A Legacy for All

Our African foreparents honored the Creator, the village, the clan, the family. They understood the oneness of being. They affirmed their humanity by recognizing the humanity in others, a way of living and being that cherished cultural unity, diversity and affinity. Thus, African humanity was an expression of the Divine.

consciousness. Our historically Black colleges and universities educated Native Americans as well as Japanese Americans following their release from World War II concentration camps. Despite segregation and degradation, our foreparents served with courage and distinction in the nation's armed forces, not only in defense of country but also as acts of resistance and an affirmation of our humanity.

What would America be without our music, our style, grace and dance, our literature and oratory? Without Dr. Charles Drew's blood plasma and blood transfusion discoveries? Without African American

"The labor and skills of African peoples throughout the Diaspora produced the vast wealth that enriched European monarchies and New World nations."



From the Nile to the Niger to the New World, our African spiritual foundation nourished the spiritual strivings we express today through our diverse religious traditions. When they were barred from worshipping in dignity in the White churches of colonial America, religious leaders such as Absalom Jones and Richard Allen established African Methodist Episcopal churches that still exist today. We have continued to express our humanity and collective identity through the excellence we have achieved in every field of human endeavor that our foreparents managed to pry open.

Our accomplishments have benefited not only Black Americans but others as well. In education, our foreparents established schools in colonial New York and Boston, free public schools in the South during Reconstruction, and citizenship schools that defied Jim Crow in support of the Civil Rights Movement, which lifted the nation's

scientific contributions to open heart surgery and pacemakers, the development of the computer and innovations that revolutionized the transportation, food-preservation, hair-care and other industries? Moreover, what do we remember of these achievements or the successful cooperative businesses and mutual aid and benevolent societies our foreparents established? What do we know today of the history of African American life insurance companies that anchored thriving urban economic hubs like Atlanta's Sweet Auburn Avenue, Tulsa's Black Wall Street, Claiborne Avenue in New Orleans or Durham's Little Hayti? Where would the world be today without the Black Freedom Struggle that inspired, among others, the Women's, the Antiwar, and the Gay Rights movements?

Creators and Caretakers

It is important to remember that our survival and our extraordinary accomplishments,

overcoming centuries of adversity, have not been the result of the contributions of isolated individuals, but were nurtured in Black communities, Black churches and other Black institutions and organizations. After all, the Black church became the centerpiece of spiritual, social and political reform.

We exist here in America and throughout the Diaspora as African people with a legacy of human values that have endured through millennia, across time and space. Even if many of us are not fully conscious of this heritage, we are the beneficiaries of values that reflect respect for elders, self-mastery, patience, race pride, collective responsibility, moral restraint, devotion to family, reciprocity, productivity, creativity, courage, defiance and integrity. We are the creators of customs that ground us in a belief in the Divine, the sanctity of family and children, hard work and social responsibilities, the sense of excellence and appropriateness and the importance of history.

Our challenge today is not only to ensure our survival but also to reach back and pass on this wondrous legacy of greatness to our children and the generations to come.

In the Eye of the Storm

Yes, our greatness has been tested, challenged and attacked through the centuries. The history of European contact with African peoples, at least as far back as the fifth century through the age of “discovery” until now, has been determined by feudalism, aristocracy, elitism, colonialism, greed and White supremacy. This history of dehumanization and destruction left our Motherland and our people scarred both on the continent and throughout the Diaspora. Our beautiful Blackness has been devalued, distorted and demonized. In every generation, African

Americans have been denied the right to live in the fullness of our humanity. Captured, kidnapped and enslaved, we have been made the object of negation and nullification.

We have been denied proper food, clothing, medical care, shelter, education and meaningful and productive work, both legally and extralegally. Consider, for example, that for most of the time that we have lived on these shores, it was against the law for us to read, write and enter libraries and theaters. Today, as deep-recession levels of unemployment remain historically high nationally—approaching 10 percent by some estimates—the devastatingly high rate of unemployment among Black families continues at double that percentage. In New York City, 50 percent of Black men are unemployed. We have borne the shock and pain of one trauma after another, experiences that have shattered much of our sense of personal and collective identity, damaged our communities and devastated our families.

Only when we have sequestered ourselves together to unlearn the madness have we thrived. Because we have been so often miseducated, most of us have little memory or knowledge of our history of collective resistance and care for one another. By and large, without intervention, the deep emotional and psychological wounds of these traumas will continue to pass from one generation to the next like a toxic family legacy. The same way we have passed on our passion, pride and power, we are passing on our pain.

Our African American Experience: Being Black in an Anti-African Reality

Millions of our ancestors were snatched from homes, villages and societies in Senegambia, the Bight of Benin, the Gold Coast, the Bight of Biafra and the Congo and crammed into the floating prisons and

death chambers of the Middle Passage. This invasion literally robbed the continent of untold genius and possibility. Our destination: centuries of bondage, deprivation and dehumanization throughout the Americas. For nearly 350 years, our foreparents and their descendants were enslaved under conditions that gave new meaning to brutality, oppression and depravity. Our ancestors were relegated by laws and pseudoscience to the classification of subhuman, the better to justify the

Even now, brutality, violence and injustice continue to stalk us. Not one of us is immune. We are seeing the justice system dismantle the lives of our men and boys in myriad ways. Their killers are seldom if ever brought to justice for the crimes committed against them, as has been the case with all too many murders throughout the South. Black men have been the particular victims of police brutality. They have walked the streets with a bull's-eye on their backs, the targets of White

"We have borne the shock and pain of one trauma after another, experiences that have shattered much of our sense of personal and collective identity, damaged our communities and devastated our families. Only when we have sequestered ourselves together to unlearn the madness have we thrived"



constant, state-sanctioned assault on their spirits, bodies and humanity.

And despite the demise of legal slavery, which eventually had even involved forced "slave breeding," the brutal disruption of our ability to live and prosper did not end. The Emancipation Proclamation was followed by virtual reenslavement through debt peonage, the Black Codes and Jim Crow laws that perpetuated oppression and subjugation. The Ku Klux Klan and like-minded Americans lynched thousands of our people—including women and children—sometimes as entertainment at Sunday picnics and advertised in local newspapers in advance. There were economic wounds, too; crippling barriers to financial resources have locked our people out of the economic mainstream, robbing us of the benefits of our labor and preventing our foreparents from accumulating and passing on wealth to the next generations.

supremacists, from the Klan to skinheads to just good ole boys—as in the case of James Byrd, who was dragged to his death in Jasper, Texas—or the targets of other young Black men who have been taught to hate themselves in a system of White supremacy. Scores of shootings by police—like those that killed Amadou Diallo, Sean Bell and too many others—are commonplace. A for-profit, privatized prison industry monitors the failure rates of fourth-grade Black boys in order to project the number of new prison-cells it will need to build to remain profitable. Lobbyists for the prison-industry profiteers lobby hard-on-crime politicians to divert funding away from education and into bonds for the building of new prisons, thus ensuring underfunded schools, the derailing of our children and a steady stream of new bodies in the school-to-prison pipeline or the morgue. Our children literally are faced with alienating schools or death on the streets.

And Black women have not fared much better. As Alice Walker states so powerfully in her poem “Her Blue Body Everything We Know,” during slavery there was no need for pornography. “We were the thing itself,” she writes, underscoring centuries of rape that our women came to know as well as they knew their own names. And when rape didn’t work, women, too, were lynched or their lives were threatened in other ways, as Ida B. Wells-Barnett both reported on and experienced. When we call the names of Sean Bell and Oscar Grant, we must also call the names of Eleanor Bumpers, Tyisha Miller and 7-year-old Aiyana Stanley Jones of Detroit, all of them victims of police executions and a general lack of regard for the lives of Black people,

even at the ever-present fast-food chains in our community. Still we stand. We are inspirers not just survivors.

Through the Past, Darkly

We carry on. But we stand deeply wounded and in need of radical healing—for ourselves, our children and our community. Is there any wonder that such fundamental healing is called for? No other people has faced the centuries of physical and psychological brutality that we Black people have endured. In the process of staying alive, we have internalized distorted beliefs, behaviors and perceptions that ultimately turn us against ourselves and one another. These, combined with institutionalized racism, have thwarted our potential and



“The same way we have passed on our passion and power, we are passing on our pain.”

seeing our lives as less valuable than the lives of Whites.

And all these years after the abolition of slavery, we find our communities crippled by a modern equivalent of enslavement: the mass incarceration of African Americans under the guise of criminal justice. Today, one million Black men are incarcerated (one in eight Black men between the ages of 25 and 34 are behind bars), and exploding numbers of African American women are being locked up throughout the country. Most of our people who were formerly incarcerated will return to our neighborhoods stripped of basic rights and needed access—from the right to vote to public assistance to school financial aid—unable to get a job,

undermined our progress. Aided by the media’s conspiratorial proliferation of toxic images of our people, a music industry that ravages our children and schools that miseducate, too many of us of all ages have come to view ourselves as inferior and unworthy. This historic assault has undermined the traditional articles of faith that have sustained our communities: that we are all God’s children, that to be human is to recognize the humanity of others and in so doing respond to them in humane and dignified ways. Because of this assault, too many of us accept society’s devaluation of our African heritage and African American culture and even adopt a belief in White superiority.

Thus, centuries of oppression have also left us staggering under the weight of pernicious stress and the systemic lack of resources that sustain life, and in some cases, deep anger, which we typically turn in on ourselves or take out on the people closest to us. Alienated, disaffected and disconnected, we are killing ourselves. Often we try to anesthetize the pain by self-medicating: We overeat and eat all the wrong things. We smoke, do drugs, and overindulge in alcohol. We have unprotected sex, a practice that has left Black women, who are about 12 percent of all women in this country, with 61 percent of all new HIV infections among women.

The cumulative effect of this litany of oppression has been an internalized alienation, self-inflicted abuse and historical, social and cultural amnesia. Are we as a community prepared to understand and address the impact of this oppression on our children; on the sense of identity and belonging our boys are seeking to satisfy, for example, when they walk around grabbing their crotches, holding on to their sagging pants with bent wrists, and showing us and the rest of the world their behinds? Unknowingly, our young males are adopting a set of social mores forced upon them in prisons, which, along with the misogyny in contemporary rap music and videos, continues to have a devastating impact on our relationships, families and beloved community.

Even Black girls have begun to acquiesce in the violence engulfing their neighborhoods and schools, hiding razor blades in their mouths to slash and disfigure other girls in a bid to affirm their own sense of belonging. We must find effective, humanizing ways to impart the God-given gifts of our heritage and humanity to our children. Would recovering and sharing family stories of

resistance and overcoming bring our children back from the brink to a sense of their humanity? What if we tell them about the Deacons for Defense and Justice of Bogalusa, Louisiana, who organized to protect their children and defended their community against Klan violence? About Ida B. Wells-Barnett's fearlessness and Fannie Lou Hamer's divinely inspired sacrifices for our people? What if we tell them about how those men imprisoned at Attica didn't "sag" their pants but courageously defended their right to be treated as human beings?

In fact, we have what we need to begin the radical healing and begin it now, for we still carry within us the indomitable will and spirit that brought us through a harsh past. We carry within us our magnificent heritage and humanity.

Shine Our Light on the World

Our heritage and humanity are bound by the age-old African belief that the family, our elders and our common ancestry are to be revered and respected. We are a people who traditionally hold elders in high esteem and rely on extended families as a reservoir of love and a strategy for survival and advancement.

It is a heritage and humanity that celebrates the beauty and power of art as a prodigious force. Our creative geniuses gave birth to music, dance, theater, poetry and paintings that would become catalysts for social change.

Ours is a heritage and humanity that values nourishing rituals, traditions and symbols. We demonstrate this at worship services, at family gatherings during the holidays and family reunions. Even if they appear to be separating from us, many of our children still embody these qualities in their own ways. Some of us are community activists who plan and attend rallies and hold our clenched Black fists high in resistance. Still more of us stand to sing the

Black National Anthem as a symbol of self-determination and a reminder of our heritage and humanity. The African spirit has never stopped calling African Americans, and we are responding by traveling to our Motherland more than ever, some of us learning and speaking African languages, giving our children names to honor their heritage and adopting African rituals and ceremonies as a way of life. In New Orleans, Mardi Gras Indians, whose rituals eloquently embody the cultural continuity of our Africanness, still refuse to “bow down.” And some of our young artists are contributing to a genre of conscious rap that speaks to our humanity. Ours is a heritage and humanity with religious and spiritual practices that humbly honor the Higher Power in each of us, that order the universe and give us guidance.

Our African ancestors were not stopped; they just kept going, kept moving our people forward. Our African ancestors—despite centuries of slavery meant to erase the extended self from ourselves—were not stopped; they just kept going, kept moving us forward. They carried our humanity and heritage with them and drew on this legacy for power, courage and resilience when they were captured and cargoed over the seas over the centuries; when they were beaten, tortured and raped. Their resilience and genius for surviving and thriving is ours. It is in us, in our DNA and ancestral memory. We carry this heritage legacy now, and as was true for our foremothers and forefathers, tapping this inspiration will light the way forward.

Team Leaders:

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Team:

Dr. Joy DeGruy, Sobonfu Somé, Madeleine Moore Burrell, Tom Burrell

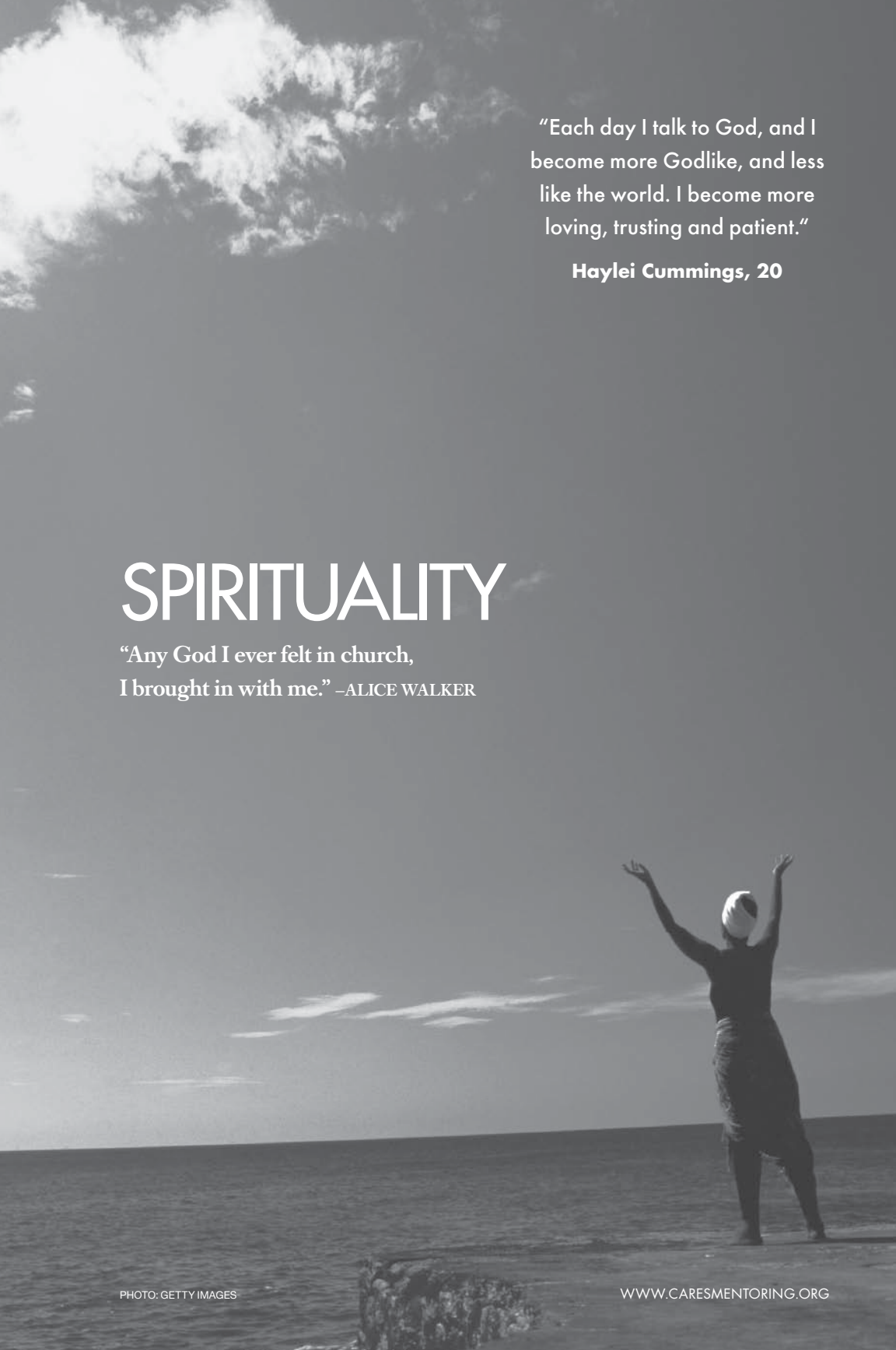
CREATING THE VILLAGE

BY DR. CHERYL TAWEDE GRILLS

Our African heritage has blessed us with life-affirming cultural principles and tools that have helped us survive against the odds, and in some cases, even thrive. From our ancestors in Ethiopia, we learn that to be a mentor is to be a *jegna*, “a very brave person who is protector of the culture and the rights of the people.” A *jegna* is dedicated and diligent, shows determination and courage in protecting our people and our culture. A *jegna* stands steadfast in defense, nurturance and development of our young. To be a *jegna* is to be in the image of African homegrown mentoring. At our deepest core, what makes us human is our connection to one another as spiritual beings, with full awareness that we are extensions of the divine force in the universe.

Our ancestors in the Congo gave us the *nzonzi*. An *nzonzi* acts as a shepherd who has learned from life’s lessons how to listen attentively and tirelessly and to grasp deeply all that is spoken and unspoken. An *nzonzi* knows how to observe all that surrounds, and missing nothing, knows how to reconnect people to their inner source of knowledge, purpose, resilience and self-healing. In essence, the *nzonzi*, the shepherd, the mentor, knows how to call a soul to its sacred meaning of being human.

Mentoring is a very old African tradition of touching another through spirit, heart and hand. In these times that try the souls of our people, to mentor our children, to walk with them along their journey, to connect with them, encourage and inspire them, is to assume our responsibility to them: to be the architects and guardians of healing communities. We are the ones, hand in hand, arm in arm, who can and must make real the village.



"Each day I talk to God, and I become more Godlike, and less like the world. I become more loving, trusting and patient."

Haylei Cummings, 20

SPIRITUALITY

"Any God I ever felt in church,
I brought in with me." –ALICE WALKER

IS IT WELL WITH YOUR SOUL?

No matter how rough the seas of life may become, when we honor, nurture and trust in Spirit, we not only ride the waves, we also soar

BY MARCIA ANN GILLESPIE

I know that I've been caught up by storms more than a time or two and am still being tested. What's gotten me through, and is still getting me through, is to go deep, get still, be quiet and meditate. I look to fill my cup. I take long walks in the park or sit by the river. Listen to love songs, gospel and classical music. I turn to sacred texts, essays, sermons, prayers, poems from many cultures and different continents that lift and challenge, offer insights and meaning, comfort, sustain and inspire me. And I talk to my spirit, affirming my love of life, humbly asking, *What is my life's purpose?* Time and again that Spirit within has given me strength, renewed me. Sometimes in a whisper, others in a roar, I hear that voice urging me to stand, to keep on stepping and have faith.

In this journey, no matter how carefully you plan, there are always surprises. You never know what's waiting just around the corner. Some of those surprises are welcome cause for celebration: They lift us up, fill us with joy, elicit our laughter,

brighten our lives. But life—like the weather—is not all sunshine. There's grief and heartbreak along the way. Beloveds die, love affairs sour, marriages fray, friendships strain. We worry about loved ones who've gone to war and those whose lives are being degraded and wasted here at home. Folks encounter serious illness, violence, terrible accidents. In the midst of the nation's economic crisis, others struggle to make ends meet; they're losing their jobs, their homes, their life savings. Some have no savings to lose. And far too many of us are daily living the blues, struggling with depression, feeling lost and lonely, trapped on the rough side of the mountain.

Their Blues Ain't Like Our Blues

Even if our lifeboats are sailing smoothly, at some point we all experience sleepless nights and stressful days, periods when we are tested. And no matter how high we may have climbed up Jacob's Ladder, we Black folk are still heavily burdened. Discrimination and racism haven't disappeared. The Obamas are in the White

House, but we don't live in a postracial world. Past oppression and current injustices exact a heavy physical, mental and spiritual toll, piling more stress on our overstressed twenty-first-century lives.

From the moment we stepped into this new millennium, we've been beset by noise and clutter and sensory overload. The airwaves are jammed; everywhere you go, folks are wired for sound, talking on cell phones, tweeting, texting, plugged in to their music, watching video streams, checking the headlines, e-mailing. We are constantly being bombarded and are ever more distracted. There's so much chatter, gossip, mindless and malicious talk, so many images, so much news and information—or what passes for news these days—constantly being piled on us.

Slow Down. We Move Too Fast

And we are all so busy that our days become a blur. Like tourists on one of those whirlwind vacations racing to take photographs but rarely pausing to really look, be awed, or quietly contemplate, we miss being in the moment and what's happening within us.

We know the importance of feeding and caring for our bodies, the value in enriching our minds, but what about our spirit?

take the high road, the voice that can warn us when we're about to take a wrong turn, that provides insight, that calls us to be better, do good, to love ourselves and love one another. It's our internal compass, always pointing us to higher ground and the essence of our being.

There's a Way Outta No Way

There is no one right path or way. But everything I've come to know in the midst of the bad and the good times tells me that honoring, nurturing and listening to the Spirit is how we grow as human beings. It's what keeps us centered and is the ultimate source of power. When all is well with our souls, we can weather life's storms, gain wisdom, and become ever more graceful.

Our spirit has the power to keep us centered and whole, no matter how badly we may be battered. Our spirit urges us to learn and grow from the challenges, to seek to find the light and not be consumed by heat, rage, recriminations or rancor. Our spirit calls us to open our hearts and minds. It reminds us that in this all-too-fleeting journey called life, we are all teachers and all students.

If we are to be of service mentoring and protecting our young, working within our communities to strengthen and sustain

*"We've stumbled, sometimes faltered,
but Spirit is what sustained us, guided us,
and urged us to keep on keeping on."*



When was the last time you declared, like the old church folks would sing out, "It is well with my soul"?

It doesn't matter if you believe in God with a capital G or whether you pray to Allah, Buddha or Jesus or don't pray at all. Everyone has a soul, a spirit. It's that inner voice of wisdom, the voice that calls us to

them, being there for our people requires more than intellect and acquired skills. We need to be on the good foot. Need to get better acquainted with Spirit. Nurture it, increase the light, listen to and for it, honor it. We need to be humble and hopeful, resilient and determined, patient and loving. We need to sweep away the clutter,

turn off the gadgets, mute the noise, and make time to be still, make time for peace, make way for Spirit, and do regular soul checks and serious spiritual housecleaning.


The Weight of It All

We Black folks are all carrying heavy baggage. Trunks filled with memories and stories—some are ours, others have been handed down from family, our parents and their parents' parents. Bags weighted by chains—old iron from slave coffles, iron and steel from southern chain gangs, and all the present-day shackles that have come to

make us doubt and lose faith in our people—need to go. The decayed contents of those nasty bags diminish and corrode our spirit and cause some of us to belittle and blame the many who barely have a toehold on the ladder and to treat with contempt those who have been sucked into the pit. Burn those bags and feel your spirit lift.

We come from people who dared to love, dared to hope, dared to look to the mountaintop in the midst of slavery.

Women and men who kept their dignity in the face of oppression, kept their eyes fixed



“The inner voice of wisdom calls us to take the high road, to be better, do good, to love ourselves and love one another more.”

symbolize a sick right of passage for far, far too many of our young men wasting away in America's jails and prisons. We carry suitcases full of tales about the bad old days, about lynchings, the Klan, Jim Crow and segregation, about our people's long struggle, about hard times and sorrow, and sad and bitter stories about current injustices, discrimination, blatant and subtle racism. Anger and hurt simmer in many of those bags. But others are bursting with joy, wit and wisdom.

If we, too, wish to sing out “It is well with my soul,” we need to take a long, thoughtful look at what's in all those bags we may be carrying, do some repacking, and leave some things behind. What's in some of those bags can lift and renew our spirits and strengthen our resolve to stand and be of service. But those moldering bags filled with all the hateful and damaging racist lies about our intelligence, our competence, our ability to succeed, our morality, our beauty, our humanity—those that undermine our self-confidence, cloud our vision,

on freedom, kept moving forward. We've stumbled, sometimes faltered, but Spirit is what sustained us, guided us, and urged us to keep on keeping on.

Yes, it's important that we remember who and where we come from, be conscious of the current struggle. But it's even more vital that we honor our triumphs and not dwell on our pain, that we take strength from the past, seek to learn and cherish the life-affirming messages that celebrate our resilience and fill our cups with hope. Our spirits thrive on hope; they are strengthened by love.

Who We Really Are

Our true power comes from the Spirit. Anyone who watched or listened to Shirley Sherrod in the midst of the maelstrom swirling around her witnessed Spirit in full bloom. One minute she had been quietly going about her business as director of rural development in Georgia for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the next, a speech she had given before

the NAACP was being cited as an example of blatant racism, her name and face on every cable news show and all over the Internet. Based on a video clip of that speech, she was publicly tarred and feathered as a racist. Her employer, the United States Department of Agriculture, demanded her resignation; the NAACP immediately condemned her. Even before it was revealed that her words had been taken out of context and that the video was a malicious hoax, Sherrod remained calm, never lost her composure as she quietly and firmly refuted the claims. She'd been hurt, 'buked, and scorned and then fired, but she was at peace. Her heart stayed open; she never gave way to bitterness, never lashed out—she just stood her ground.

She accepted the apologies, ignored the mean-spirited remarks, and stayed true to her commitment to “love and service.”

Weeks after that horrific storm had passed, Sherrod reaffirmed her commitment to the NAACP and urged others to do the same. And she concluded by sharing these hard-earned words of wisdom. “Life is a grindstone. But whether it grinds you down or polishes you up depends on you.”

We choose to be diamonds when, like our sister Shirley, we embrace our spirituality, take the high road, and give purpose to our journey by seeking to bring light not heat. I didn't need to hear her say it to know that all is well with her soul. I could see the light shining in her eyes. I'm working to join the chorus. What about you?

Listening In

Ours is a knowing so ancient, so deep. The security and serenity we are seeking is within us

BY SUSAN L. TAYLOR

A sacred place has been prepared for you to commune with God. As a youngster, I thought it was in the little Catholic church, St. Paul's, in my East Harlem neighborhood, where every morning before class we Catholic school-children attended mass. Our palms pressed together, we would bow down and offer up rote prayers, begging for mercy and forgiveness to a faraway God. But as a young single mother, sad and lonely, emerging from a painful marriage, I learned that God is ever so near. I had lost my cosmetics company and taken a job as beauty editor at the new magazine *Essence*, but I wasn't earning enough to cover my expenses. I was frozen

with fear and falling, but a minister's wisdom brought sunlight to a seed in me that continues to blossom. “God is alive in you,” the Reverend Alfred Miller repeated to the congregation that Sunday afternoon I had wandered into a church after seeking relief at a nearby hospital's emergency room. I had thought I was having a heart attack. I was 24, depressed and, in reality, having a severe attack of anxiety. Out of my deepest despair, a new consciousness was born.

Pain is a purposeful teacher. It forces us to focus on what we should be paying attention to moment to moment: that we are heaven-sent, the offspring of God, Allah, Amma, Jehovah, Krishna, Love—a few of the many names people throughout

the world call our Creator. We have the right to live in all the many rooms of the mansion. God is offering us everything we need to fulfill our obligation to life; all is at our fingertips. Every circumstance, every joy and pain is for us to trust listening in. Our inner world is the architect of our external world. The life we are living reflects the life we have established within. As we grow in this spiritual awareness and merge our soul with God, our suffering ceases.

I am soul. I knit my soul to your whole, dear God.

Every crisis is a pathway to merging with our essence, the spirit within. Every calamity is temporary, lasting as long as it takes for us to retreat to the sacred place prepared for us where we can listen. In the quiet, we remember what we know: Worry solves nothing but is a host to illness. To doubt our power is to doubt the power of the Almighty. Still your mind and clarity comes. It's so

THE REAL REVOLUTION BEGINS WITHIN

BY DR. LINDA JAMES MYERS

To secure ourselves, our people, our world, we have to liberate our consciousness from the false ideas that separate us from Spirit, from one another. We must free and empower our hearts, minds and souls. The insight to do this remains with us because our resilience has never died.

The ancients said that all is Ntr, Spirit, God. They taught that *Ntr—neter* transformed into all things in the universe—including you—and that all is within you. Some of the earliest historical records from Khmet, which we now call Egypt, tell us that reality is “What the heart feels, the mind thinks, the tongue speaks.” The wisdom of our ancestors is now supported and reinforced by discoveries in quantum physics and

neuroscience, Eastern philosophies, indigenous wisdom, as well as African Common Sense.

We nonimmigrant Africans in America have been socialized into an alien cultural mind-set. That cultural mind-set is the same one used by the captors of our ancestors to deny their status as fully human. Over the generations we've been brainwashed into accepting the distortions of that suboptimal mind-set and the lies about ourselves. A mind-set void of connection to Spirit is destructive to all of humanity, and particularly damaging to us—African peoples, the lightning rod for humanity. Disconnected from Spirit, we are left without a moral compass and the healthful reality we need to sustain us.

Fortunately, we also know much about our true heritage and who we are called to be. The wise ones taught that the Divine is within each of us and all around us. They revered those who came before them, the divinity of nature and recognized that we, too, are a part of that divine order. With the understanding that we are divine, that God is within us and all around us, we experience connectedness, and our perceptions of things change. We see ourselves in a clear light, we see our intrinsic worth. When you know that you are one with the Creator, that you are a creator and can be a change maker, you become full of courage. You know that you have a role to play in uplifting humanity and that you must play it. Your focus

simple, so mysterious, we miss it.

The morning after my anxiety crisis, I took the minister's advice, sat quietly, and listened. Like a waterfall, wisdom flowed: Give thanks, Girl. Your man and business may be gone, but look at what you have left: your health; your beautiful, healthy baby, Shana; and Mommy. A job, a roof over your head. Call the local modeling school. Ask if they would like the magazine's beauty editor to teach makeup-application classes to their students. The Ophelia DeVore School of

Charm hired me part-time. Then Marcia Ann Gillespie became editor-in-chief of *Essence* and offered me a full-time position as the beauty and fashion editor, and my salary doubled. Not focused on what I had lost but what I had left and God in me, I began stepping into the world each day expecting good things to happen. In the quiet, in the sacred place within, we can feel the Presence, and our faith is strengthened as what is hidden in the physical world is revealed—the connections, synchronicity,

shifts from "Me" to "We" and future generations.

We have to cultivate the ability to distinguish between the real and unreal. When we see clearly, we feel empowered, the illusions dissipate. We see how meaningless it is—the conspicuous consumption that we've been brain-washed into believing we need. We can break free of the color, caste, class, religious, ethnic and sexuality boxes this culture relies on to separate human beings and control situations.

We must stop and be transformed. Learn to embrace Spirit, that God force within you. Sit down and decide what is really true. Be still and know. Rest in the reality of knowing that you are in Supreme Being and Supreme Being is in you. Let your mind think it! Your heart feel it! Your tongue speak it! This will not

only open the door to awareness, but over time it will also allow you to live from your higher consciousness, above conditions.

Each of us is unique.

Each of us has gifts to share and a divine purpose to fulfill. To discover yours, think about what you are good at and what you most enjoy creating and giving. To sustain you as you strive to fulfill your purpose, you must have a plan, do the work, and learn to let go. Get out of the way so Spirit can work through you. Spend time with nature: Look for the insights and affirmations it offers. Learn to interpret nature's signs and symbols. Cultivate stillness. If you feel down or too distracted to be still, play a love song, dance, and think of the love being sung about as the One Love seeding all your relationships and the love of the Divine Infinite for you.

In the wisdom tradition and

deep thought of our African ancestors, faith is known to be the substance of things expected and the evidence of things yet to come. Faith is positive belief; it comes from an enlightened mind-set that knows no separation from Spirit and its source, and has eagerly pursued knowledge of the nature and functioning of Spirit. It judges not by appearances and refrains from putting limits on possibility. We can be sure of achieving the life outcomes we desire if we make faith our cornerstone. Faith that has questioned, reasoned, challenged, studied, tested, and observed. Faith in love, in the Spirit that sustains you. The only reality is Spirit. Embrace your spirit, wrap yourself in love, and remain steadfast in seeking wisdom and shoring up your faith. If we believe that we can intercede on behalf of ourselves and our people and turn the tide, it will be so.

the larger spiritual forces that are always working on our behalf. Sweet surrender is our native state. It's the path that always leads us home.

Pleading to a faraway God affirms fear, disconnection and the belief in a God who withholds "his" grace and parcels it out for praise and flattery. This is the god of man's invention—a jealous and vengeful god I was taught to believe would condemn me to burn in hell. The image of a punishing, blessing-rationing god has been used to instill fear and limit our vision, to justify our enslavement, even demean women and disempower our people.

Make inner listening in the quiet your habit, not something you do on weekends or just when things fall apart. In the stillness, the spiritual doorways open and you learn what we were sent here to prove: The grace of God will never fail you. It

separation." There's nowhere to go and nothing to do to merge with God. Praying to God isn't about pleading or an insistence: "Listen, Holy Spirit, I am speaking." It is an invocation: "Speak, Holy Spirit, I am listening." Retreat to the stillness within, and listen with an open heart.

Before you get out of bed to greet the day, take a moment to greet the divinity within you. Lie still, close your eyes, smile and send to the Giver of Life your own loving thoughts. These are mine: *Good morning, dear God. I love you so much and I'm so grateful for my beautiful life. I will use it wisely to serve you and the highest good this beautiful day.* Fill your heart with gratitude, and listen to your slow, steady breath—always with a paper and pen near so you can capture the wisdom. In the quiet, answers to what seemed like monumental challenges just flow—and if not instantly, always at the divine-right time.

"Sweep away the clutter, turn off the gadgets, mute the noise, and make time for peace."

will knock you around at times, slap you upside your head to awaken you to your innate wisdom and ability and the work you're to do in service to the world. But forsake you? Never!

Seeing God outside yourself is like searching frantically for your glasses when they're sitting on your face. Our eyes are not the problem; it's our inner vision that is clouded. You are life's greatest miracle, a temple of the living God. Human and divine, we are earth angels sent here to love and do God's work. "You and God is one," my dear friend Olga Butterworth would say. During his Sunday sermons at Unity, her husband, my beloved teacher Eric, would often put it this way: "Like water is to a wave, you are to God. There can be no

When you listen in, the enemies of doubt and fear are replaced with clarity and courage. It's not that you'll be forever free of losses and sorrows. But you'll no longer be overwhelmed by them. Trusting the Master's plan you don't sacrifice your serenity. In the quiet, we become aware of what God is calling us to do in what is always a unique and special season of our life—and we gain the faith and courage to move forward.

Team Leaders:

Rev. Iyanla Vanzant, Susan L. Taylor

Team:

Rev. Andriette Earl, Marcia Ann Gillespie, Linda James Myers, Ph.D., Dr. Therman Evans, Bishop Dr. Barbara Lewis King, Dr. Kofi Kondwani

PEACE, BE STILL: THE MIRACLE OF MEDITATION

BY DR. KOFI KONDWANI

Meditation is as old as humanity. The word *meditation* means to empty the mind of thoughts or to concentrate the mind on a single thing. Meditation may be common to Eastern traditions, but the practice of being still is completely African. Don't think of meditation as some exotic activity. Like breathing, it is a natural process of turning within and stilling the mind of idle chatter and the body of movement to rediscover who you are. The demands and responsibilities of living distract us from our natural state of being. Without taking time to relax and restore, we become weary and agitated and are overcome by stress. Meditation cures. It releases tension, reduces stress, and lowers blood pressure. Practiced regularly, meditation strengthens our immune system and concentration and encourages a more positive outlook on life. The more regularly you meditate, the easier it becomes. When life gets tough and you're tempted to push harder and speed up to meet its demands, resist the urge. The way to good health and maximum productivity and to

ensure peace and joy is to make time each day to become still within.

Consciously Resting Meditation (CRM) is a process of allowing our minds to settle down to fewer and fewer thoughts so that eventually all thoughts are lost to our awareness—all while our mind remains conscious and our body lets go of tension. All we need do is commit to resting from 10 to 20 minutes twice daily. It's best to meditate as soon as you awaken and then again at the end of your day.

TO PRACTICE CRM:

- 1. Find a quiet, relaxing space.** No TV, telephone, no buzzing or beeping PDAs or noisy appliances. Turn off the music. Sound is no barrier to meditation, however, the quieter your surroundings, the deeper your experiences will be.
- 2. Sit comfortably,** close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Breathe in through your nose as you extend your abdomen. Breathe out through your mouth and empty your abdomen of air.
- 3. Focus your breath,** and think gently the sound

shring. Don't concern yourself about its pronunciation during the practice. Shring (sha-ring) is an ancient sound, known to have the effect of settling the mind and bringing it back to its source. The sound itself has no meaning. It's the vibration that is powerful. Just think the sound and let it be in you as it comes. Listen to it, follow it, but make no judgments about it. Just stay with it as it quiets and focuses your mind. If images intrude on your thoughts, replace them with the vision of a place that calms you.

4. Once you decide to end your meditation, stop thinking the sound in your mind, but don't open your eyes for two to three minutes. This allows the mind to slowly increase its thinking activity but not so abruptly as to be uncomfortable.

Over time, you will train your mind to remain peaceful and calm no matter what is happening around you. Through the practice of meditation you build a spiritual sanctuary within yourself. As you make it your daily habit, the effect on your life, your relationships and achievements will be profound.

WHAT WORKS**THE GOD
IN ME****Seven Sacred Steps to
Healing Spiritually**

BY REV. IYANLA VANZANT

**1. FIND PEACE IN THE PRESENT;
RELEASE PAIN TO THE PAST**

Each of us has a story, a story of how we have come to be who we are and a story to explain why we may not be who we think we should be. Our stories are created as a result of and in response to our experiences. Contributing to those experiences are the stories others have told us about ourselves and themselves; stories that we have made up to support, excuse or deny the stories we have been told, and the stories we embrace to explain the pieces and parts of the stories we do not understand or cannot accept. Some stories make us stronger. Others deplete our mental, emotional and spiritual energy. People of color have a collective story of pride turned to sorrow, freedom turned to enslavement, honor and courage turned to devastation and desperation.

Today we stand as capable authors with the inherent right to tell empowering old stories and to write new, enlightening ones. Many of us don't feel fully sustained or supported by our stories, and the reasons are rooted in our history. We've survived more than 400 years of oppression. This process shifted our people's belief system from one in which the Divine Being was the essence of all things, including themselves, to one in which the human, physical self was separate from Spirit and under the control of the captors. The story of that history of oppression is that we have no means of escape from the painful past in our present experience. That viewpoint is distorted by an outmoded lens designed to manipulate how we think, what we think, and how those thoughts create the stories we tell.

We are shaking off the chains of pain and shame and reclaiming our spiritual birthright. We can overcome the past and live in the present as spiritually grounded and guided human beings. We can begin to tell a story that holds oneself, one's life and all life as sacred. Owning our spiritual identity offers us power, wisdom, wealth and affirmation. African culture employed principles of truth, order, love, faith as the foundation of actions. This communal strength was the bond that sustained our ancestors, and it can sustain us today. When we act in contradiction to those principles, our lives become chaotic, disorderly and stagnant. In our pain and confusion stemming from our history in this country, we may lay blame and seek solutions outside of ourselves in drugs, sex, work, shopping or other pursuits. The key to spiritual wholeness is to begin within. Begin with Spirit, and this is the story we must begin to write and tell.

**2. UNDERSTAND WHAT IT
MEANS TO BE SPIRITUAL**

Spirit is the life force of every living element. It is the energy of the Creator coming forth in many different forms. Spirituality is not religion. It doesn't matter to which faith community you belong or which philosophy you follow. Religion offers a way, rules and regulations used to approach the concept of God. Spirituality, on the other hand, means that you recognize, accept and are aligned in your individual connection to the Creator and use that connection as your guiding force. Spirituality leads to peace, fulfillment and happiness. It enables you to overcome limitations of the physical mind and body by putting you in touch with the true source of power. Your soul represents how the presence of God manifests in a unique way, in a particular form, for a specific purpose.

3. LET YOUR SOUL BE YOUR GUIDE

L-i-f-e is "Learning Inspired for Evolution." It is a spiritual process by which we are refined and prepared to be of greater service to others. Our soul guides us to the experiences we need to learn. Our life lessons purify us spiritually, as long

as we are aligned with life's seasons, with cause and effect, with balance and harmony, righteousness and order. These principles and laws represent the nature and essence of God. However, the mind, ego and will are not in alignment with these spiritual laws. They are concerned with the way things "appear" to be, not what our experiences teach us on a spiritual level. Ego out of sync with Spirit leads to destructive behavior—living for physical pleasures and pursuits instead of for growth. Habitual thought patterns in response to the physical experience and without regard to spiritual meaning are at the root of all our "issues." Invite the Spirit into your daily living. We need to think less and embrace l-i-f-e more!

4. LET GO AND LET GOD

Spirit provides everything we need to have an authentic, fulfilling connection to God. Spirituality heals the desire to control and dominate because it fosters greater understanding of our life's purpose. Consequently, your desire to control events, circumstances and people is replaced by the knowledge that all we need and want will be provided for us in the perfect time, in the perfect way, as we move through our learning process.

5. REJECT DOUBT AND FEAR

We say God is everywhere, yet we exclude God from so much of who we are and what we do.

wholeness. There is a place of default that affirms the worst possibilities and things that are not true. We make up outcomes that are not there. We affirm them powerfully and use our prayer in reverse to create what we do not desire to experience. Feed your mind the truth about yourself and God—that everything God made works and works perfectly and was made to work through and in connection to everything else God made. A perfect creation following a perfect process leads to a perfect outcome.

6. MAKE DAILY DEPOSITS INTO YOUR SPIRITUAL "BANK"

Repetition is how you retrain the mind. Feed it the truth about yourself and God. Feed it the principles of truth, and then demonstrate your faith by living and practicing those principles throughout the day. The more deposits we make into the spiritual account, the more strength and resources we have to shore us up. Devote the time, energy and attention needed to deepen God's expression through you. Meditate and pray, and practice how to be a more loving, grateful, forgiving, compassionate person.

7. READY YOURSELF FOR REVOLUTION

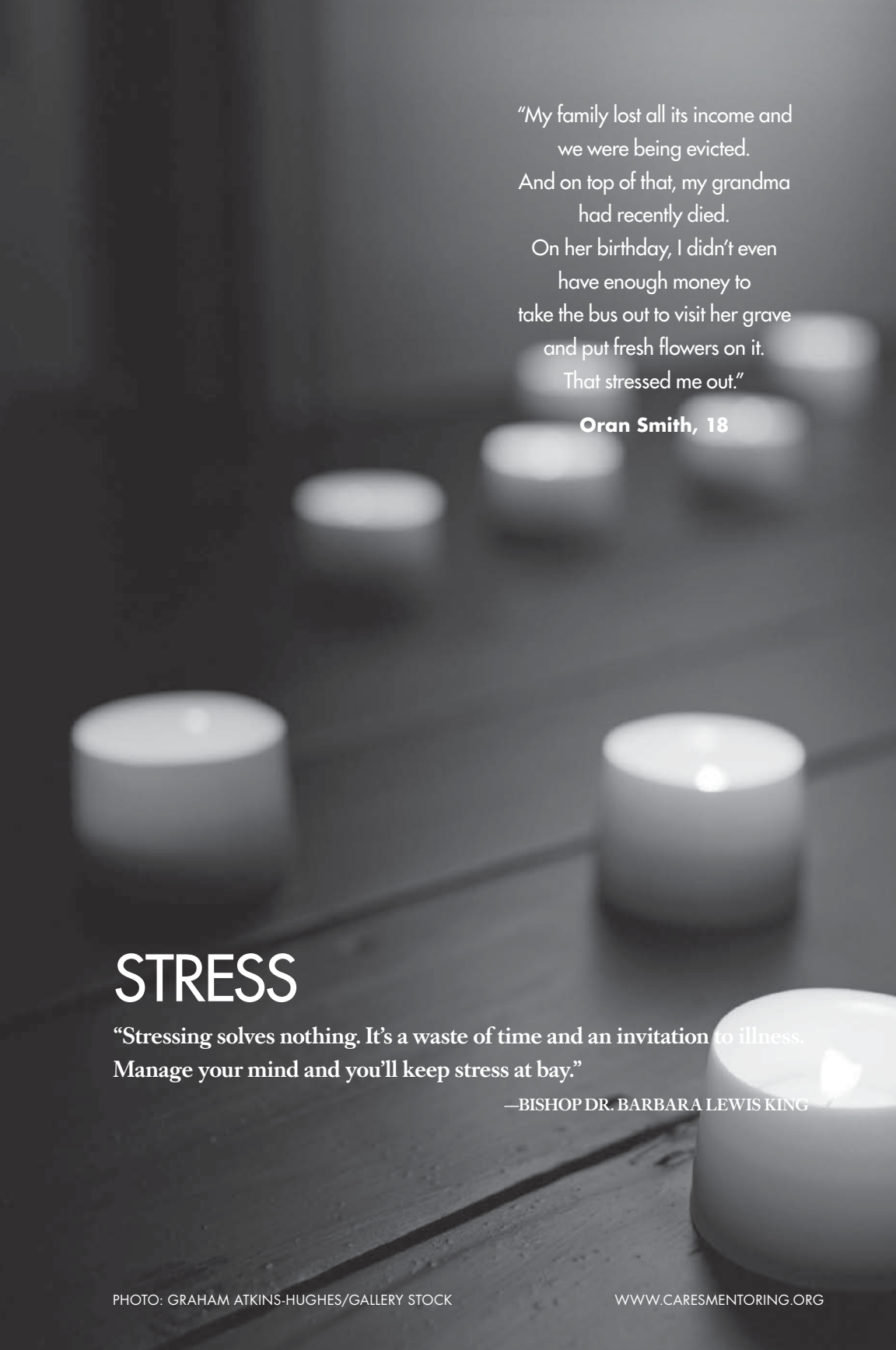
As we chase material things and get caught up in the outer world, we are moving away from our power and greatness. But when we are no longer caught up in our emotions and senses, we become

"Today we stand as capable authors with the inherent right to tell empowering old stories and to write new, enlightening ones."



When we forget we are children of God, we lose our sense of wholeness. Wholeness is a matter of conscious choice and where we choose to put our attention—on God or on the problem. Relying on physical "evidence" rather than spiritual truth leads us to doubt and fear and destroys our

a danger to society's status quo. When we as a people tap into our God-given power, when we direct our vision inward, recognize who we are and the power and authority we have over our destiny, we will not only change our circumstances, we will change the world.



“My family lost all its income and we were being evicted. And on top of that, my grandma had recently died. On her birthday, I didn’t even have enough money to take the bus out to visit her grave and put fresh flowers on it. That stressed me out.”

Oran Smith, 18

STRESS

“Stressing solves nothing. It’s a waste of time and an invitation to illness. Manage your mind and you’ll keep stress at bay.”

—BISHOP DR. BARBARA LEWIS KING

PATH TO SERENITY

We should all live our lives like they're golden

BY KHEPHRA BURNS

My wife worries when she sees me racing like a runaway slave, as if trying to stay a step ahead of the hounds of my deadlines snapping at my heels. The deadlines are real, but I also know that my anxiety about meeting or missing them is all my own making, and that running from the phone to the computer won't get me where I need to be any sooner. But we all know that knowing right doesn't always mean doing right, even for ourselves. They say you should teach what you most need to learn. Somehow, making a statement makes it your own, makes you the owner of it, makes you have to try to practice what you preach. That was surely the idea behind the suggestion from my wife (Susan L. Taylor) that I write the intro to this section on stress: It would give me an opportunity to speak to our Braintrust members, who are experts on the subject, and I could remind myself of what I already know while passing some science on to others. Just what I needed—another deadline. But rather than stress about it, let me stop, take a breath, and think before I begin.

What's Killing Us?

Today we have more to work with than in the past. In some ways we're the most

well-equipped Black people ever to walk the earth. We've been several million years in the making. Endowed with gifts by those who came before us, legions of us stand poised to make the next leap forward—for our people, our families and ourselves. But we can only go just so far without confronting one of the most insidious killers our community has come up against: debilitating stress. It moves through the Black community in myriad ways, laying waste to lives and dreams. Managing chronic stress is our challenge.

African Americans have the highest mortality rates in the country, not from drug overdoses or drive-bys, but from chronic diseases. Death in the Black community seems to feed on death and grows more voracious with every life consumed. The violence not only begets more violence, but it also begets the stress that is killing us secondhand when violence isn't the direct cause of death.

The sorrow and grief of bereavement increase our susceptibility to disease. And given the constant grieving, both personal and communal, for the thousands of lives lost to Black-on-Black violence, there should be little wonder at the disproportionate incidence of so many stress-related illnesses among us. The statistics, the nightly news assaults on our

humanity and sense of security with each report of another life lost, and the nagging suspicion that the root causes of such violence are intentionally left unaddressed, all weigh heavily on us as anger, fear and frustration. We're sick and dying of being sick and dying.

Statistically, Black youths in Harlem, in Detroit, on the South Side of Chicago, in Compton and South Central L.A. today are less likely to reach age 65 than people in Bangladesh. We're dying younger of diseases that commonly afflict people in old age, as if the aging process is being accelerated by all the chronic stresses that come with just living while Black in America. A study cited in *The Heartmath Solution* by Doc Childre and Howard

entirely escape. This is the normal state of affairs for Black people in America, but it doesn't have to be this way. My first trip to Ghana, West Africa, was a revelation. Like so many brothers and sisters who have traveled outside of America, especially to a Black nation, I relaxed, as if for the first time, releasing tension I had unwittingly carried around my whole life.

Racism is the American equivalent of a national autoimmune disease. It's a crippling social and economic arthritis. It's America's vitiligo, a chronic attack on the increasingly melanin-rich complexion of the country in an attempt to depigment the population—consciously on the part of militant White supremacists, but more effectively by legislation-resistant

“Racism is one of the more significant causes of chronic stress among African Americans.”

Martin found that unmanaged reactions to stress were more predictive of death from cancer and heart disease than from smoking cigarettes.

It's a Black Thing, Baby

High on the list of issues that cause chronic stress among African Americans is racism. It seeps into the everyday of our lives like smog, like pollutants in the air that make it hard to breathe. It's so commonplace that we don't always see it, but we feel it. We're emotionally, psychically and physically sick with its debilitating effects: Many of us must arm ourselves emotionally just to go out shopping or dining, before getting in an elevator, or going to work because of the innumerable indignities, assumptions and assaults that African Americans, regardless of education or class, can't

strains of institutionalized racism and racist media. In these forms it operates unconsciously. It needs no individual to commit its crimes. There's often no one who can be singled out for blame or held accountable. Institutionalized racism and its media partners merely maintain the momentum of economic advantage for one race of people to the disadvantage of all others in a descending hierarchy of disadvantage, with Black people sitting at the very bottom.

Our responses to racism have not always been coherent. But then, as Dr. Na'im Akbar has said repeatedly, racism and the self-loathing it has engendered have made us all crazy.

Time Out

Another source of stress is time, or the clash between our traditional concept of

time and the modern world's concept of time as money. The latter view implies that you will be left behind if you don't run to keep up. So we consciously cultivate lifestyles we think will help us get ahead in a fast-paced world. But living like this puts us out of sync with our heart and nature. We boast of our ability to multitask. But research shows that multiple shifts in concepts, intention and focus within an hour or day create more anxiety than any other stressor. Similarly, a cluttered environment is a reflection of a disorganized mind and a major cause of mental stress.

In cultures where a less frenetic attitude toward time holds sway, what we call "CP time" produces significantly reduced rates of stress-related illnesses. In the Caribbean, when asked for a definite time of arrival, our sisters and brothers might say, "Soon come," meaning whatever time they arrive is when you can expect them. No problem. No stress.

Studies of blue zones—places where an

of the village elders asked him. "To their workplaces," Somé explained. "Why do they run to something that is not running away from them?" the elder asked.

The question for us is how do we reconcile healthier traditional attitudes about time management with a contemporary culture in which being out of step has economic consequences and other attendant stresses?

Discomfort Food

What we know is that constant exposure to stress hormones weakens the immune system. It damages the brain and other organs. It also signals the body to accumulate fat around the waistline. These particular fat cells—abdominal fat cells—temporarily inhibit the brain from producing the feelings of anxiety we experience when we're stressed. And so we have a situation in which the pressures of being poor and Black in America—of being profiled, denied, denigrated and demonized—create a



"Researchers found that Black people who accepted unfair treatment had higher blood pressure than those who challenged it and took control."

extraordinarily high percentage of the people live past age 90—have found that typically the people there like to party; they go to bed late, sleep late, and take daily naps. They're also relentlessly optimistic and never worry about time. Work gets done when it gets done.

Malidoma Somé, a native of the Dagara people of West Africa and the author of *Of Water and the Spirit and Ritual: Power, Healing and Community*, writes that the notion of speed in American culture is baffling to traditional people. "Where do these people run to every morning?" one

biological urge to overeat in an effort to de-stress. Add to that the abundance, convenience and affordability of fast food, junk food and comfort food in our communities, and we have a confluence of conditions that have made us, as a group, the most overweight people in America.

These same abdominal fat cells are the primary cause of our disproportionately high incidence of high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease and other life-threatening illnesses. So for many African Americans,

stress-related failing health begins with chronic, unmanaged environmental pressures, such as racism, which lead to unconscious, self-destructive responses like overeating, unhealthy diets and toxic lifestyles, which in turn create

given discriminatory hiring practices, and a wage that could support a family. What seems to have been forgotten is that in the early 1900's—a truly challenging time for our people—90 percent of Black children were born into two-parent households. As

“Constant exposure to stress impairs the immune system and the brain, and signals the body to accumulate fat.”

physical distress, further weakening the immune system and leading to premature death. Those deaths add the emotional stress of the loss of loved ones to all the other stressors, weakening the entire community, emotionally, physically, economically and in myriad other ways.

The dissolution of community is yet another source of stress. And the breakdown of community begins with the destruction of the family. The evolution of culture began with sharing food around a fire. But in our culture today much of the communal aspect of sharing food has been lost. Where meals were once occasions to gather daily around a common table; where traditions, customs and the wisdom of the elders were passed from one generation to the next; where pride was instilled in family, history and community; families that once gathered together around a common table have been dispersed to the fast-food outlets. The elders and family griots have been replaced by reality TV. The male griots—the fathers—were removed from the table by AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children), which required that Black men be absent from the home if the family wanted to be eligible for the supplemental financial aid it needed to make up the difference between what Black men could earn,

recent as the late 1940's and 1950's, before AFDC, the majority of African Americans continued to be reared in two-parent households. But AFDC accomplished what even slavery could not.

Black and Blue

The first thing Black people did after Emancipation was walk for as many as a hundred miles to search for their separated family members. The late anthropologist Marvin Harris shows that stable two-parent Black families were the rule in both rural and urban communities after the Civil War. It was only after the great wave of European immigration when urban Black males were forced out of jobs by racist hiring practices, Harris's research shows, that the pattern of mother-centered households began to develop. The number of families headed by Black single women soared 257 percent in the 1970's, while the number of out-of-wedlock births among us rose by 50 percent. And the levels of chronic stress in the Black community rose proportionately.

Stress hormones tell the body to get ready for an emergency—for fight or flight. But a constant flood of these hormones weakens our body's defenses against disease. And many of us are living in a constant state of emergency.

We're frustrated, we're anxious, we're angry, and we're stressed out. Feeling like we don't have control of our lives, our environment or our own destiny is stressful. Researchers at Harvard have found that Black people who said they accepted unfair treatment as a fact of life had higher blood pressure than those who said something or did something about it. But this can be risky as well. Black men particularly have a long history of suffering swift and brutal physical reprisals for any pushback or show of resistance. For generations the choice came down to a slow death or a quick lynching. Black people today often have to make similar if less literal choices when confronted by law enforcement. And we frequently have to decide between risking our survival in corporate America or swallowing an insult to hang on to our jobs another day while having it eat us up inside.

A 20-year study of more than 1,700 older men conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health found that worry about social conditions, health and personal finances significantly increased the risk of coronary heart disease. But

in high levels during the body's "fight or flight" response to stress. The presence of an immediate and significant threat or danger, whether real or imagined, triggers the release of cortisol and adrenalin, instantly readying us to fight for our lives or flee as fast as we can. Cortisol prepares us primarily by speeding up the heart rate, diverting blood flow to major muscle groups, and giving the body a quick burst of energy and strength. It also heightens memory functions, enabling us to recall information that could aid in our survival. Cortisol strengthens the immune system, although only briefly, and lowers our sensitivity to pain. It helps regulate blood pressure, temperature, glucose and other blood levels.

When the threat ends, the body's relaxation response kicks in so that it can return to normal. But too often in contemporary society the threats and attacks never end. The onslaught of racism is relentless. Our responsibilities are numerous. The deadlines keep coming, and there never seems to be enough time to do all that we have to do. The chronic stress this never-ending threat

| *"We're sick and dying of being sick and dying."*

an international study of 2,829 people between the ages of 55 and 85 found that individuals who reported the highest levels of personal mastery—feelings of control over life events—had nearly 60 percent lower risk of death compared with those who felt relatively helpless in the face of life's challenges.

Orange Alert

One stress hormone in particular—cortisol—is produced in the adrenal glands

produces in us doesn't allow the body to return to normal functioning. As a result, African Americans experience higher and more prolonged levels of cortisol in the bloodstream, which have been shown to have a range of negative effects, including impaired cognitive performance, suppressed thyroid function, blood sugar imbalances such as hyperglycemia, decreased bone density, decreases in muscle tissue, higher blood pressure, lowered immunity and inflammatory

responses in the body, slower healing of wounds and, as mentioned previously, increased abdominal fat.

With the ongoing racist, virulent and often violent cultural backlash to Black progress, the threat level to African Americans today has hit orange. Racists openly advocate violence against Black people. Sadly, our response has been to seek refuge in sugar, fat, fast food and all the familiar toxins that have been dumped into our communities and are slowly killing us. For instance, a study published in the *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism* shows a correlation between significantly higher levels of stress-related cortisol in Black women and the presence of higher levels of another hormone, ghrelin, which triggers feelings of hunger and is thought

cortisol when it should, says Lia Fernald, assistant professor of community health and human development at the University of California, Berkeley, and lead author of the study.

Free Your Mind

To keep cortisol levels healthy and under control, the body's relaxation response should be activated with various stress-management techniques, including regular exercise, meditation, yoga, tai chi and deep breathing exercises. Yet many factors in a complex cultural web work against African Americans' managing elevated levels of cortisol and chronic race-related stress. For example, one survey found that nearly one third of women of African descent exercise less frequently because of their concerns

“It’s not the events in our lives, but how we perceive them that causes stress.”

to be related to a greater incidence of obesity in Black women. In that study, Kimberly Brownley, Ph.D., University of North Carolina, writes, “These findings suggest subnormal [post meal] ghrelin expression [or faster ghrelin rebound] in Black women—especially the obese—that might play a role in their increased prevalence of obesity and cardiovascular disorders.”

Researchers have also found “blunted” cortisol levels in some African American children, which they think may be an adaptive response to chronic stress. The hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal system, which produces cortisol, simply shuts down so that the body doesn't produce

about managing their hair. The survey, presented at an international symposium sponsored by L'Oréal Institute for Ethnic Hair and Skin Research, revealed that sweating out their hairstyles and the time it took to wash, dry and style their hair were the top two reasons women of African descent gave for not exercising regularly. This concern about hair is directly related to image, which in turn is related to the historic denigration of naturally kinky hair by White image makers, cartoonists and arbiters of Western standards of beauty. It offers yet another example of the numerous pressures Black people live with every day in America.

How We Begin to Heal

BY KHEPHRA BURNS

So where do we begin?

Ultimately, healing is going to require a holistic approach that takes into consideration remedies to the historic, chronic social conditions that continue to make us all sick. A multitude of disciplines, practices, attitudes and activities must be employed to achieve health, wholeness and peace, and diminish the stress in our lives. But we can begin simply, by holding on to hope and a positive mental attitude—two virtues that have sustained our people. Both are vital to our physical, mental and emotional health. Despair and nihilism—whether given voice in popular media, in music and music videos or implied in our unconscious autogenocide—are not viable options.

We can smile or even laugh.

Research in neurophysiology shows that when we smile, or see others smile, our mood is brightened and we let go of stress. When we frown or scowl, or see others do so, our attitude turns negative, defensive and guarded, and we become tense. Could it be that the emulation of scowling images of entertainment-industry “gangstas” on CD covers and in music videos has spawned a pandemic of negativity and verbal and physical violence that has spread virally throughout the Black community?

We can walk.

The simple repetitive motion of putting one foot in front of the other synchronizes with the heart and restores rhythm to the mind and body. Walking can be the physical mantra of a meditation that repairs our fractured lives. It may be no coincidence that poetry is spoken of in terms of feet and meter. Writers and poets have long extolled the virtues of walking for its effect in clearing the mind and reconnecting us to the heart, the muse and inspiration. Walking is an externalization of hope and faith, the will to live and a determination to keep on keeping on.

We can change our perceptions.

It’s not the events in our lives; it’s how we perceive and respond to them that cause us stress. We can allow ourselves to be angry, or we can master our emotions. Anger turns to bitterness, and bitterness destroys the host. “Catastrophizing” events—making every minor crisis a catastrophe—and obsessing about negative experiences only causes us to relive, re-create and reinforce those experiences inside us. Complaining causes dissonance and incoherence and drains our strength. On the other hand, cultivating gratitude and appreciation for life helps us live longer, happier, healthier.

We can—and we must—remember that our personal health and wholeness are inextricably linked to the healing of our people and the rebuilding of our community. In nature there is no such thing as a solitary bee or ant. Separated from the hive or the anthill, these insects cease to have meaning, lose their connection to life and die. Divorced from community, we may not die immediately, but something inside does. And when the soul dies, the body soon follows.

The ultimate embrace of community is synonymous with the oneness of God.

The two cannot be separated; they are one and the same. “I am because we are, and we are because I am,” the traditional axiom goes. The memory of that oneness, down to the cellular level of our very being, is the source of our impulse and longing to gather in groups—in churches and mosques and sports arenas, in community and communion. It’s the *sangha* of Buddhism, the *satsang* of Hinduism, the *hajj* of Islam and the Body of Christ of Christianity. It’s the community of the village and the ancestors that goes under numerous names throughout Africa. By being one with our community we can be reassured, and reassure others, that we are not alone, that others have similarly endured and that we have a community of support.

The miracle of being human and conscious is that we have the unique ability to pause, take a breath, and reflect before we act. We have the ability to choose the life that we would have for ourselves. We can choose health and well-being.

Team Leader:
Khephra Burns

Team:
Dr. Carl C. Bell, Dr. Kofi Kondwani, Dr. Therman Evans, Terrie M. Williams, Rev. Iyanla Vanzant

WHAT WORKS

RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF TRAUMA

It doesn't have to break you to
make you stronger

BY KHEPHRA BURNS

NOT ALL STRESS IS BAD, and some, such as the mild physical stress we subject our body to when we exercise, can be quite beneficial. The noted psychiatrist Dr. Carl C. Bell distinguishes stress from distress and trauma, and suggests ways to effectively cope with each.

STRESS

Occurs when we lose our balance—emotionally or physically—and the body strives to regain it. When we exercise, for example, we stress the body by using up more of the oxygen stored in our muscles than we do when we’re at rest. The body strives to regain its balance by having the

lungs increase their rate of respiration to catch up, and the muscles grow larger to retain more oxygen for future needs.

DISTRESS

Occurs when we lose our physiological or psychological balance, and the body must tax itself beyond its usual limits, but not beyond its capacity, to regain its balance.

TRAUMATIC STRESS

Occurs when we lose our physiological or psychological balance to such an extent that regaining it is beyond the capacity of the mind and body. We can experience traumatic stress with the death of a loved one, which can produce an anxiety and depression so great that we cannot resolve our grief.

With symptoms of **post-traumatic stress disorder** (PTSD), a traumatic event—like having served in a war zone or being raped—is persistently reexperienced, decreasing our capacity to function.

Bell notes that, in general, there are several measures we can take to help us cope with stress and distress.

■ **Cultivate an attitude of awareness** that stressful, distressing and even traumatic experiences do occur and can happen to any of us. This will help minimize the “Why me?” shock should something bad happen.

■ **Practice coping techniques regularly.** Relaxation breathing is a good strategy for remaining calm in the midst of calamity. But if you have not practiced relaxation breathing, it won't be there for you when you need it most.

When a calamity occurs, many of us panic. Instead of reacting, stop, take a breath, think about what might be the best way to respond, and then act. Some emergencies are real and require us to react as quickly and effectively as we know how. But real emergencies are rare. When you have one, take a break and a breath. If we have prepared ourselves by calmly meeting common crises with minimal hysteria, we will have a head start on the real thing when it comes along.

■ **Once we have stopped, paused and taken a break from reacting, we can deal with the crisis in one of two ways.**

We can change the outside—that is, change the cause of the stress or distress. Or we can change the inside—our emotional and philosophical reaction to the situation. If the job is distressing, we can change the job or change the way we feel about it. If your mother dies, you can't do anything to change the fact, so you will have to change inside, perhaps by seeking a spiritual approach to the loss of your mother. We can also minimize our sense of “traumatic helplessness” by engaging in “learned helpfulness.” If your mother died of breast cancer, you can devote yourself to breast cancer awareness and raise money to find a cure, which can help change both the inside and outside.

■ **In attempting to cope with traumatic stress,** safety is a priority. Bell notes that medication may be called for to reduce symptoms, but we should educate ourselves about traumatic stress, how it manifests and how best to cope with or treat it. A few strategies he lists include being able to tell the story in a

safe, empathic interpersonal environment; taking a holistic approach to health and addressing issues of diet, exercise, humor and spirituality; making sure that social networks, such as family and support groups, are in place; and turning negatives into positives

HOW TO REDUCE STRESS AND CREATE CALM

■ **Practice Constantly Resting Meditation (CRM).** This is a simple, natural mental technique that is easy to learn and easy to practice, either alone or in a group. Constantly Resting Meditation is the process of allowing the mind to do less and less. As the mind settles down, so does the body. When your heart rate and breathing settle, the body will naturally begin to rejuvenate and purify itself.

■ **Sit comfortably and quietly with eyes closed.** Centering the mind in the right mental sound to quiet and calm it is the key. Sounds can have positive or negative effects on both the mind and body. Some sounds elicit a positive, soothing, quieting response from the mind and body. Others jar, irritate and disrupt. The right sound used in the right way can cut through the noise of mental chatter that goes on in all of us.

■ **Constantly Resting Meditation uses sounds that have been part of meditation practices for thousands of years.** In CRM, the sound attracts our awareness and attention away from other thoughts. Our awareness and the sound settle into the deeper levels of the mind. The mind gradually gets quiet and still. The sound has a tendency to disappear, while the mind remains conscious, awake and aware of deeper levels of itself. When the awareness settles down, so does the body, and it's in these quiet moments that the healing takes place.

■ **Use the right sound correctly.** Straining or forcing the mind to focus on the sound is incorrect and will not yield the expected

benefits of meditation. Fixing the sound as a word or phrase is also not recommended. The sounds used in meditation are meaningless by design; they are meant to draw the mind away from thoughts. Sounds are vibrations that change by getting longer or shorter, louder or softer, clearer or fainter, quieter and quieter. This property of sound is useful in quieting an active mind. It's okay for the sound to change; just take it as it comes.

ACTION STEPS:

The best way to learn CRM is from a qualified instructor. The second best way is to play a CD containing a simple, guided meditation. Or you can follow the instructions below, either alone or in a group:

- 1. Reduce the noise around you as much as possible.** Turn off all sources of sound that you can control, such as televisions, radios, telephones, CD and MP3 players, computers and nagging PDAs.
- 2. Sit comfortably in a chair, close your eyes, and be still for at least a minute.**
- 3. Softly and easily, repeat the sound shirring (sha ring).** Shirring is not a word; it's a soothing vibration. Move from whispering it to silently thinking it. Continue to repeat in your mind.
- 4. Don't look for anything to happen.** Don't strain or concentrate on the sound. Just think the sound and take it as it comes.
- 5. When you are ready to end the meditation, stop thinking the sound but don't open your eyes for two to three minutes.** During this period, you may think anything but the sound you used for the meditation. After two to three minutes, or when you feel your meditation is complete, slowly open your eyes. If you feel you need more time to come out of the meditation, take it.

REACH FOR INNER CALM

When our bodies are constantly stressed and tense, we're setting ourselves up for distress and disease. It is crucial to our healing and continued good health that we achieve and maintain an internal calm. Even in our fast-forward world,

achieving inner peace and calm is possible. It requires developing ways to strengthen every aspect of our being—body, mind, spirit and behavior. When these key aspects of our lives are working in concert, the way is opened to managing stress and achieving the harmonious life we all are longing for.

ACTION STEPS:

- **Nourish Your Spirit.** Each day make conscious choices to engage in activities that are fulfilling and add to your health and happiness. Look for opportunities to be kind and charitable—even to people who are difficult.
- **Work in the community** with others who are giving back and helping those who are less fortunate. Make service to our community your ministry.
- **Set aside time** every day for undisturbed stillness and quiet. Just sitting in silence for ten minutes each day will change your life and bring peace and calm to your days.
- **Read** inspiring books; practice meditation.
- **Carry** in your wallet a few affirmations that speak to strengthening your faith and finding inner peace ("I am peace," "I am power" or "God's got my back," for example). Read them; turn to their wisdom and calming effect when you feel the tension rising.

MIND

- **Write down** the things that cause you stress, how you react to them, and what you know you must do to find relief.
- **Laugh often!** Laugh at yourself. A healthy sense of humor is healing and creates happiness. It can help to keep communication open on difficult issues. Laughter strengthens your body's immune system.
- **Put yourself** on your schedule. No matter how busy you are, downtime is necessary and nourishing. Make time for family, friends, fun and relaxation—often.

ACTION STEPS:

Change the situation that's causing your stress: You can learn to say no. Avoid difficult people.

Stop procrastinating. Learn to compromise.

■ **Change your reaction to the situation.** Hidden in all the drama, no matter how painful or shameful it may be, there is always a lesson in living. Find it, focus on it—for your growth and development. There will always be things we can't control. Rather than rigidly resist and possibly snap, bend like a willow in the wind and bounce back. See what the ill wind has been sent to teach you.

■ **Practice forgiveness** or be forever held hostage to hurts of the past. Forgiveness is a process that takes time and demands courage. We may need the help of a minister or therapist to honor our heart's capacity to change and grow and trust again. Forgive yourself for your missteps; guilt is a heavy burden to carry. Ask for forgiveness from those you have hurt and offer it to those who have hurt you. This will open wide a space in your life for healing, renewal and joy.

■ **Cultivate the good** within and around you. There's no need to grab, hoard or cling to things or insist that everything go our way. Dr. Therman E. Evans, a master teacher, physician, minister and member of the A New Way Forward Braintrust, offers these nourishing truths from his phenomenal book *From Purpose to Promise Driven Life*:

I am committed to God.

I am connected to people.

I am compassionate toward all.

I am confident in thoughts and actions.

I am conscientious in conduct.

I am complimentary all the time.

BODY

■ **Adopt a healthy lifestyle that includes the following:**

1. Regular aerobic exercise for 20 to 40 minutes, at least three or four days a week.

2. A healthy diet that emphasizes fruits, vegetables and plenty of water. Avoid caffeine, sugar, cigarettes, drugs and heavy use of alcohol.

3. Plenty of sleep, at least 7 to 8 hours a night.

■ Reshape Your Internal Life and External Environment.

None of us is exempt from the difficulties of everyday life. The cycle of life itself—birth, growth, decline and death—combines with the challenges of basic survival, personal ambitions and interpersonal relationships to ensure that joy and suffering, success and failure, serenity and stress will visit us all. But chronic stress can lead to depression or even suicide. And we sometimes miss the early warning signs of too much stress: irritability and mood swings, restlessness, poor concentration, negative self-talk, overeating and unexplained body aches and pains. If you're depressed, see your doctor to discuss treatment options. The good news is that self-help stress relievers like those listed below can help to get stress under control, early.

VISUALIZE YOUR GREATNESS

A close second to the power of faith is the power of the mind. One of the great motivators of our time, Napoleon Hill, said, "What the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve." We all want happiness, good friends, affection, adventure, health, fulfilling work, a nice place to live, and so on. Stress often intrudes in the space between where we are and where we want to be, or think we should be. Daily visualization of our desire and affirmations like "I can do this!" can help us manage the stress that fills that divide. Consider taking five to ten minutes every morning in quiet prayer or meditation while doing the following visualization techniques:

■ **Count your blessings** by thanking your spiritual source for the things in your life that you value or that bring you joy.

■ **Congratulate yourself** on the goals you have met. Identify clear objectives for the next day or week.

■ **Determine one step** you can take today to help someone else in your surroundings. When you do something for others, you get the gift.

TALK TO OTHERS

Talk therapy, which is simply talking about what is bothering us, can be practiced with a friend

or a loved one, a family member or a therapist. In the short term, it can help us identify and address problems we cannot address alone. Talk therapy with a professional can help us change harmful ways of thinking and acting, and help us relate better to others.

■ **Choosing the right person to talk to is critical.**

A person with a different perspective on our situation can help us decide how to fix the problems we are having and how to deal with the things we can't fix. Consider engaging in conversation with an objective friend (one who isn't always inclined to agree with you), a colleague or someone of the opposite sex. If you feel you need professional talk therapy and have privacy concerns, do some research or seek referrals for a licensed mental health practitioner.

CREATE NURTURING SPACES

A long-standing, commonsense principle commends the oneness of life and the environment: An unquiet, disorganized environment is the product of an unquiet, disorganized mind. Our internal and external lives mirror each other. Just as the power of positive thinking can change our external lives, organizing our external lives can quiet a stressed mind.

■ **When our lives are in chaos**—whether at the job, at home or both—our stress levels are bound to rise. Preparation, planning, realistic goals and a set routine are the keys to organization. It's not going to happen in a day or even a week. But once we work on reducing our hectic schedule—by managing our time more carefully and effectively, prioritizing and focusing on completing certain tasks, and establishing daily routines at work and at home—we will feel more in control.

CONSIDER IMPLEMENTING THE FOLLOWING:

- **Read books on organization skills.**
- **Hire a certified organizer.**
- **Have family spring/fall cleaning parties that rotate among relatives**

so that the work doesn't become overwhelming.

- **Keep a personal, professional and/or family planner.**
- **Learn to say no. It's not personal.**
- **Everything has a place—put it there.**

CREATE NURTURING PLACES

"Peace in pieces" is a great approach to short-term stress relievers, and participating in an art form is an excellent way to lift our spirits and feed our senses. The growing field of art therapy encourages listening to music, dancing, singing and painting, as well as attending live concerts, visiting museums, and attending the theater. **Adding the creative arts to our daily lives** can lead to improved enthusiasm, energy and expectation. Music is perhaps the easiest of these to add to our lives. As new technologies allow us to listen to music while engaged in other activities, it really doesn't take time away from our busy schedules. Music allows us to find increased enjoyment in what we're doing and also reduces stress in our day. Consider listening to music that represents a happy time in your life—whether it was an old-school basement party or family cookouts. Dancing is another creative way to relieve stress, with the added benefit of exercise.

LOL

Laughter is indeed the best medicine! Laugh therapy is another growing method of treating stress, as evidence continues to mount that laughter has both short- and long-term benefits. **When we laugh**, it lightens our load mentally, and it encourages physical changes. Laughter goes a long way to soothe our nerves and relieve tension. Whenever possible, take things lightly. Plan a monthly night out with friends; visit a comedy club. For young people, read *Stay Strong: Simple Life Lessons for Teens* by Terrie Williams. There are also books and Web sites that offer specific ways to implement laugh therapy techniques. Be silly and goofy once in a while. It's infectious and helps reduce stress.

WELLNESS

“We cannot live without our lives.” —AUDRE LORDE

“What makes my body
feel loved, strong
and confident does not come
from clothes or accessories.
For me, it comes from an inner
peace and comfort with myself.

Everything else just
accentuates these things”

LaPrecious Polk, 19

HONORING THE TEMPLE

Self-preservation is the first law of nature

BY GLENN ELLIS AND SARA LOMAX-REESE

Our people have long gathered around a communal table. As we've shared meals prepared with love, we've passed down stories, traditions and the wisdom of our elders from one generation to the next. Around the table, too, pride has been instilled—in family, history and community. Mealtimes have been our daily occasion to celebrate and honor our beautiful Black selves.

But we've somehow lost our way to the communal table. Many of us replaced it with fast-food restaurants and the cheap, deep-fried, salty, highly processed, high-calorie, supersize meals they market. We gulp it all down with a sugary drink and hurry on with our stressed-out, unhealthy lives. The result? While poor habits among all Americans have pushed this nation into a health crisis, the situation in Black America is dire. We have disproportionately high incidences of the illnesses that are the leading causes of death in the United States: heart disease, diabetes and stroke. Whether we live in inner cities or in upscale suburbs, we are more likely than Whites to die from heart disease. Two times as many of us die from asthma, and our death rate from cancer is 25

percent higher. In fact, the overall life expectancy for African Americans falls five years short of that of Whites. From birth to our twilight years, we have higher death rates.

Daunting obstacles hinder African Americans from closing the health gap. Poverty and poor medical care conspire to undermine our health and shorten our lives. And no matter our social status or the size of our bank account, we are often burdened with unyielding stress. The stress of living in a society that still refuses to fully value its citizens of darker hue weighs us down and makes us more likely to smoke or drink in excess, paving the way to more health problems. Stress also leads us to overeat. Obesity is a risk factor for many of the diseases that plague our community, and again, we are more likely to be obese than Whites.

What we eat, how much we exercise, and how we manage stress are lifestyle choices that have a powerful impact on closing the health gap and on the quality and length of our lives. By changing our relationship to food, jump-starting physical activity, and learning sound techniques to relieve stress, we can improve not only our own health but also the health of our families. If we do

not make these changes, we may leave our children the legacy of poor health habits, thereby realizing experts' fears that this generation of American children may be the first ever to have a shorter life span than their parents have.

Eating less and exercising more seem to be the fairly simple solutions to this situation, but they belie the complex historical, cultural and emotional terrain we navigate with food. For most of us, food is not just about eating to promote health and vibrancy. It has a much more textured connection to our lives. Food can be a celebration of family and culture or an expression of love. It can also be a substitute for love. We may use it, too, to deaden our emotional pain. Whatever the reason we eat, the food we reach for in our communities tends to be the nutritionally deficient variety found at the fast-food joints and convenience stores that punctuate the landscape.

Meanwhile, foods rich in vitamins, minerals and fiber—including whole grains, dark leafy vegetables, fresh seasonal fruits—are often overpriced and of poor quality.

foods have hidden calories? Which foods help to prevent cancer? Why do diets eventually fail? It's easy to become frustrated. But we can't let our frustration stop us from becoming smart about nutrition. Each time we put food in our mouths, it circulates through our entire bodies, either nourishing us or depleting us. It becomes either our medicine or our poison.

We must make lasting, holistic changes in our relationship with food. A critical first step involves becoming more informed and getting our questions answered.

What Foods Should We Eat?

A healthy meal plan features whole grains, fruits and vegetables, and avoids high-fat meats and cheeses, high-sodium canned or processed foods, and sugary drinks loaded with high fructose corn syrup.

Eat fruits and vegetables that are the colors of the rainbow. Experiment with yellow, red, green, purple and orange produce so you can experience the full spectrum of nature's nutritional bounty. You'll gain the benefit of powerful

“What we eat, how much we exercise, and how we manage stress are lifestyle choices that have a powerful impact on the quality and length of our lives.”

And sometimes they are simply not available. Many Black communities are bereft of supermarkets that offer fresh produce and other nutritionally sound foods.

Navigating this complex terrain is no simple matter. For starters, most people, regardless of education or socioeconomic status, are confused about what constitutes good nutrition. There is so much contradictory information out there—“eat lots of protein,” “be a vegetarian”—that we're left with many questions: What foods should we eat? What foods should we skip? Which

phytonutrients that provide lots of vitamins and minerals. And eat fruits and veggies that are local and in season; they naturally have more nutritional vitality. Avoid those that have been shipped, trucked and left to sit for extended periods of time; their inherent vitamin, mineral and nutrient content is diminished.

Choose a diet rich in complex carbohydrates and low-fat protein, which provide the main ingredients for sustainable energy. Complex carbohydrates—vegetables, whole grains, leafy greens, beans—feed the

muscles, vital organs and the brain. For protein, be guided by these three considerations: quantity, frequency and quality. Quantity and frequency vary depending on the person, but generally try to reduce consumption of animal products, such as chicken, fish, eggs, cheese and milk. A serving size should be no larger than the palm of your hand. So “just say no” to those huge slabs of red meat at the local steak house.

As for quality, when you do eat animal protein, make sure that it is free of hormones, pesticides, antibiotics and other toxins. The best way to ensure this is to eat organic whenever possible. The growing consensus among scientists is that small doses of pesticides and other chemicals can cause lasting damage to human health, especially during fetal development and early childhood. The Environmental Working Group, a nonprofit organization dedicated to raising public awareness about toxic substances in our environment, has developed a list of the Clean 15. These are the least contaminated, conventionally

Certain foods and beverages put our bodies on a damaging energy roller-coaster. The usual suspects include caffeine, sugar and refined or simple carbohydrates, such as white flour, white rice and sugar. And keep in mind that caffeine is very dehydrating. So if you drink coffee, drink more water.

Dairy can congest us. It produces mucus, making us more susceptible to colds and flu. Reducing or eliminating it can boost energy levels. Eat dairy in moderation, if at all. When you do, choose fermented dairy, including yogurt, buttermilk and cheese, being mindful that these products are high in fat.

Wheat can also cause low energy. Many people are allergic to wheat and don't know it. Symptoms include bloating, indigestion, constipation, headaches, fatigue, insomnia, depression and excessive production of mucus. If you have any of these symptoms, stop eating wheat, especially bread, rolls and flour products.

Some foods that are good for you are exposed to pesticides at a higher rate than



“Eat organic whenever possible. Even small doses of pesticides and other chemicals can cause lasting damage especially during fetal development and early childhood.”

grown fruits and vegetables—people who eat them ingest fewer than two pesticides a day. These are foods to make your favorites: onions, avocados, sweet corn, pineapple, mangoes, asparagus, sweet peas, kiwi, cabbage, eggplant, papaya, watermelon, broccoli, tomatoes and sweet potatoes.

What Foods Should We Skip?

If it's deep-fried, salty, sugary, highly processed and high calorie, it's probably nutritionally deficient. Skip it!

the Clean 15. These include peaches, apples, bell peppers, celery, nectarines, strawberries, cherries, kale, lettuce, imported grapes, carrots and pears. The Environmental Working Group has found that people who eat these fruits and vegetables consume an inordinate amount of pesticides. Rinsing reduces but does not eliminate pesticides. Peeling helps, but valuable nutrients go down the drain with the skin. The best approach: Eat a varied diet, rinse all produce, and buy organic

whenever possible. Doing this reduces the quantity of pesticides you are exposed to.

Which Foods Have Hidden Calories?

You'd be surprised at the number of calories lurking where you least suspect them.

We too often guzzle down sodas, smoothies and fruit juices without giving it much thought, but these drinks are laden with

We sometimes add buttery sauces or spreads, or drown our food in ketchup. Just one tablespoon of ketchup adds 15 calories. A tablespoon of butter averages 101 calories.

Be aware that even the smallest servings—a handful of chips, a two-bite sample of a new food item at the grocery store, those two or three spoons full of a dish you taste when you're cooking a meal—come with calories.

"In addition to the role fruits and vegetables play in protecting us against cancer, studies show that they also help prevent stroke and heart disease."

calories. While they may quench your thirst, they don't go very far in satisfying your hunger. Those coffee drinks we love—lattes, frappuccinos and others—are calorie-rich, too. A 16-ounce café latte with milk can run you 260 calories.

Alcoholic drinks are also full of calories, and a few drinks in one evening can quickly increase your total for the day. Figure about 85 calories for a small glass of wine. Alcohol also makes us less inhibited, which makes us eat more.

Be careful about dairy products. Ice cream may be an obvious culprit, but cheese and milk have more calories than one might expect. One tablespoon of grated parmesan cheese on your salad or pasta adds 22 calories. An 8-ounce glass of skim milk has 90 calories.

Sugar is a clear choice to avoid, but many of us don't realize that refined carbohydrates like white pasta and rice or a plain bagel or white potato flood our bodies with sugar. And how we prepare our food can also pile on calories. Although the main ingredients we select may be wholesome, deep-frying, breading or sautéing them defeats the purpose. Sometimes we reheat the frying oil over and over again, which creates a cancer-causing agent called acrylamides.

What Kind of Diet Prevents Cancer?

It's widely known that eating fruits and vegetables helps prevent cancer. Produce is loaded with antioxidants, fiber, folate and potassium, and is low in fat and calories. In addition to the role fruits and vegetables play in protecting us against cancer, studies show that they also help prevent stroke and heart disease.

Eat foods in the carotenoid family, a widespread family of plant pigments found mostly in vegetables; they provide us with antioxidants. They include carrots, cantaloupe, tomatoes, pink grapefruit, watermelon and apricots, and dark green leafy vegetables like spinach, collards, kale and broccoli.

Eat foods high in omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon and flaxseeds.

Avoid trans fats, red meats and charred or smoked foods.

Limit your fat intake to less than 20 percent of your total calories per day. This is an extremely small amount of fat to eat; an average amount is about 30 to 35 percent of total daily calories. Start by eliminating foods with the highest fat content, like fried foods and margarine, and then gradually lower the amount of fat you eat.

While soy remains somewhat controversial,


soy proteins have been found to reduce blood cholesterol levels and the risk of heart disease.

Soybeans also contain unique phytochemicals called isoflavones that behave in the body like weak cousins to the female hormone estrogen, they are called phytoestrogens. Although isoflavones work with soy proteins to reduce blood cholesterol levels, they also act like

classes every night of the week isn't sustainable either.

Diets also fail because they start from a place of self-loathing. We hate our fat thighs, our wide hips, our jiggling arms, our bulging tummies. We want to do whatever it takes to tame them into submission. Instead, we need to affirm all that our bodies do for us.

Whether we want to lose 20 pounds or 120 pounds, we need to appreciate our physical



“Understanding the connection between what, when and why we eat can have a profound impact on our mental, physical and emotional well-being.”

estrogens, which are known to increase the risk of breast cancer and other cancers in women. This raises the possibility that soy isoflavones might increase cancer risks.

Still, soybeans, high in good-quality protein and minerals, contain a healthy balance of carbohydrates and fat. It is processed soy products like soy milk and cheeses that should be avoided. Stick with fermented soy, which includes tempeh, miso, natto, and soy sauce, which is traditionally made by fermenting soybeans, salt and enzymes. But beware: many varieties on the market are made artificially instead.

Why Do Diets Eventually Fail?

Diets are a temporary fix. We're on them for a finite period of time—and then we go back to doing whatever we were doing before we started them. To lose weight and keep it off, we must change our lifestyle. We must stop dieting and start living healthily. Losing weight should be a side benefit to developing a healthy relationship with food.

Whatever changes we make need to be sustainable. Fad diets—eating all protein or all grapefruit or all low-fat cereal, all the time—are not sustainable. And, for most of us, working out in the most strenuous gym

classes every night of the week isn't sustainable either. We must honor our uniqueness and become more aware of our own bodies, our own cravings. We need to figure out why we eat, when we eat, and what we eat, and not approach losing weight as a one-size-fits-all proposition that requires the latest fad diet or the latest diet book. We also need to examine the connections between politics, economics, education, race, culture and access to health care and how these factors impact the personal choices we make every day about how we feed our families and ourselves.

Understanding the connection between what, when and why we eat can have a profound impact on our mental, physical and emotional well-being. Marc David, author of *Nourishing Wisdom: A Mind, Body, Spirit Approach to Nutrition and Well-being*, explains it this way: “How we eat is a reflection of how we live. Our hurrying through life is reflected in hurrying through meals. Our fear of emotional emptiness is seen in our overeating. Our need for certainty and control is mirrored in strict dietary rules. Our looking for love in all the wrong places is symbolized in our use of food as a substitute for love. The more we are aware of these connections, the greater

the potential for our personal unfolding and inner satisfaction. For in changing the way we eat, we change the way we live.”

The journey to lasting change begins within. Cultivate self-awareness. Ground yourself in self-reflection and introspective exploration. Make gradual, incremental changes that make sense to you so that they become part of your life. By doing this, you’ll cultivate a new relationship with food and, by extension, a new relationship with

your own life. It is an act of self-love that can have a ripple effect, spreading from you out to your family and eventually throughout your larger community.

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Exercise: You Were Made to Move!

BY SUSAN L. TAYLOR

You can make the commitment right now.

The generations before us didn’t have the lifestyle choices that we take for granted today. The choices we make now will go a long way in determining whether we are mentally alert, mobile and healthy in the winter of our lives. We were made to move, not to be sedentary. Make this your mantra: I love taking care of myself. I love to exercise, and I’m committed to exercising regularly. You can train your mind to work with the laws of life, rather than working against them. Aerobic activity releases both depression-destroying and spirit-lifting hormones. Exercise is a natural way to release tension and anxiety. Often-times, migraines, ulcers, asthma, rashes and other tension-related illnesses disappear with regular exercise.

Choose the types of exercise and times of day that work best for you. (Always check with your doctor before you begin an exercise program.) That may mean investing in an aerobics video you pop in your DVD

player and follow along with before heading out in the morning, or a stationary bike you pedal while reading or watching television. When you exercise, you are practicing being your own best friend, caring for yourself in a way no one else can, caring for the temple that the Holy Spirit dwells in.

Starting today, recommit deeply to an exercise ritual you will love. Make a workout plan for the next month, then the next two months. Exercise for 21 days in row, and you will develop a lifelong habit that will stave off illness and increase your confidence and joy all the days of your life. And when you fall off the wagon, as we all do, just begin again.

Self-care Is the Best Care

Regular exercise is central to ensuring optimum health and longevity. If you want to slim down or firm up, boost your mental clarity, or take years off your looks, get going. This is such a critical move for our community. “African Americans are the most inactive, unhealthy population in the nation, and we don’t have to be,” says Teresa

Kay-Aba Kennedy, Ph.D., M.B.A., certified holistic health counselor and founder of Power Living Enterprise.

“Only 25 percent of us engage in regular physical activity, which is why we have disproportionate rates of lifestyle-related diseases like diabetes, stroke, heart disease and certain forms of cancer. We also have high rates of obesity, which is a contributing factor to these chronic diseases,” adds Kennedy. The good news is that exercising will improve our overall quality of life, she emphasizes. A certified personal trainer, yoga instructor and lifestyle and weight-management counselor in New York City, Kennedy offers these guidelines:

Getting started again and staying motivated:

■ Find a partner and start walking.

Make it social, make it fun, and make it a family affair. Find out if your place of worship or workplace has a walking club.

■ Or go solo and hook up your sound.

Listen to powerful sermons, motivational talks, your favorite sing-along music; or use the time to learn a new language.

■ Follow a progressive plan.

Do at least ten minutes each session, and then do a little more each time. In this way, you'll be up to an hour before you know it.

Doing it consistently:

When you stop an exercise regimen and then start again, you lose momentum and increase your risk of injury. As with anything, planning is important. There are no valid excuses for not stepping up for your total well-being each day, and you don't owe apologies to anyone for putting yourself on your schedule. It's the most important thing we all must do. Here's how to start:

■ **Reserve** a time slot on your calendar every day for exercise.

■ **Plan** to eat fruit before exercising—it's a healthy choice and you need the carbohydrates for energy.

■ **Eat** a small nutritious meal within two hours after your workout—the sooner, the better—and drink water before, during and after exercising. Pure coconut water is a great natural electrolyte—better than sugar-laden sports drinks.

■ **Make** it a habit to incorporate more movement into your daily activities, such as parking farther away from your destination, getting off public transportation a stop earlier, or taking the stairs instead of the elevator.

Losing weight:

Effective weight loss requires a combination of good nutrition and exercise. Here's a breakdown:

■ **Sweat.** U.S. guidelines recommend two and a half hours a week of moderate aerobic exercise, or one hour and fifteen minutes a week of vigorous exercise.

Moderate means you can still talk while moving but not sing; this includes brisk walking, biking and ball sports like basketball or volleyball. *Vigorous* means you get breathless when you move and talk; this includes activities such as aerobic dancing, brisk walking, jogging, swimming, cycling, cross-country skiing, tennis.

■ **Stretch.** Stretching helps increase flexibility, reduces risk of injury, minimizes muscle soreness, and improves overall performance. Yoga is perfect for this.

■ **Strengthen.** Strength training is essential to boosting your metabolism and enhancing bone density. The more lean tissue you have, the more body fat you will shed, even while you sleep. You can use resistance machines or tubing, free weights or old-fashioned push-ups. Strength-train at least two days a week, and include all major muscle groups.

We are the parents of our elder selves, and we know what it takes to achieve optimum health and longevity. Couch potatoes don't get there. Be the guardian of your health—for yourself, our children and our community.

WHAT WORKS**5 ESSENTIAL STEPS TO HEALTHY LIVING**

BY SARA LOMAX-REESE

Although we eat every day, few of us are taught sound nutritional practices. We lack strategies to create and sustain the shift in consciousness that can lead to transformation. Arming ourselves with education can lead us to the healthy lives we deserve.

ACTION STEPS:

1 Find a knowledgeable facilitator to help develop and operate a holistic nutrition program via webinar or teleconference. This kind of interactive forum can be an effective way for you and others to learn about the connection that the mind, body and spirit have to diet and lifestyle choices. Participants could meet as a group twice a month for three to six months, followed by monthly check-in sessions to assess ongoing progress. Questions could be e-mailed to the facilitator, who could offer personal, individualized feedback.

To find a knowledgeable facilitator, explore these sources:

National Association of Nutrition Professionals (www.nanp.org/cndb/search.php) and the Institute for Integrative Nutrition (www.integrativenutrition.com/Alumni/WorkWithAGrad.aspx).

TO DEVELOP A MEANINGFUL PROGRAM, CONSIDER THESE TOPICS:

- Creating an Awareness Practice
- What Exactly Is Real Food?
- Sugar Addiction
- Carbs, Fats and Proteins
- You're Not Hungry, You're Thirsty

- Why Breakfast Matters
- Healthy Snacks
- Emotional Eating
- Conscious Cooking
- How to Afford Healthy, Nutritious Food
- Stress: The Missing Link in Weight Gain
- Health Disparities
- The Obesity Epidemic
- Dark Leafy Greens: Nature's Superfood
- Making a Plan for Long-term Success

If you can't create your own program, explore existing nutrition awareness programs. A wealth of institutions from faith institutions to community-based organizations to schools, might offer what you're seeking. Make sure that any program you consider is relevant, engaging and interactive, with opportunities for ongoing participation.

2 Increase access to affordable food.

We need to examine the connections between politics, economics, education, race, culture and access to health care and how they impact our personal choices about how we feed our families and ourselves. In urban communities, there is a well-documented connection between rising rates of obesity and lack of access to nutritious food. Taking these steps can help ease the situation.

Seek out farmers' markets, cooperatives and community-supported agriculture (CSA) organizations. Farmers' markets and CSAs have some of the freshest local produce. Many farmers' markets are now accepting food stamps. If your area doesn't have this kind of resource, contact the Food Trust (see information that follows) to find out how to set one up. Co-ops are much cheaper than specialty stores such as Whole Foods, and they often support local farming communities. Find out if your state and local governments provide start-up funds and technical assistance to local not-for-profit organizations that want to organize co-ops. CSAs and farmers' market programs like New York's Low Income Investment Fund and the Reinvestment Fund are designed to help in this type of effort; they bring not only nutritious, affordable food to

neighborhoods across New York State, but they also create good jobs and private investment.

To find food cooperatives, community-supported agriculture programs and farmers' markets in your area, visit the following Web sites:

www.localharvest.org

www.farmersmarketcoalition.org

www.biodynamics.com

www.coopdirectory.org

Support businesses that support local farms.

Many restaurants and grocery stores are committed to buying from local organic farms that yield foods that are often cheaper and more nutritional. Locate them through these

Web sites:

www.eatwellguide.org

www.organichighways.com

www.organickitchen.com/rest/rest.html

Make your dollar count.

Organic produce and meats are popular among the health conscious, but they can be expensive.

Your best bet for managing costs is to buy them at farmers' markets, food co-ops and CSAs.

Prices for organic foods tend to be higher at supermarkets. However, if that's where you shop, be aware that you can help bring down those prices. Supermarkets track everything that consumers purchase. If more members of our communities buy organic fruits and vegetables, supermarkets will increase the quality and the quantity, which can help drive down the cost. For example, Walmart has introduced a line of organic dairy products and more.

Join forces with groups that are working to increase access to affordable food in low-income communities. Organizations across the country, including those listed below, are participating in this effort. Contact them to learn how you and others in your neighborhood can roll up your sleeves and get involved.

THE FOOD TRUST

www.thefoodtrust.org

The Food Trust seeks to make healthy food

available to all. Working with neighborhoods, schools, grocers, farmers and policymakers, it has a comprehensive approach that combines nutrition education with greater access to affordable, healthy food. Here are some of its efforts:

FOOD TRUST FARMERS' MARKET PROGRAM

- Opened and expanded farmers' markets in urban communities in North, South and West Philadelphia and completed a farmers' market Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/food stamp pilot program that resulted in a substantial increase in SNAP/food stamp sales.

SUPERMARKET CAMPAIGN

- Helped to create city and state programs in New York, Illinois and Louisiana that encourage the development of supermarkets in communities that don't have access to healthy foods.

- Has begun work in New Jersey and Colorado to promote policies intended to stimulate supermarket investment in underserved areas.

- Earned the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Pioneering Innovation Award for work by its Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative in advancing policies and environmental strategies to prevent and control obesity.

PROGRAMS IN SCHOOLS AND RECREATION CENTERS

- Reached nearly 70,000 Pennsylvania students through a number of education programs, including Fuel Up to Play, Kindergarten Initiative, Healthy Corner Store Initiative and Healthy Times.

THE URBAN TREE CONNECTION

www.urbantreeconnection.org

This organization helps low-income urban communities revitalize their neighborhoods by transforming abandoned open spaces into safe, functional places that inspire and promote positive human interaction. Since 2006, growing vegetables has become a major programmatic theme in the organization's Growing Healthy

Initiative, a multiyear community gardening and health education project designed to promote the benefits of healthful eating and physical activity.

TEENS4GOOD

www.teens4good.orbius.com

A program of the Federation of Neighborhood Centers, Teens4Good is a youth entrepreneurship business that transforms blighted vacant lots into urban gardens and farms, thereby improving access to healthy foods for communities, creating meaningful jobs for at-risk youth, and empowering youth to become healthy, responsible young leaders who give back to their communities.

WEAVER'S WAY CO-OP

www.weaversway.coop

This 3,500-member community-owned market is located in two neighborhoods in Northwest Philadelphia. Its nonprofit arm, Weavers Way Community Programs, seeks to foster cooperative activities that support local food production, economic literacy, a sustainable environment and healthy lifestyles.

3 Exercise regularly It's a proven path to wellness. Before you begin any exercise program, have a checkup. This is especially important if you're new to working out or have been less active than you once were. Once you've gotten your physician's okay, begin!

Millions of us suffer from illnesses that can be prevented or controlled through regular physical activity. Moreover, by increasing muscle strength and endurance and improving flexibility and posture, regular exercise helps prevent pain in key areas, like your hips and back. If your life is jam-packed with other responsibilities, take charge and make room for yourself. Shorter workouts throughout the day can usually be as effective in burning unwanted calories as longer workouts are. Try to make the sessions intense. Get your heart rate up, and repeat the workouts for 15 or 20 minutes at a time throughout the day. As you get stronger, consider adding jumping jacks and crunches to your routine to work

even more muscles. Your mind and body will love you for it.

ACTION STEPS:

- Start slowly. Ease into it. Don't make the mistake of doing too much too soon. Too much of anything will make you sick of it—fast. Eventually you'll learn to love exercising and eating healthy foods.
- Use the 5 & 10 rule for escalators and elevators: Take the stairs if you only need to go up five floors or fewer, or if you need to go down ten or fewer flights.
- If walking outdoors raises safety concerns, invest in a treadmill or simply high step in place at home or walk indoors at the mall during the least busy hours. If you're unable to resist shopping—or buying those fiendishly aromatic cinnamon buns at the food courts—leave your credit cards and cash at home.

For more information on how to make exercise a lifelong investment in your well-being, please see "You Were Made to Move" on page 53.

4 Manage stress.

Many people don't think about stress management unless they're already on the verge of burnout. With our busy lives, it doesn't always seem obviously important to practice extra stress management until a worn-out body or an overly taxed psyche forces the issue. A small dose of stress can be helpful. It's represented by those stomach jitters that can help you knock a presentation to your bosses out of the park. It's that rush of adrenaline that keeps you mentally alert. It's that extra burst of strength and energy during an emergency. But too much of it can lead to a laundry list of woes, from poor judgment, anxiety, moodiness, anger and depression to chest pain, rapid heartbeat, frequent colds, dizziness, eating too much or too little and loss of sex drive. In the end, too much stress can kill you. Managing stress can save your life.

ACTION STEPS:

- Breathe slowly and deeply. Instead of reacting to a stressful occurrence, take three deep breaths

and release them slowly.

- When you feel yourself becoming tense with stress, note what triggered that response.
- Take five minutes for a stretch and breathing session. This will provide a calming effect that will last for hours.
- Get adequate rest and sleep. Experts suggest 7 to 9 hours for adults, 9 to 18 hours for infants, and 9 to 15 for younger children and adolescents. Your body needs sleep to produce new cells and renew itself.
- Do not rely on alcohol or drugs to calm you down. They can lead to addiction.

5 Stay hydrated.

Water is critical to our survival. It helps our bodies function. Without it, we would die in a few days.

The amount of water in the body is dynamic and always changing. We lose water routinely when we breathe and humidified air leaves the body; we sweat to cool the body; and we urinate or have a bowel movement to rid the body of waste products. Dehydration occurs when the amount of water leaving the body is greater than the amount being taken in. Proper hydration can aid in preventing and curing a range of illnesses, and it can cut the risk of some cancers. If you're dieting, you need a good supply of water to burn calories efficiently. And you need water to flush out the toxins created by

burning those calories.

Water helps maintain muscle tone, and it lubricates the joints. Water should be our drink of choice, for it is the elixir of life.

ACTION STEPS:

- Drink at least eight 8-ounce glasses of water a day. The more active you are, the more water you need to replenish lost fluids.
- Drink an 8-ounce glass of water before you go to sleep and when you wake up in the morning, because sleep is the greatest time for dehydration. But, as we age, we must be sure to drink our fill of water earlier in the evening. Probably a good time to have a final glass is two hours before you normally retire. If you drink too much water close to bedtime, you risk ruining a night's sleep with frequent bathroom breaks (this is important for younger children as well).
- Do not replace water with beverages like soda, alcohol or caffeinated drinks. They can act as diuretics, causing excessive water loss because of increased urination.
- Drink water before you feel thirsty. By the time thirst hits, you've probably already used up much of your body's available water reserve.
- Make drinking water as convenient as possible. Carry a bottle with you wherever you go—while running errands and commuting to work. Keep a bottle of water bedside, and take water breaks instead of coffee breaks.



PROSPERITY

“I had to make my own living and my own opportunity. But I made it! Don’t sit down and wait for the opportunities to come. Get up and make them.” —MADAM C. J. WALKER

“Being rich means enjoying what I have no matter how much of ‘it’ I have. It’s enjoying the little things. And fortunately I’m rich in those.”

Jeremy Damian, 19

WEALTH-BUILDING WISDOM

These smart steps will lead you to financial security

BY LENA SHERROD

The current economic crisis has revealed why wealth—what’s left over after all your debts are paid off—is so important to your family’s stability, notes a new study by the Insight Center for Community Economic Development.

“Wealth, or net worth, refers to the total value of one’s assets minus debts. Without savings or wealth of some form, economic stability is built on a house of cards that quickly crumbles when income is cut or disrupted through job loss or reduced pay, or if the family suffers an unexpected health emergency,” write the authors. Wealth is what cushions your retirement, keeps the family home in the family, and puts your kids through school.

Yet nearly 300 years of oppression, superexploitation and legally sanctioned racial discrimination have been ruthlessly effective in locking our people out of the economic mainstream.

The end result: Generations of African Americans have been robbed of the benefits of their labor and the benefits of their tax dollars.

The financial cost of centuries of

enslavement and legalized racism has yet to be definitively calculated. But we know that these crippling barriers to accessing resources have caused an unconscionable wealth disparity between African Americans and our White counterparts.

Consider this: The wealth of Whites in the United States—many of whom have access to financial resources through family inheritances—is now 15 times greater than the wealth of African Americans. And although African Americans are 13 percent of the U.S. population, we own less than 3 percent of the wealth. Forty-one percent of African American households have less than \$1,000 in net assets. The median net worth of an African American family is \$8,300, while the median net worth of a White family is \$56,000.

We lag behind in other ways too. For example, home ownership represents more than four fifths of a typical family’s wealth. It is the major source of wealth for most Americans, with assets built from home equity (the market value of a home minus the balance due on home loans). But African Americans were

systematically discriminated against by policies of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) that prohibited them from buying prime property in suburban America. To complicate matters even more, African Americans faced such discriminatory practices as redlining—the unwillingness of banks to offer housing loans. As a result, Whites got a colossal head start on accumulated wealth.

Today, legions of our people who sought to build assets and embrace their dreams by buying homes are the primary victims of mortgage fraud and subprime and predatory lenders. They are losing their homes to the plague of foreclosure.

Yet history has shown time and again that racism and discrimination are no match for the indomitable will of our people. We have within us the power to get money-smart. We can learn how to save and invest wisely. We can learn how to manage our money effectively. We can learn how to build wealth.

Wealth—It's What's in the Bank, Not What's on Your Back

Wealth is also called net worth. If you owe more than you own, you have negative net worth, which is the predicament too many African Americans find themselves in. Why? Because too many think that wealth is defined by a lavish lifestyle: the money they earn, the money they spend, the car they drive, the clothes they buy, and the bling they wear. Not so. As financial adviser Michelle Singletary points out in her book *7 Money Mantras for a Richer Life: How to Live Well With the Money You Have*, “If it's on your ass, it's not an asset.” (Or it's a depreciating asset.)

True wealth equals financial freedom. To figure out what this means in your own life, answer this question: How long can you sustain your lifestyle if you stop working? That length of time

is determined by your liquid assets, specifically, how much cash or cash equivalents—like checking and savings accounts, stocks, bonds and other investments—you have that will cover your monthly expenses. That time is also set by your passive income, which refers to earnings you will receive from royalties, rent, interest, dividends, business profits and other means.

Owning real estate and businesses and investing in stocks and bonds are critical building blocks to individual and community wealth. They both require a commitment to manage your resources wisely, to exercise financial smarts, and to rein in out-of-control consumerism.

We must make the commitment. We can start by challenging ourselves to think about why we spend the way we do. Economist Dr. Julianne Malveaux, who is president of Bennett College, explains it this way: “We live in a consumer society where sport shopping is the way we live. We feel good, we buy. We feel bad, we buy.

When we deal with the African American psyche, we come from a culture of lack. We have not had access, opportunity and equality. Some of us think we can bridge the equality gap in spending. We can spend with the big boys, even though we do not have big boy wealth—we don't have 3 percent of the wealth Whites have. But we can buy name brands to fill up a hole that says we may be inadequate. We can step up and spend up. To what end? If we understand the psychological reasons we spend heavily, we may be able to stop.”

Team Leader:

Lena Sherrod

Team:

Dr. Julianne Malveaux,
Veronica Conway, George Fraser

DR. JULIANNE MALVEAUX BREAKS DOWN WHY WE ARE EMOTIONAL SPENDERS

Many years ago, I was admiring some pricey earrings at a fancy department store. The sales clerk, a White woman, stared at me and said, “Are you sure you want these?” To my mind, she was looking down on me, and my initial thought was, *Who does she think she is? I’ll show her I can afford these.* I asked to see another pair, then another and another, intending to buy them all—almost a thousand bucks’ worth of jewelry! But then another part of me put that emotional impulse in check. I didn’t know this woman. Why should I care what she thought, and why would I allow someone who had dissed me to make a 7 percent commission? I left empty-handed.

When we look outside of ourselves in order to feel good, often the end result is emotional spending. We don’t feel good, so we go buy something. Add to that the fact that we live in a culture that’s designed to separate us from our money for somebody else’s benefit. Everywhere we turn, we’re being hit with “reasons” to spend. On the college campus where I work, young people are constantly barraged with images and ads online, getting signals from Facebook and Twitter. And the messages are clear: If you don’t own this or wear that, then you don’t belong. It’s as though they are brainwashed into believing that they have to have the trendy new pair of heels or jeans, because everybody is wearing them. And if they don’t wear them, then they’re nobody.

We’ve all seen folks who have next to no money spending the few dollars they have on hair extensions. Hair is one of the most emotionally fraught issues in our community, because we’re still bombarded with images that tell us ours isn’t good enough, as is. And while no one wants to criticize another sister for trying to look her best, if hair care is costing you 25 percent of your take-home pay, something is really wrong. (I should point out that emotional spending isn’t limited to women. Men often overspend on big-ticket items like cars or electronics.)

Spending to fill emotional needs leads us to neglect truly important money goals like saving, investing and giving back to the community.

BUT WE CAN REGAIN CONTROL BY DOING THE FOLLOWING:

- **Acknowledging** that we are worthy and worthwhile human beings, whether we’re wearing a designer suit or a T-shirt and jeans, because we are designed by the Divine. This self-confidence comes from surrounding ourselves with positive people who affirm us for who we are.
- **Being conscious of every dollar we earn.** When a dollar comes in, earmark it for a purpose, be it personal survival, savings or investing.
- **Setting financial goals.** If you want to go on vacation, consider saving your money and paying cash as opposed to paying by credit. If you think about it that way while you’re saving, every time you’re tempted to make a purchase on impulse, you’ll say to yourself, What about my vacation?
- **Setting spending limits.** Don’t go shopping without knowing beforehand how much money you’re going to spend. And don’t go to the mall if you don’t have any money.

WHAT WORKS**5 WAYS TO WEALTH**

Information we all need

BY LENA SHERROD

1 TEACH CHILDREN THE BASICS OF HOUSEHOLD FINANCES

Most young people can—and want to—master the basics of day-to-day finances. We simply have to spend an hour or two each week going over family money matters with them. When we do, there's an added benefit: Financial education tends to promote family stability.

HOW TO DO IT:

Show your children the bills. Teach them the value of saving—saving money as well as saving the planet—and how to spend wisely. The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) offers a curriculum called Money Smart for Young Adults (fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/moneysmart/young.html), which helps young people ages 12 to 20 learn the basics of handling money, including how to create positive relationships with financial institutions. When equipped with the basics of financial education, young people gain the knowledge and confidence needed to manage finances responsibly when they enter the adult world. For now, too many of our young people are ill-equipped. The Jump\$tart Coalition for Personal Financial Literacy (jumpstart.org/index.cfm) reports that the average high school graduate lacks basic skills in managing personal financial affairs. Many cannot balance a checkbook, and most have little or no insight into the fundamental survival principles involved in earning, spending, saving and investing.

As a result, the coalition says, "Many young people fail in the management of their first consumer credit experience, establish bad

financial management habits, and stumble through their lives learning by trial and error." But organizations like Jump\$tart can help us turn that situation around. A national coalition of groups whose mission is to prepare youth to make successful financial decisions throughout their lives, Jump\$tart offers advocacy, research, standards and educational resources. It encourages curriculum enrichment to ensure that students gain basic personal financial management skills during the K-12 years. "The wheels of education do not need to be reinvented," Jump\$tart stresses. "They simply require balance."

2 MAKE IT YOUR GOAL TO LEARN SOMETHING NEW ABOUT MONEY EACH DAY

Amid the whirlwind of financial products, services and providers available today, it is essential that consumers acquire the knowledge and skills to evaluate and identify options that best suit their needs and economic circumstances. This is especially true for African American consumers. We have traditionally been underserved by financial institutions and, as a result, may become the victims of transactions that are financially destructive.

HOW TO DO IT:

Financial books, magazines and Web sites can help you become financially literate. Spending just 15 to 30 minutes a day, you can find the right strategies for rebuilding credit, reducing debt, securing personal loans, building a 401(k) retirement plan, buying a house, sending your child to college, and building wealth. Many banks and other institutions offer information about financial literacy. Web sites like The Motley Fool (fool.com) will walk you through a basic education about financial instruments available to savers and investors. Take advantage of the numerous online tools that can help you get your finances straight. For instance, click on Practical Money Skills for Life (practicalmoneyskills.com/budgeting), Visa's free personal financial management program. You'll find budgeting worksheets and calculators there, along with tips

for living within your means, budgeting suggestions, and more.

But knowledge isn't power unless you put it into practice and make financial know-how your launchpad to wealth. Some smart moves that will help get you on track include building an emergency fund and developing, and sticking to, a budget.

3 BEGIN SAVING AND INVESTING TODAY

The age at which you start investing will determine how much wealth you build. Financial planners recommend that you save and invest 10 percent of your income; if you can't save that much, start with a smaller amount. Set a goal for how much you'll save each month and how the money will eventually be used. Perhaps you want to start a business, buy a home, grow a retirement fund, or pay for your child's education.

HOW TO DO IT:

Create an emergency fund that will cover at least six months of expenses. If you don't already have one, open an individual and/or a family savings account. You can save automatically so that you don't have to think about it. Have your bank transfer a set amount monthly from your checking account into a higher-interest savings account. Consider opening your savings account at an African American financial institution, and urge your church, community organizations and family members to do the same. This will increase the available capital in your community.

If you're not already enrolled in your company's 401(k) retirement plan, sign up right away. You'll be putting in pretax dollars, thereby reducing your tax bill. You'll also be taking advantage of an employer match, which is literally free money.

As far as investing, you've heard it said that "Time is money." Here's proof: Tisha begins putting away \$100 a month when she's 22. Her investment earns 8 percent a year; after ten years, she stops contributing while her money continues to grow. Jamal, on the other hand,

waits until he's 32 to invest \$100 monthly, which also earns 8 percent a year. He keeps investing until he's 64. When they both retire at 64, Tisha has a total of \$234,600, while Jamal has only \$177,400—a difference of \$57,200. What a difference ten years makes.

You can begin building long-term wealth by investing in stocks using a technique called dollar-cost averaging (DCA): buying a fixed dollar amount of a particular stock on a regular schedule, regardless of the share price. With this method, you automatically buy more shares when prices are low and fewer shares when prices are high. Learn more about saving and investing at mymoney.gov.

4 BUY REAL ESTATE OR START YOUR OWN BUSINESS

Homeownership is still the single largest creator of wealth for most Americans. Assets are built from the equity in your home, which can be passed down from generation to generation. With the housing market currently cooling off—a combination of low interest rates, decreasing prices and increasing inventory—buying a home is one of the smartest investments you can make. In addition, the interest on the mortgage and on the property taxes can generally be fully deducted from your gross income, thereby reducing taxable income and resulting in thousands of dollars in tax savings. Another tax break comes when you sell your primary residence after living in it for two years. A couple can keep up to \$500,000 of the profit tax-free, while a single owner can hold on to \$250,000.

HOW TO DO IT:

Buying a home is a big move, so you must do your homework. Use an online calculator to figure out how much you can afford to pay for a house. Next, find out your credit score for free at annualcreditreport.com; a good score can help you better negotiate interest rates. Then shop around for the right loan. To be as smart as possible in what can be a daunting process, consider enrolling in a home-buying program in your area. For more information on home

buying, visit nahb.org/timetobuy or hud.gov. Does your road to wealth involve starting your own business? Whether you create it from the ground up, buy a franchise, or take over a family business, you must learn how to run it successfully so that both you and the business will thrive.

Once you've targeted your market and developed a product or a service that the market needs, there are myriad financial and legal steps you must take, from writing the business plan and getting training to finding financing, choosing a location, and marketing your business. Plenty of Web sites offer beneficial tips and advice on getting your business off the ground and operating it successfully, including allbusiness.com and entrepreneur.com/bizstartups. You can also obtain sound advice and guidance from SCORE, the "Counselors to America's Small Business," formerly known as Service Corps of Retired Executives. This organization provides, free of charge, information on such topics as writing a business plan, analyzing the competition, targeting your market and staffing, and financing and marketing your business. Contact SCORE at score.org.

5 TAKE CONTROL OF DEBT

Credit card debt has been called the new slavery because it gives other people and institutions control over your future earnings. In his book *Debt Is Slavery and 9 Other Things I Wish My Dad Had Taught Me About Money*, Michael Mihalik talks of the "Giant Marketing Machine that constantly tries to brainwash us into wanting more and more stuff, which leads to more and more bills." He offers practical advice on saying no to unnecessary spending and gaining control of your finances. Most people get into serious debt because they can't control spending, didn't plan for the future, and didn't save money. The increasing amount of interest they pay on debt, especially credit card debt, cannot be saved or invested. It's gone forever, significantly reducing their net worth. With some cards carrying interest rates as high

as 30 percent, they are designed to keep you in lifelong debt, costing you thousands of dollars in penalties and finance charges—especially if you make only the minimum payment. We need to say no. By doing so, and taking additional steps, we can break the shackles that hold us captive to debt.

HOW TO DO IT:

Debt is a tool to be used wisely. Borrowing for a home or for college tuition makes sense; borrowing more than you can comfortably afford to pay back does not. Whenever you borrow, be sure to shop around for the best rates, and try to pay your monthly balance in full within a month or two. However, if you can't afford to pay off credit card bills in full during a particularly tight month, pay the minimum by the due date so you avoid incurring late-payment fees and higher interest rates.

Avoid using a credit card to pay for anything that will be quickly consumed, like drinks, food, and vacation; that's the quickest way to fall into deep debt. If there's something you really need but it's expensive, try saving for it (or putting it on layaway) before you say, "Charge it."

If you must use a credit card, use it wisely: Learn everything about the card, including the interest rates and fees and penalties for late payments.

In other words, read the fine print. Scores of books and online sites are available with advice on eliminating credit card debt. One of the most important tips is to save money so you're prepared for unforeseen circumstances.

In addition to the books and Web sites mentioned earlier, check out Lynnette Khalfani's *Zero Debt: The Ultimate Guide to Financial Freedom* or *7 Smart Habits to Building the Wealth of Your Dreams*; Brooke Stephens's *Talking Dollars and Making Sense*; and Suze Orman's *The 9 Steps to Financial Freedom*.

You can do this. Changing your money situation begins with changing your mind-set. Make a conscious decision today to choose to build wealth, to become one of the "haves" and to stop living paycheck to paycheck. It's a decision that will pay off for generations to come.



RELATIONSHIPS

“I will bring you a whole person / and you will bring me a whole person / and we will have us twice as much / of love and everything.” —MARI EVANS

“To me, a loving relationship is when you don’t have a lot of fights. Instead you have power talks and work things out as a team.”

Nisa Bandele, 10

LOVE NO LIMITS

Healthy, committed, intimate and lasting relationships are what create strong communities

BY ASHA BANDELE AND APRIL R. SILVER

In 2001, just before my father went into the hospital to remove the cancer that had begun to consume his esophagus, he got organized. I'm not talking about making sure his papers were in order. I'm talking about cooking. The doctors said that if he survived, he would likely be in the hospital for seven days. So my father made seven meals, labeled and dated them, and put them in the freezer. He didn't want my mother, who would be at the hospital late with him, to have to worry about having to make herself dinner. When I brought my mother home that first night and saw what Daddy had done, I wept. I couldn't believe that, debilitated by the harsh chemicals coursing through his body and facing a surgery that might or might not have made him well, all he could think about was taking care of Mommy. But I shouldn't have been surprised.

I am one of the lucky ones who grew up watching real love in action. I have never heard my parents utter an unkind word to each other. I have never seen them argue—fuss a little maybe—but raised voices, slammed doors? These behaviors had no place in my parents' hearts or home. I asked

my mother once why it was so, why they never argued. Isn't a good fight healthy in a relationship once in a while? My mother answered my question with a question. "asha, aren't there other ways to resolve differences besides fighting and yelling?"

Indeed.

But my parents are of another time. They were acutely aware of all that had been lost to them, or more accurately, aware of all they'd never had as little Black Depression-era children who, between them, did not have one father they knew. My own sense of things is that when they came to each other, they came with a deep gratitude for the good love the Universe had presented them. They honor that every day still. Fifty-five years after they wed and 56 years after they met, their gratitude for each other shows up with each "Good morning" they share. Today, for too many, the landscape of how we learn to love is not populated by images of, and real-world experiences with, people who cherish themselves and each other. Too many of us traverse landscapes that have been carved out by video shots of Black women having credit cards swiped down

their butts, Black men leading sisters around on leashes. Too many of us still, unbelievably, watch Jerry Springer and seem to think that buffoonery and violence have a place in our relationships.

We can change this. There is infinite love in the universe waiting to be shared. But it will not be easy. To have the love we need, deserve and can call to us, we must

more staggering unemployment among Black men, reaching more than 50 percent in some cities; the overincarceration of our young, especially our males; and shifting values. These are on one end of the spectrum, while on the other end, new opportunities and avenues have increased women's choices and fostered a degree of financial independence for some. And

"We are still creating families, but far fewer Black parents are doing it together."



first confront and then remove, brick by brick, the wall that keeps us trapped on the other side of joy.

What Our World Needs Now Is Love, Sweet Love

No matter how possible great love is, if we are open to it, there's no denying the fact that creating and sustaining loving relationships—something even medical science now acknowledges as a key factor in maintaining happiness and good health—is a challenge for people who seem to have been born with every advantage. Divorce rates in the wealthiest White communities state this clearly. For we who bear the harsh weight of a color-coded social system causing disparities and stress at every turn, relaxing into love is often our greatest challenge. But good love begets strong families, and strong families beget the building blocks for all societies. We do not have a choice but to choose love.

But how do we get there from here? According to a U.S. Census estimate, in 2007, only 44 percent of us are married, and nearly half of all Black American adults have never married. The reasons are both complex and numerous: Chronic and ever

when men do not fulfill their breadwinner responsibilities, women get angry. Where once Black men had a clear role within the family structure, for many, these days there's a fog. Even for sisters who are not of means, since the 1970's, welfare has fostered male absenteeism by requiring that the man stay out of the home if the woman "was getting a check." In that one decade alone, out-of-wedlock births by Black women rose by 50 percent, and the number of families headed by single Black women rose 257 percent. Adding to these dynamics and the toxic cocktail of racist lies that demean and distort our view of ourselves and one another are a host of unresolved and cross-cultural issues and tensions about behavior, expectations and goals. Instead of pulling together we drift apart.

So yes, we are still creating families, but far fewer parents are doing it together. After the Civil War, self-supporting two-parent Black families were the rule. In 1900, nearly 90 percent of Black children were born into stable two-parent households. Today 50.2 percent of Black children live with their mother alone, and one in three Black children live in poverty. The overincarceration of our men has led

to fatherless families and the increase of struggling Black families. Although there are many single parent families thriving against the odds, the deck is stacked against the single mom who is inadequately educated and lacking in skills, underemployed or unemployed, with few resources and fragile to nonexistent support systems. The bottom line? Regardless of whether we choose to marry or not, whether we choose to become parents or not, regardless of our sexual orientation or our so-called socioeconomic status, this is a fact: We need each other. Need to love and be loved. Need healthy supportive relationships.

Removing the Wall

With matters of the heart, we can turn the page from hopelessness to hopefulness.

Open up in a support group; there are many valuable support circles out there. We need not carry the pain, suffer in silence, or pass our pain on to our children and others. If we survey the depths of our souls, open up and own up to our deepest feelings, our heartache, feelings of betrayal, the demons that rip and tear us apart, not only do we discover that we are not alone, we also will find support and healing. Truth is, most of us are struggling emotionally.

Real talk. That's what's needed. Instead, many of us shut down and crawl into our shells. Or we raise hell: yell and scream, hit and curse, or even violently assault our wives, husbands, partners and children. Unhealed and left to fester, pain and rage manifest in self-destructive behavior. The pain freezes our hearts and our faces. Our anger and feelings of betrayal cut deep.



“Do not lower your standards—only your demands.”

The first thing many of us have to do is release the fairy-tale ideas of who our perfect partner is. Let go of what you think “fine” looks like. Beauty is as beauty does. It's an inner value. Release your idea of wealth. Some of the happiest people we can look to have never earned into the six figures, let alone seven. True wealth can never be measured solely in dollars and sense. Susan L. Taylor encourages us never to lower our standards, just some of our irrational demands, and watch how sweet the love can flow.

But this is not to say the task is easy. Unlearning a way of being and seeing is a process that begins with talking about the toxins we've been bottling up. We need to identify and name them. Air them out in therapeutic counseling with a trusted spiritual adviser, a wise elder or a friend.

Feelings of self-loathing spew in what some of us call ourselves and one another—dog, nigga, bitch, ho, pig, MF. Our unexpressed pain shows up as virulent attacks against those in close proximity. Many of us are people in trauma, in need of emergency care—sort of like a person with a broken leg whose bones have never been correctly reset but who wants to run a marathon! That's who we often are when we turn to another: in love and in trouble.

And why is that?

Are we crazy?

No.

Here's the truth: We live in a nation that has shown little regard for our health and well-being. And so often, African Americans are resistant to counseling, leery of asking for help. It's understandable. But we can no

“Release the fairy-tale ideas of who the perfect partner is.”



longer afford our fear.

And it's also true that the road to healing may include some bumps along the way. But the rewards are sweet. As Taylor offers, “We are called to repair the village. Primary to that is Black women and men's

understanding of our history—the values we held dear in our Motherland, what was stripped away from us over the seas and centuries. Then we will heal deeply, be bound heart to heart again. Then we will bring to our relationships the peace,

Securing the Sacred Union

BY JOY ANGELA DEGRUY, PH.D.

Intimacy, religion and spirituality are recurring themes in studies of successful African American marriages and relationships. Given the course of our history and culture, this comes as no surprise. People of African descent throughout the Diaspora have strong spiritual traditions and rituals that have helped guide them through their lives. According to Sobonfu Somé, author of *The Spirit of Intimacy: Ancient African Teachings in the Ways of Relationships*, “There is a spiritual dimension to every relationship.... The role of spirit is to be the driver.... Spirit helps us fulfill our life's purpose and maintain our sanity.”

Because despite all of the bleak studies and mean realities, we have countless positive and successful African American relationships to celebrate. We have strong marriages that can guide us, teach us, and help our own relationships heal when needed. Consider the deeply spiritual marriage of Sylvester and Linda Silver of Suffolk, Virginia. They have been together since she was 3 and he was 5. “One weekend while I was visiting my father's house,”

Sylvester begins, “I noticed this girl in the yard next door. She was making mud cakes. I went across the way and asked her if I could play with her. She said yes, and we made mud cakes together. When we finished playing, I went and told my Daddy that I was going to marry that girl, Linda.

As the pastor of Gates of Heaven Church of God in Christ, Reverend Sylvester Silver teaches that there are two things that make a relationship work: the couple and God. Linda agrees and adds: “We also both came from broken families, and as teenagers we vowed that when we got married, we would not divorce or separate. Those things were never an option for us. We knew that from the start.” The Silvers don't paint a picture of pure bliss 100 percent of the time. Surely in 39 years of marriage there has been friction. What distinguishes their relationship and many others, however, is their determination to stay together—and not to wound each other when there are disagreements and pain. “Sure we have said hurtful things to each other,” Linda explains, “but I don't

seek to destroy my husband. I know what triggers his pain, and I don't go there. We have boundaries."

In the Silvers' relationship, we see that they came together with their eyes wide open and their purpose conjoined. These things are key. With intimate relationships, the task is to know the reason for the sacred union: Why did we/are we coming together? What are we seeking? What do we want to accomplish? What do we bring to each other? How can we grow together? How can

we enrich each other's lives and the lives of those around us?

Too often we run headlong into marriage or "marriage-equivalent" relationships without examining these questions. But success largely hinges upon whether or not we are in agreement on key issues prior to committing to one another. My life and studies have taught me that all of us should humble ourselves to certain steps before turning to one another—and God—and making a life-changing commitment.

ENSURING OUR LOVE BY JOY ANGELA DEGRUY, PH.D.

Here are 15 concise tips about how to do relationships well. Some of the wisdom here is amplified in this chapter's What Works section.

- 1.** Observe silence; learn to listen completely and to communicate openly. (See the chapter "Stress," which includes wisdom on meditation.)
- 2.** Communicate consistently and frequently; speak honestly and bring your best self. This requires check-ins with your partner and yourself.
- 3.** Consider the timeliness and appropriateness of your communication. Bear in mind that things said in the heat of the moment all too often add to the fire. But do not avoid communication when the topic or issue is difficult if you feel it's important.
- 4.** Before you say something, consider: How can I say it kindly? Is it honest? Is it useful? Work hard to meet all three of these bars in all that you say.
- 5.** Identify trusted and wise significant individuals, loving family members, friends, and mentors with whom you can meet and consult about your relationship.
- 6.** When you and your partner are seeking counsel from significant individuals whom you have identified, remember that it's up to the two of you to determine the relevance and value of their advice.
- 7.** Set goals and monitor your progress together.
- 8.** Commit to your relationship as a spiritual practice; the commitment is to each other and the Divine.
- 9.** Practice fidelity; be faithful in word and deed.
- 10.** Be open and honest with each other.
- 11.** If one of you stumbles, acknowledge it and the pain it has caused. Seek to make amends, ask to be pardoned. Practice forgiveness. The great challenge is not to keep the hurt alive by repeatedly bringing up the incident. Let it go. Get help if you need to. We all mess up. As we learn to forgive, we heal and are forgiven.
- 12.** Speak your love and demonstrate your caring and loyalty. Be tender in touch, words and deeds with your beloved.
- 13.** Trust and be trustworthy. No spying or tracking your mate. No accusing. No tolerating indignities or disrespect. And violence must never be tolerated. Trust is earned, not built overnight.
- 14.** Make it your lifelong ritual to look for wisdom and guidance from sacred writings and or traditions—and to practice them.
- 15.** Model what you believe.

Candles in the Window

BY ASHA BANDELE



Drs. Wade and Vera Nobles and family

For a moment, set aside the mean statistics always being tossed at us about Black love and marriage. Listening to them being repeated again and again could persuade almost anyone not to even try to find a soul mate, not to even attempt to take a stand for love. Well,

emeritus in the Department of Africana Studies at San Francisco State University and founder and executive director of the Institute for the Advanced Study of Black Family, Life and Culture, Inc., in Oakland. Dr. Vera Nobles, who holds a degree in African American studies, has focused her work on education, literacy and writing. Married since 1967, the Nobleses have five children and 12 grandchildren. Africa is deeply rooted in the Nobles family lives.

In talking about their marriage, time and again, Wade Nobles references the influence, spirituality and values from the Motherland that have enriched, informed and sustained their union.

Dr. Wade begins, “We’ve been sweethearts since high school and **throughout our marriage we’ve made space and time for our love.** We wake up early every morning

“Black men and women need each other. Need to love and be loved.”



never mind that that’s the steady beat pounding in our ears. The people you’ll meet below, who range in age from their thirties to nearly eighties know love, have embraced love, and have great advice to share about love. Listen to them. They’re the remix.

Wade and Vera Nobles live in Oakland, California. Dr. Wade Nobles is professor

and share pillow talk. We know that God is in us. Part of our romance is in the recognition of God in each other. I am always in wonderment that she sees God in me. And every morning, I see God’s glory shining in her eyes.”

Dr. Vera continues, “We believe that we are all Gods. We can see the kindness, the gentleness, the love—and God’s love for us. Knowing this helps both of us

Monifa and Lumumba Bandele and family



acknowledge our own anxieties and fears and release them because we want the best for each other.”

What does it take to get there? “We need to re-Africanize ourselves,” Dr. Wade offers. “There is great worth in connecting with many of the practices and the spiritual values that sustained our ancestors. If we are to make strong marriages, families and communities, we need to reclaim both path and purpose.”

Monifa Bandele has been married to Lumumba Bandele for 12 years. Lifetime community activists, the Bandeles are residents of Brooklyn, New York, where they are raising their two daughters, 8-year-old Adasa and 11-year-old Naima. Monifa says, “We’ve known each other all of our lives. Our fathers were friends, and we grew up in the same circle. But we didn’t start to date until we were in our late twenties. One day we just seemed to look at each other with fresh eyes. But since we are both children of divorce, we had no road maps.”

Here’s what worked for them, according to Lumumba. He says, “We made a conscious decision not to model our marriage after anyone else’s.” Monifa agrees: “We decided to create our own rules, ones that work for us, and to find our own way. **Every family is its own country.**” And, adds Lumumba, “You

have to learn to be fluid. We all grow, so you have to learn how to re-situate yourselves.”

For the Bandeles, that means regularly scheduled time for each other—date nights—and open, honest communication. And laughter, stresses Lumumba.

“Doctors say that laughter is good for the body. Well, we think it’s good for a relationship as well.” To balance out the challenging times, he says, “We laugh a lot.”

Leonard and Rosalind Jeffries have been married for 46 years.

They reside in New Jersey and are both academics at universities in New York City. Although they have no children of their own, they have parented, mentored and shepherded a host of young people. The renowned Dr. Leonard Jeffries, a passionate and fearless champion for our people and Afrocentric scholarship, is the former chair of the Department of



Drs. Leonard and Rosalind Jeffries

African American Studies at the City College of the City University of New York and the City University of New York Institute for Research on the Diaspora in the Americas and Caribbean, where he remains as a professor. Dr. Rosalind Robinson Jeffries is an equally courageous advocate of African and African diasporic history and culture. Museum curator, educator, lecturer, Dr.

Rosalind Jeffries is on the teaching faculty of the School of Visual Arts in New York City. Dr. Leonard is sure that having a deep and unbreakable connection to Africa is key to a successful African American marriage. And, he says, “Rosalind and I share a deep commitment to our people and an abiding love for Africa, where we have lived and worked many times over the years. Africa is at the heart of our scholarship, and imbedded in the fabric of our marriage—as is our commitment to the struggle to help our people rise.”

And to this, he adds, “What sustains our marriage—and I would argue, any good marriage over time—is that we have an agreed-upon process of communication and a process for handling problems. My wife is very spiritual, and she brings her powerful sense of spirit into every aspect of our relationship, and I trust and rely on her wisdom. We share the belief that we, like all people, are a manifestation of God, living a human experience. Rosalind and I have mission, purpose and direction. Ours hasn’t always been a marriage free of struggle. But from the moment we exchanged vows, we’ve been a couple building for eternity. This is our lifelong commitment.”

Which, Rosalind Jeffries, underscores: “When you’re young and getting married, the power struggle can sometimes be fierce. There’s not enough love in those early days—of each other, of the Almighty. Each one of you has to master your fears. And each one of you has to have patience.”

Team Leaders:

Marcia Ann Gillespie, Joy Angela DeGruy, Ph.D.,
asha bandele

Team:

Shawn Ginwright, Ph.D., April R. Silver,
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WHAT WORKS

BUILDING FAMILY

Expert advice for every couple

BY MARCIA ANN GILLESPIE

From the moment we are born, we are in relationships. First and foremost with ourselves, and then with everyone we encounter intimately or casually throughout our lives. Every smile we exchange, every glance, each and every word we speak or is spoken to us may not have the same weight, but has significance.

We ought to be mindful of all our relationships, no matter how casual. But our significant relationships require diligent work and a great deal of care from both individuals. When two individuals—wife/husband, gay/lesbian/transgendered partners, boyfriend/girlfriend, father/son, daughter/mother, brother/sister, friend/friend, mentor/mentee—are relating, then two worlds are, in essence, intertwining. We each bring all our life experiences, pains, joys, filters and insecurities with us—and when our lives entwine, the complexities begin.

TENDING THE GARDEN

Our relationships afford us opportunities to grow and learn. “The strength of relationships,” noted author Iyanla Vanzant so wisely points out, “is in their ability to provide individuals with a mirror which enables them to see things about the self that would not or could not be accessed on their own.” Significant relationships—the ones we have, the ones we may be seeking or longing for—are like gardens. If you want your garden to take root, you have to prepare the ground, get your hands in the soil, and dig. If it is to grow and flourish from year to year, it needs consistent care, fertilizer, water, warmth and light. Though some of us discover an intuitive understanding of how to make our gardens thrive, if you have never seen a

garden or been taught how to make one grow, chances are the results may not be what you hoped for. And even the best gardeners are constantly seeking more information.

LET LOVE SPEAK

Eric and Elaine Johnson have been providing relationship counseling and advice to singles and couples and with groups and organizations in Houston, Texas, and around the country for more than a dozen years. Helping people establish and maintain healthy relationships is what Optimum Lifestyle Community Development Corp., their counseling service, is all about. In conversation with this dynamic duo, the joy they each have and share is palpable and contagious. There's lots of laughter, the talk flows freely, openly, and oh, so honestly about their own relationship and the understanding that they seek to foster in their counseling. They are each master gardeners who, in addition to training as counselors, bring an abundance of innate wisdom, skills learned during their 15-plus years of marriage and parenting of six children. The Johnsons bring a passionate sense of purpose and mission to their practice.

When talking to singles and couples, they stress the importance of knowing one's self. They urge us to take time, think long and deep about our purpose in life, our values and goals, acknowledge our humanity, recognize our weaknesses, vulnerabilities and strengths. They remind us to see ourselves as one with nature and that, like nature, we are constantly changing, experiencing different seasons. They encourage us to see and embrace the Divine within ourselves.

And they recommend that we use the following proper tools to tend our gardens:

1. COMMUNICATION

Open and loving communication is a key component of successful relationships. When a person brings understanding to a relationship and can feel in his or her heart what another is saying, not merely repeating what was spoken but clothing themselves with understanding of the person's thought process, reasoning and conviction, then

they are really communicating. Communicating deeply requires understanding far more than just words; it's about opening our mind and heart.

It's about talking to and with and not "at" or "past" each other. And it's about learning to really listen. Listening is the root of understanding—not the same as hearing. We can hear sounds, words being spoken, but we must listen intently to understand what's being said and what the words mean. To do so, we must recognize and remove our filters, all the perceptions and opinions we've been taught or picked up along our life journey. If our filters are not removed, our interpretation can be flawed.

Effective communication is an ever-evolving, lifelong process, something we must continue working at. A lack of effective communication often tops the list of problems that lead to the failure of many relationships. African Americans have the added problem of struggling with open emotional wounds, the product of racism and a host of other destructive issues visited upon us in a hostile and dysfunctional environment. We are faced with the task of supporting and assisting each other while trying to avoid the vulnerable places in our own hearts and minds. This makes learning to communicate effectively all the more important.

Similarly, it is vital to remember that all words have power. Our society too often lacks positive speaking. We build up or tear down one another and our relationships with our words. When we speak positively, we cause the universe to create and manifest that which we request. The same is true for negative words. Slander, gossip, mean-spirited words and put-downs are pervasive in our society and the media and generate so much ill will, violence and death.

Knowing that words have such impact, monitor how you use them. Ask yourself, Am I building up or tearing down? Find ways to speak positively of and to your partner, your children, the people in your world. It will cause change and harmony to happen in you and in others.

2. EMPATHY

Put yourself in the other person's shoes. Try to understand what the one you care for is feeling

and thinking. You won't be able to show grace when grace is needed if you lack empathy. The lack of empathy makes us selfish. We think only of ourselves, what's in it for me. With empathy comes a sense of service and the desire to benefit others.

3. INTEGRITY AND TRUST

Integrity is all about living one's life honestly, telling the truth, opening our heart, and not hiding behind the mask we've been taught to wear. It means trusting being you—being true to yourself, your word and to others. Integrity eliminates suspicion from our relationships. When we are kind and gentle with one another and walking our talk, trust naturally flows.

4. VISION

All of us must have a vision for the life we want so we can plan and know where we are going. Partners need a shared vision for their relationship as well, so they are planning, building and growing together. Vision forces us to see long-term, so even when the present looks grim, we know where we are heading. Having a strong vision will keep us anchored in the midst of a storm and throughout the seasons of life and relationships. With vision, we maintain focus.

5. STANDARDS

We need to have standards, principles that we believe in and try to live by. This calls for self-examination. What are your values? How did you come by them? Are these things that really matter to you, or are you simply repeating a litany that you learned from others? Take the time to understand yourself and what really matters to you. You were created to express in words and deeds who you are and what you value. But we must be careful not to impose our values on others or to expect them to be who we want them to be. We have to be mindful that relationships will be rooted in conflict when partners don't share similar values and standards and lack understanding, tolerance and mutual respect.

6. INTIMACY

Being comfortable with each other, completely

genuine and real is the essence of intimacy. We must be willing to be vulnerable. Having intimate relationships is a hallmark of the human experience; don't allow fear, insecurity and past hurts to rob you of this rewarding dimension of life. Some of us make deep connections easily, for others it requires practice.

Intimacy begins within. We have to do our own personal self-assessment and self-reflection work. Our guard comes down with our partners and others when we let go of the fear of being judged. When we realize that each person is perfectly imperfect, made so by our Creator, and doing the best we can to take care of ourselves. Open your heart to yourself and to others. Enjoy the journey of self-discovery and learning what's in the hearts and minds of others.

7. ALLOW FOR SPACE

Successful couples know that spending every free moment together isn't a wise move for themselves or their relationship. It's smothering. We should give our partner what we need ourselves—breathing room, time alone. We all need space for other friendships, to pursue hobbies, personal goals, to read, go to ball games, hang out at a spa. We all need and are nourished when we take time alone, time with our thoughts, time to contemplate, time to listen to the Holy Spirit.

8. COMMITMENT

Commitment is about bringing our mind, heart and soul fully into our intimate relationships so that we are prepared to journey together through good times and during the rough patches. Many successful couples say that they have committed not to bring drama to their sacred union—no blowouts, knockdown and drag-out battles, no skeletons in the closet, no ugly surprises. They say they strive to be each other's best friend, that they share everything, the good, the bad and the ugly about themselves and work at staying committed to this all the time. Couples in happy long-term relationships have identified commitment as the glue that keeps their partnerships tight—the commitment to "stay put," not give up, shut down or stray. This is no small

feat. Compassion, counseling, forgiveness, recommitment—many long-married couples say these have been in the healing mix. Commitment at this level builds the relationship muscle we Black

folks need to feel fulfilled and move our children and community forward. The rewards we will reap—personally and collectively—will be rich and deep.

HOW TO LOVE: A VIEW FROM A BLACK MAN'S PERSPECTIVE

BY SHAWN GINWRIGHT, PH.D.

There are places, hidden from public view, where Black men love, laugh and cry together. Sometimes, however, we cover up these feelings so as not to appear vulnerable to the world. In our relationships, we make statements like “I’m aight” or “I got this” as a way not to let others in too deep. While these tough fronts protect us from unnecessary pain, we also develop a cool detachment from our partners that ultimately makes it difficult to foster true intimacy.

How can Black men love more fully? Given the long-standing, color-coded obstacles in our paths, deep loving relationships, healthy families and joy in our dating can be revolutionary acts. The need is for us to heal from the multilayered traumas—the collective and the personal—so that we can be better at living, loving, caring and dreaming together.

I have learned a little about love, marriage and relationships over the span of my 16-year marriage. Here are a few practical lessons that I hope can lead to healthy and more fulfilling relationships:

Tell the truth. It is easy to hide the truth from our partners, because truth telling can be scary. It can also be empowering. You will learn that by telling the truth, you develop a sense of power in the relationship.

Every battle isn’t worth fighting. There is no need to argue about why you didn’t clean the house while she was out shopping for groceries. The

truth is, you wanted to watch the Lakers beat up the Knicks! Simply tell her that she was right, and clean up during halftime. Over time she will develop the same habit of not battling over every little thing.

Dream together. It is important to encourage our partners to dream, no matter how unrealistic that vision or goal might seem to you. Encouraging their dreams communicates to our partners that we care about their intimate thoughts.

Give yourself permission to grow. Often we carry baggage from past relationships into new ones. We also have images of what relationships are supposed to be, and we are disappointed when our partners don’t meet our expectations. We need to give ourselves permission to grow and learn from each other and from people who model what we want to become.

Get on the path to healing our relationships. There is no blueprint for how to have a healthy relationship with a Black man. However, we brothers have a responsibility and a right to learn how to love. This means that we will make mistakes, but in doing so, and with our partner’s loving forgiveness, we will become better men for our children, our partners and our communities. I believe that every Black man wants to love and give himself fully in his relationship. Our challenge is not just learning how to love, but garnering the courage, the light and the wisdom to live and grow in love.



CREATIVITY

“To speak a language is to assume a culture and take responsibility for a civilization.” —FRANZ FANON

“Playing the piano helps me to focus and to express myself in ways I can’t do just with words.”

Amina Suzanne King, 12

ARTS AND ACTIVISM

A new world is possible. Our children need only the right paintbrushes, pens, music and moves to create it

BY SHANI JAMILA

Art is a primary energy force. It emanates from the core of us, from our soul. It is not simply a raw, disconnected expression. The statement an artist creates comes out of a social and artistic context, and that statement—whether it’s one we watch or listen to or read—is then experienced by others. Throughout this process, all involved are changed in some way. We are angry, or we are uplifted. We feel connection with a wider group, or we feel excluded. We exhale because our stories are being witnessed and told, or we cringe because we are made small, narrow unreal versions of ourselves. This is how art moves society along, changing attitudes and perceptions that impact social, political and economic systems. Art has great power, and when offered with love and imbued with truth, it can heal our psyches. And because it can, it is a cohesive force in creating and sustaining community.

Art can also be the catalyst for widespread social change. African Americans have historically used art as both a source of liberation and inspiration. From spirituals to folk art to poetry to dance, African American artistic expression has been used to emancipate the enslaved, to strengthen our communities in the face of struggle, and

to pass on our triumphs as people.

Using art in this way is particularly important in reaching our young people, so many of whom are trapped in schools that are failing them. Too often, the poor education and simultaneous pop culture socialization they receive in these institutions tend to prepare them for prison rather than college. Most often students go through school with little if any exposure to the arts or the role that art has played in African American history. This means they are not always accustomed to being embraced by an art that heals. Instead, they are force-fed, vis-à-vis television and hateful music, a mean art, an art that tells them they should only aspire to be thugs and hos.

To combat this kind of tracking, we must ground our children in a worldview that promotes cross-cultural communication, understanding and sharing. And we must nurture in them the kind of unshakable self-awareness and self-esteem that enables them to navigate a difficult world. If we want them to achieve the success they deserve, we must help them hold fast to the following:

- 1. A deep understanding of the world** in which they will have to function. The

foundation of their knowledge must be anchored in a positive self-concept and taught in an environment that encourages growth.

2. A realization that all education is foundational. The values we practice are introduced early and often in a range of ways, from school settings and family to media, church, entertainment and sports.

3. An understanding that education can be fun, but that it is often hard, monotonous work that requires a commitment far beyond the kind of commitment required to learn a new dance or handshake. It demands deep study and quiet time. But its reward is freedom. Its reward is something that no one can ever take away.

4. An appreciation that multiculturalism is created from the substantive contributions of all cultures, from Africa to Europe to Asia to the Americas. We need not hate, disavow or diminish any one group's contribution to society. To honor our Black selves does not mean we must dishonor those who are non-Black. It means that finally we have to embrace the whole of the truth, exposing the ugly, elevating the beauty.

In the end, it is young people's active participation in music, dance, painting, poetry, film, photography and the indigenous crafts of their people that rounds out their humanity, makes them more comfortable in their own skin, culture and capabilities. An integral part of A New Way Forward's approach is encouraging our young ones to create their own narratives and expand their imagination to foster individual and social change.

Team Leader:

Shani Jamila

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THE ARTS ACTIVIST'S GLOSSARY

The 4 Terms You Need To Know

BY APRIL R. SILVER

ACTIVISM

Activism is a purposeful act or series of actions designed to effect social, political, economic, spiritual, or environmental change.

ART

In a global sense, there are many definitions for this word. They range from using the word as a concept and as part of a branch of philosophy known as aesthetics to using the word as a process of creating. Historically, art has also come to be defined as a vehicle for the expression of human thoughts and emotions or as an indirect means of communication.

ARTS ACTIVISM

Arts activism is the concept, study and practice of relating and/or intertwining the fields of art with methods of activism. It's an interdisciplinary approach to understanding, experiencing, and sharing one's life. Arts and activism support the idea that art has holistic, practical and transformative meaning in an individual's life and that of his/her community, and that activism is necessary for individual and collective development.

CULTURE

Culture is represented by the shared experiences, ideals, customs and traditions of a people. The most popular expressions are often thought of as performance or visual-based expressions (music, dance, sculpture). Yet cultural expressions may also manifest as cuisine, hairstyles, clothing, literature, social games and much more.

WHAT WORKS

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Great activities for artists and activists

BY SHANI JAMILA

WRITTEN EXPRESSION

HAIKU

This Japanese lyrical verse form is accessible to young people. Haiku simultaneously transmits writing, history, literacy and healing. It also allows for the history of artists who are activists in our community to emerge. For example, by using Sonia Sanchez's haiku, people who may not have known of her work before can now become acquainted with her poetry and community work. A trained person can teach the form Sanchez innovated—*sonku*—as a way to demonstrate how to become bold and create our own structure and definitions.

"I AM FROM" POEM

Encourage young people to create poetry from an experience or a memory. To start an "I Am From" poem, have them follow these three steps:

- 1) name three objects in their home
- 2) identify a thing in their backyard or neighborhood
- 3) name a food from their childhood or three places in their community

This exercise allows participants to reflect on the kinds of experiences they've had and to create a different way of introducing themselves. It also provides a different way to think about creating poetry.

COMMUNITY POEM

To create this kind of poem, a facilitator should give a group of young people one piece of

paper and have each one write two sentences. Before each person passes it on to the next, the sheet is folded so that only the second sentence of what he or she has written is visible. After everyone has participated, the sheet of paper should be unfolded and read aloud to the group. Altogether the sentences make up a poem that establishes equal validity of voice and creates community.

LITERATURE AND JOURNALING

We must encourage young people to be both readers and writers. In addition to exposing them to accomplished authors, we can introduce them to journaling. Writing just three pages every morning as a creative, spiritual process can turn lives around. Journaling can also be done in a group, with a set amount of time—say, 15 minutes—allotted for writing. At the conclusion of the exercise, participants can share their thoughts with the group.

VISUAL ARTS

COLLAGE

Collage can be done by anyone because, although everyone is not an artist, everyone is creative. Collage can also have a therapeutic effect as a form of meditation.

Have facilitators or participants cut out images and words from magazines so that each person can make a collage that represents them. All the collages should share collective elements by having participants address such points as the following:

- Where the participant is from
- Favorite subject
- Least favorite subject
- Hobbies
- Goals
- Dreams

After assembling the collages, each person can explain to the group what the piece means and why he or she chose particular images or words. Then they all can post their papers on the wall. The individual collages can be used to create a

collective “quilt” on the wall. This process allows for the individual and the team to merge.

VIDEO JOURNALISM

Our young people must begin to “think” in video. There is a dearth of Black video journalists (VJs), who are both shooters and producers, modern-day one-person bands. They can have lucrative careers and make an important contribution as news outlets all over the world dispatch them to get video content for television and the Internet.

As traditional news outlets continue to fall by the wayside, it is imperative for young people to be trained for the new, highly technical society so that they can translate the knowledge of conventional journalism to video. They need to learn how to research story ideas and produce content in order to keep in step with the ever-expanding digital age and to tell their own stories.

PERFORMANCE ARTS

More than any other art form, music and its physical response, dance, are integral and harmonizing forces in the lives of Black people

But performance art need not be restricted to music. Use the talents of the group, incorporating performance and visual arts. Examples include creating graffiti backdrops, staging live performances, painting, or holding poetry readings. In this way, you can support local artists who are looking for exposure while simultaneously providing an atmosphere that will support the other aspects of your work.

THEATER

Live theater and its attributes—music, dance, singing, acting—are all part of the healing arts. It is a way for us as human beings to connect with ourselves, our stories and our history. Unlike film, another powerful medium, live theater experience is immediate, a way of seeing performers use their craft to invoke emotions and thoughts in real time. It inspires and causes reflection.

We have a strong history in our communities of tying theater in to movement work. For example, during the sixties and seventies, the Free Southern Theater would tour predominantly Black, rural towns in the South to do


“African Americans have historically used art as both a source of liberation and inspiration.”



throughout the Diaspora. The history of African American music reveals it to be a social and psychological reflection of our experience in, and response to, America. Music is an aural representation of the people. Music *is* the people. To engage youngsters and set the tone for the day, open with a song. It can be a solo performed by a great singer, if there’s one in the group, or it can be a community chorus. Or use both approaches. You can also divide the room into sections and assign each a part of the song, whether separate parts of harmony or a lyric or phrase that can be sung as a round. The most that’s required is for one person to serve as director to teach the song and direct the group in singing it.

performances that explored civil rights themes. That same era also saw the emergence of El Teatro Campesino, which began as the artistic arm of the United Farm Workers union and delved into Chicano life in the United States.

Young people today should be trained in theater arts tradition as actors, producers, writers, directors and more. The National Black Theater Festival, the Hip Hop Theater Festival and the performance poetry forum Brave New Voices provide outlets for contemporary creative spirits. The viability of the urban theater market also provides artistic outlets and career possibilities for talented young people in our communities.



"I listen to music and watch movies, but I don't apply any of it to my own life. They're too violent."

D'vaughn Brooks, 20

MEDIA WATCH

"The media speaks louder than Mom. Neither parents nor teachers can compete with the power of media propaganda." -TOMBURRELL

SAY IT LOUD

It's 9:00 P.M. Do you know what your children are watching?

BY TOM BURRELL

For centuries, African Americans have been bombarded with the prolific messaging of a marketing and media campaign designed to instill a sense of Black inferiority. From slave auction posters to minstrel shows, from *Amos and Andy* to *The Flava of Love*, we Black folks have been exposed to toxic images of ourselves; images that have burrowed their way into our very souls and become a poisonous element of our self-concepts.

Why is media messaging so important? Study after study has shown conclusively that media messaging—particularly media such as television, film, music and music videos—has a huge impact on the worldview of both children and adults. These studies suggest that this is why there is such a strong correlation between violent and sexual behaviors and mass-media viewership.

Sticks and Stones Will Break Your Bones and Names Will Also Hurt You

According to Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, the process of socialization involves children forming a set of beliefs and values about themselves, culture, family, society and ethnic/racial

identity. If they are consistently exposed to negative images of Black folks, it stands to reason that those images will strongly impact their sense of self and racial identity—and not for the better. If, for instance, one of their media heroes boasts of murdering his enemies for “respect,” or proudly calls himself a “pimp,” how could this not affect a young mind?

Take Jay-Z's video for “Run This Town,” for instance. Jay-Z, along with megastars Rihanna and Kanye West, is stylishly outfitted in postapocalyptic gang threads, replete with bandoliers of bullets, clubs, and a plethora of other blunt-force weapons. They are surrounded by a violent-looking mob of Black faces, each wielding a stick or a club, each ready and waiting for the impending turf war. They make it look tough; they make it look sexy. They make it look like all the things that young kids want to be.

Now, if one were to watch this back-to-back with the never-to-be forgotten video of the heinous murder of Derrion Albert, the 16-year-old Chicago high school student, what similarities would we see? The sticks, the clubs, the surging Black mob intent on violence and victory have lost any shimmer of sexiness and glamour.

Yet the similarities are there, and they are more than chilling.

Listen to the words of “White Meat” by Lil’ Jon & the Eastside Boyz:

I know where yo kids and yo wife be, wife be... Bust a nigga head to the white meat, white meat...

While nodding to the catchy beat, reflect on the planks of wood used to pummel Derrion about the head and body. In real life, the death of a child in what amounts to a senseless turf war is sheer insanity. From the moment we stepped off of slave ships in chains, there has been a well-executed media campaign, a well-executed

1. The Black family has failed.

We are exposed to words and images of broken homes, struggling single parents, or families with physical, sexual or verbal abuse.

2. Blacks are sexually promiscuous.

We are exposed to words and images of men and women who are chronically incapable and uninterested in loving, monogamous relationships. We are shown images of both men and women who use their sexuality to “get paid” and “get over.”

3. Black is NOT beautiful.

We are exposed to words and images that encourage a Eurocentric beauty ideal, and portray traditionally “African”

“Videos of violent-looking Black kids wielding a stick or a club make it look tough, sexy, like all of the things that young kids want to be.”



strategy with consistent messaging, resulting in the branding of African Americans as inferior to Whites in intellect, physical beauty and spiritual worthiness. The tragic result has been the internalization and acceptance of Black inferiority by Black folk themselves, to such a great extent that we have become powerful promoters and creators of content for the media messaging campaign, and voluntary consumers of its poison.

WHAT MESSAGES DO THE MEDIA SEND ABOUT US?

The media messaging campaign has been nothing if not consistent. One has only to watch or listen to most media designated as “Black” to witness its promulgation. In almost any piece of Black media, you will witness at least one of the following toxic messages:

features as “ugly,” “bad,” or as something that “needs fixing.”

4. Blacks are violent.

We are exposed to words and images that portray Blacks as dangerous, violent, brutish and criminal.

5. Black equals unhealthy.

We are exposed to words and images that portray us as self-destructive and physically unhealthy. This messaging promotes an unhealthy food culture, and a culture that overimbibes in both alcohol and drugs.

6. Blacks overspend and undersave.

We are exposed to words and images of Blacks “living to the limit” and “living for today.” Blacks are often marketed high-ticket “status” items that depreciate quickly.



“Media messaging has a huge impact on the worldview of both children and adults.”

7. Black are underachievers.

We are exposed to words and images that celebrate the Black underachiever, and viciously mock Blacks who are smart, educated or “reach too far.”

8. Black are followers.

We are exposed to words and images that portray Blacks as incapable of effecting change in their lives or communities without outside leadership.

9. Blacks are not united.

We are exposed to words and images that portray us as backstabbing Judases, incapable of sticking together, forever grasping for other Blacks’ successes.

10. Blacks are buffoons.

We are exposed to words and images that portray us as buffoonish, willing to do anything, including denigrating ourselves, for a laugh.

Often we hear the cry of civil rights advocates to increase the number of Blacks in decision-making positions in the media. This has happened to some extent, yet there is no evidence that having more Black editors, television network owners or executives has decreased the negative media messages; in fact, the opposite may be true.

Team Leaders:

Tom Burrell, Madeleine Moore Burrell

Team:

Dr. Na’im Akbar, Khephra Burns,
Michaela Angela Davis, Michael Eric Dyson

WHAT WORKS

BREAKING IT DOWN

How to be media-savvy

BY MADELEINE MOORE BURRELL

What can we do to dismantle this media messaging campaign and begin to heal the centuries of trauma and feelings of inferiority that it has produced? There is a school of thought that advocates turning off the negative messages by using parental controls on the television. This does have merit, but we cannot isolate and insulate ourselves and our children 24/7. To raise awareness and develop the ability to consciously dissect media messages is an option that allows us to at once understand and transcend the negative onslaught.

AWARENESS:

Our first goal must be to spread Media Literacy. No Black person should ever watch or listen to another piece of media without having his or her antenna up for any toxic messaging. We must ask ourselves the following questions: What is this piece of media trying to tell me about Black folks? Does the messaging hurt Black people? Does the messaging help Black people? Does the messaging have no impact? Being Media

“There has been a well-executed strategy to brand African Americans as inferior to Whites in intellect, physical beauty and spiritual worthiness.



Literate allows us to watch with a purpose, to be “media watchdogs,” and to ferret out the poison that is killing us and expose it to the light.

ACTION:

When we discover that a piece of media is part of the campaign, we have the opportunity and the obligation to do something about it. In this new technological age, we can all be soldiers in this effort. Send an e-mail blast, start an online blog or video log (vlog) that chronicles your media finds, and use social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. The idea is to flood the Internet with our findings, raise awareness, cause a stir, and begin to hit them where their money is: the Black consumer base.

ADVOCACY:

We need to use our currency wisely, not to spend it on our own destruction. We must become aggressive in supporting artists and companies that create healthy Black images, and withhold that support from those who are part of the problem and go public with both strategies for change. The Web site www.stopthebrainwash.com is a resource for action steps to wielding the power of our currency.

AUTONOMY:

We must invoke our imaginative genius in creating a Positive Propaganda campaign, designed to defeat feelings of Black inferiority and replace them with feelings of pride and

esteem. Our own Black artists, actors, musicians and rappers, etc., will create this campaign.

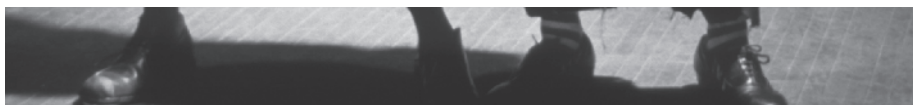
The Web site will also provide action steps on how to use new media to expose the good and bad media products targeting our communities.

EDUCATION:

The multimedia presentation designed to complement the recently published book *Brainwashed: Challenging the Myth of Black Inferiority* by Thomas Burrell, who built the largest Black-owned advertising and marketing company in the world, is a useful tool to aid in providing mentors and mentees with information to understand and begin reversing the negative messages that shape our internal and external worldviews. It’s a life-changing read to give to young people and adults alike.

TOOL FOR MEDIA LITERACY:

To help develop and/or enhance critical thinking skills necessary to discern if what you are watching is moving us forward or dragging us backward, spend a day making notes of every negative image you see or hear on television and radio, and read in the paper. What are the messages you hear about Black people? Ask yourself about each one: Does this message help Black self-esteem? Does this message hurt Black self-esteem? Does this message have no effect on Black self-esteem? If you see anything that hurts Black self-esteem, this piece of media is part of the Media Messaging campaign and warrants an organized, collective and strategic response.



COMMUNITY

“Make a difference about something
other than yourself.” —TONI MORRISON

“I want to start an outreach
program to get the gangsters off
of the streets; they need to
know they have a better life to live
without gangbanging.”

Martika Thompson, 19

REIGNITING THE FLAME

The power to shape the laws that govern our lives belongs to the people, and we must learn to use it

BY SHAWN GINWRIGHT, PH.D. AND DR. NOEL S. ANDERSON

For years Joyce Williams, a single mother of three boys, did not have access to fresh, quality produce in her East Oakland neighborhood. The only fresh foods available at the grocery store in Joyce's community were heads of wilted iceberg lettuce, bags of oranges that collected dust, and sacks of old potatoes piled on the floor right below the chips, cookies and motor oil. In fact, the local store sold more liquor than food. Joyce had to take the bus all the way across town to feed her family.

The last straw came when Joyce ran out of food while entertaining a house full of family and friends over the Thanksgiving holiday. She had the money to buy more food, but not the five hours it would take to ride the bus across town to the nearest well-stocked supermarket, shop and return home. Joyce felt embarrassed and humiliated. She was angry—and, most important, Joyce was committed to doing something about the meager shopping options in her neighborhood that had disrupted the holiday she had planned for her family and friends.

A Blueprint for Change

After talking to a number of her neighbors about not having a decent grocery

store nearby, Joyce attended a meeting at her church that was sponsored by the organization People Improving Communities Through Organizing (PICO). Following a powerful leadership model long employed by southern Black churches, PICO uses a method of working with faith communities to address the problems and concerns of their neighborhoods, and, in turn, to revitalize and strengthen neighborhoods. At the PICO meeting, Joyce learned that the city of Oakland was granting three times more business permits to liquor stores than to food markets and grocery stores. She also heard that some city council representatives even encouraged the opening of new liquor stores because they generated lucrative streams of revenue for the city. Joyce could see that a major part of the problem was that the city discouraged grocery stores from doing business in her neighborhood. She resolved to change these policies and create more positive options for her community.

Joyce and her neighbors worked closely with their local city council representative. It would take months for

the group to gather enough signatures to move the city council to consider its request to invite well-stocked grocery stores into the community. But Joyce and the team's persistence in canvassing the neighborhood with their petition ultimately forced the city council to vote on and approve a policy that would make it easier to create grocery businesses throughout the city.

Lessons Learned

Joyce and her neighbors learned three important lessons in devising the successful strategy that compelled the city council to work with a local developer and grocery chain to build a quality grocery store in their neighborhood. First, people closest to the problem are best suited to solve it. Community residents know better than policy experts what families and neighborhoods need. The residents' voices should be at the center of political life in their communities.

Second, government can play a vital role in improving neighborhoods, but local civic leaders need to have the power to shape policy and hold public officials accountable.

neighborhood? What changes are needed that will benefit your area? What will it take to effect change? Are you willing to get involved and work with others to bring needed changes to fruition? These questions and answers are at the heart of driving the civic and political changes needed to revitalize our under-resourced and struggling communities.

Our Legacy of Political Action

African American communities have long played a critical role in local, regional and national policy development. And their participation has led to a better quality of life for those suffering from injustices and social ills. We have a history of political engagement. Courageously, we organized, faced violence, fought to end slavery, and gained the right to vote and access to education along with many other freedoms many of us take for granted today. In recent years, we have had a higher number of Blacks in Congress than ever before, according to the Congressional Research Service. Our political will and might helped to put the first African American president, Barack Obama, in the White House.

"We have a history of political engagement. Courageously, we organized, faced violence, fought to end slavery, and gained the right to vote and access to education along with other freedoms taken for granted today."



Third, when neighborhood people use their power, they can protect what is important to their families and their communities. Our power is created by organizing and forging relationships with people who care about the same issues and are willing to work together to improve things.

What issues matter most to you in your

Tremendous progress has been made. Some of us are thriving, but many are losing ground. One in three Black children lives in poverty. Now we must organize and push for more access—to quality education and health care, affordable housing, jobs that pay family-supporting wages, high-level corporate and

government posts and appointed positions with authority. Racist practices make securing investment capital to develop and grow Black entrepreneurial efforts a tough fight that only unity and strategy can win.

Charismatic leadership is abundant in our community. But we must demand more. We need leaders who don't allow ego to override mission. In our houses of worship, we must have prophetic leaders who inspire congregations to stand strong for social justice.

It's up to us to keep our leaders focused and fighting for justice for Black people. Political leaders who deliver must have our unwavering support. We must vote and push family, friends and neighbors to the polls—organize transportation to the polls through our faith institutions—so our voices are heard strongly in all primary as well as midterm elections.

Equal Rights for All

The old top-down model of leadership, where direction comes from just one person, does not empower people to take ownership of an issue. It takes the collective effort of the many to make and sustain real change. Community organizers like Ella Baker, Kwame Toure (Stokely Carmichael) and Barack Obama understood this and promoted through word and deed that each person in a movement can help shape the movement.

We need to move toward the alternative model that the Reverend Eustacia Moffet-Marshall calls mutual accountability in leadership. In this alternative model, leadership is from the bottom up. Everyone is considered a leader, and we're accountable to one another. And primarily, we must make a place for young people's participation and for their voices to be heard at every level. They are brilliant, passionate, tech-savvy and prepared not just to follow but also to lead.

REDEFINING POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN OUR COMMUNITIES

BY SHAWN GINWRIGHT, PH.D.,
AND DR. NOEL S. ANDERSON

Our elected officials were put in government to represent us, but our political engagement does not stop there. All of us must hold them accountable to the communities they represent. Further, true political engagement calls for more than individual charismatic leaders but collective action by all—from the grass roots to the halls of government—to create policy that uplifts our communities.

The economy This is one area in which targeted public policy is required for our communities. Steven Pitts, labor expert at the University of California at Berkeley, reminds us that higher-than-average unemployment for African Americans is a chronic problem, and young Black people experience discrimination in the labor market and much greater unemployment than their White peers. The reality of an increasing number of underemployed and unemployed will have long-term effects if we don't organize for more job creation and job training in our communities.

Pitts argues that we need “not just jobs, but good jobs, with livable wages.” Pushing our elected officials to create jobs in government and the public sector is a place to start. Promoting incentives for private businesses to create jobs in our communities is another charge to initiate. Finally, youth-employment and training programs that develop needed skills is one area that young people themselves should organize and advocate around.

Education or Catastrophe: The Choice Is Ours

BY SUSAN L. TAYLOR

Pushing for top-tier public schools and academic-enrichment programs in under-resourced communities is how we will transform the lives of our struggling young and our communities. This demands coalition building and collective leadership. Parents, students, teachers, elders, faith communities and representatives of all political parties must be at the table. Children in failing schools are in a state of emergency—today 80 percent of Black fourth-graders in the nation are reading below grade level, and 56 percent are functionally illiterate. They can catch up. All they need is us—able, caring adults to act strategically and swiftly on their behalf.

Starting today, we must not only talk about the crisis but also move toward solving it, toward preparing all our young to meet the extraordinary demands of the twenty-first century so they can thrive and lead in this new world. Our children need all hands on deck. Changing the landscape is possible, but only at our command. Support and demand that our civil rights organizations and denominations, our fraternities and sororities, the union leaders and political leaders of all parties take up this critical fight. Whether or not you're a parent, even if your own children are in great schools or are adults, this is the battle we all must join in order to secure the vulnerable ones who are falling into peril on our watch.

The battle for quality schools must be all-encompassing. We have to push for school facilities that don't look like prisons but are bright, welcoming, safe and equipped with well-trained, well-paid teachers, the most

current technology, in-school literacy curricula, science- and math-enrichment programs and up-to-date textbooks. Ensure a safe learning environment and drop the chain-link gates and police stationed at our children's schools. Real security is not about bars and cops. It's about love—learning to value ourselves, each other and the genius in our children. It's our having high expectations for them and putting in place the supports they need to discover the extraordinary within themselves. This means meeting our children where they are and ensuring that along with all of these measures, we provide culturally competent curricula so that our young will know who they are and grow strong and proud of our heritage.

The National CARES Mentoring Movement was founded to recruit caring mentors and role models anywhere in the nation our children are losing ground. One of the areas we are focused on is working to connect stable, able adults with academic-enrichment mentoring programs. This is our commitment as we develop our capacity to serve children beyond the 56 cities where we now have volunteer leaders recruiting mentors and connecting them with existing youth-support organizations and in-school programs.

The bottom line—our bottom line—is that with community involvement, Black children will win. Members of Bishop Geoffrey V. Dudley's New Life in Christ Church congregation in Lebanon, Illinois, or as he calls them, the Life Changers, have adopted the entire ninth grade of a challenged school in nearby grossly underserved East St. Louis, Missouri. The Life Changers are mentoring the youngsters straight

into college. With group mentoring, academic support, retirees and the love and guidance of other congregants, grades are up, truancy is down, and the children are succeeding. There are many more churches than there are schools in our communities. If we connect them—small churches adopting a single classroom, midsize ones a grade, megachurches an entire school—within a decade we will see a seismic change in the landscape of Black America; we will write new history.

Children—including those in the historic 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* case, which outlawed “separate but equal” in education—have led the charge for better schools and for quality education. Young people have powerful voices and can be the best advocates for their

themselves. Make room for their voices and perspectives to be heard. Empower them to petition school-district leaders and elected officials to meet their needs. Encourage students to canvas their community, assess its needs, and write up specific policy proposals for elected officials. A number of cities throughout the country have experimented with youngsters working alongside elected officials to inform public policy that impact their communities. Let’s link arms and aims and commit to doing the most important work of our life.

Team Leaders:

Shawn Ginwright, Ph.D., Dr. Noel S. Anderson

Team:

Steven Pitts, Susan L. Taylor



“With community involvement, Black children will win. Mentoring equals higher grades and lower truancy.”

WHAT WORKS

**YES,
WE CAN**

The 5-point plan for victory

BY SHAWN GINWRIGHT, PH.D.

How do we continue to build upon our legacy of political engagement to end Black suffering and foster Black joy? How do we hold not only elected officials accountable but also redefine leadership from the grass roots to shape and influence public policy to better our communities? There are many paths to a more responsive political system and keys to assuring that our voices matter. Here are five critical points with some strategies culled from the Berkeley Labor Research Center to remember.

1. IDENTIFY A SPECIFIC ISSUE OR PROBLEM YOU FEEL PASSIONATE ABOUT THAT IMPACTS YOUR LIFE AND THE LIFE OF THE COMMUNITY

Rein in reforming schools, ending police harassment, advocating for job creation in your area, having more traffic lights at busy crossings—we all have things around us we want to change. When we are personally or emotionally invested in the issue, our engagement will be deep and sustained.

2. GALVANIZE NEIGHBORS, FRIENDS AND FAMILY WHO SHARE THE SAME CONCERN

Few issues impact us without touching others similarly. Children’s poor performance in school could be the result of a districtwide policy that places the least-qualified teachers at the lowest-performing schools, affecting all families. By asking questions, talking to others, organizing and investigating, we will discover that issues are

not an individual's problem but a community's challenge, which, with collective action, we can change.

3. DETERMINE WHAT THE SPECIFIC OUTCOME SHOULD BE, RATHER THAN WHAT IT SHOULD NOT BE Many people can identify things that are wrong about a policy, but few offer a viable alternative. For example, rather than focusing on reducing violence, community residents should discuss how citywide policy could support ways to increase safety or peace in a neighborhood. Focusing on what we want, rather than on what we don't want, forces us to consider what resources are required to achieve our goal. In the name of reducing violence, residents could request funds from the city to support initiatives with an emphasis on working together and looking out for one another: enriching after-school activities, cultural events, mentoring and job-readiness training programs that provide the way out of gangs to productivity that so many beleaguered youngsters are longing for. These are some of the supports that bring about safety in the streets.

4. IDENTIFY AND DETERMINE WHO HAS THE POWER TO FACILITATE THE DESIRED CHANGE While writing letters to Congress or the local city council is an effective first step for policy change, it is also important to consider exactly who has the power to make the specific change you desire. While Congress is powerful, it is unlikely that your representative in Congress can create legislation to repair the potholes on your street. That's a function of local government. By identifying specifically where the governmental power lies, you can focus your attention and leverage your influence more efficiently. Setting up regular meetings with your local city council representative or state legislator is an important way to build local political relationships that lead to policy change.

5. BUILD COLLECTIVE POWER—AND SUSTAIN IT Building support is the most important step in creating change in public

policy. The core team's leadership and networking skills will determine the depth and scope of its influence with responsible parties. Egos out of the way! Get the right people in the right positions. Here are ways to build your power base and gather support to address issues:

- **Build** neighborhood-resident councils because there is always power in numbers.
- **Create** intergenerational policy councils in our faith communities. Don't forget the elders (they are brave, have the time and will fight); don't forget our young (they have ideas, passion and technology skills).
- **Use social networking** strategies like blogs and Facebook to disseminate information about relevant topics to constituents. To keep the community informed and connected, create simple newsletters that are distributed electronically. Also print them and place them as handouts in locations where people won't miss them.
- **Shore up effective youth social networking** and community-support organizations in the Black community, even if you aren't a resident in one. Coast to coast, our effective grassroots nonprofit organizations are struggling for funding and shutting their doors because support continues to flow nearly exclusively and in large sums to big-name organizations. Many groups connected to the funding stream receive grants to help our community, and though their leaders may have the best intentions, from their boards to their executive directors and staff, too, they are disconnected from what's happening on the ground and the critical issues underserved Black families are struggling with.

Identify the most effective programs and work to ensure their survival, growth and sustainability. Speak up! Work with faith and political leaders, corporations and foundations to get proven-effective organizations into funding streams. Make sure they have top-tier grant writers, financial governance and pristine records tracking their successes.

MENTORING

“A child cannot be taught by anyone who despises him.” —JAMES BALDWIN



“Knowing that my little brothers are looking up to me reminds me to show them right from wrong.”

D’vaughn Brooks, 20

THE MIRACLE OF MENTORING

We are all called to take up this mission—the mission of securing our children

BY THOMAS W. DORTCH, JR.

At 38, as I lay in the hospital combating one of the deadliest forms of cancer, a form that fewer than 8 percent survive, I did not know whether I would have the opportunity to return home to love and guide my 2-year-old son and 10-year-old daughter. I so desperately wanted to be present in their lives, to be the ever-important male role model that I believed was critical to their well-being and success. While I was struggling through major surgery and chemotherapy, I received an outpouring of love not only from my family but also from the people in the communities that I had served and the people with whom I had worked and supported. I was moved. There was one group of well-wishers whose sentiments were particularly gratifying: the young people I had mentored over the years. In their unique voices, they expressed what I meant to them, how I had touched, even transformed, their lives. Their expressions were often comical. Through the pain, they made me laugh. Through the fear of

confronting mortality, I had no regrets. I knew I had made the right choices. Every second I spent mentoring was worth it. I knew that I had more to do.

Today, more than 22 years later, I give no less than 40 percent of my time to mentoring, either personally mentoring, designing mentoring programs, or informing adults of the tremendous need for and benefits of mentoring. For those who care, mentoring should be a way of life. Mentoring is a way of creating miracles.

There are too many young men and women in our communities without sufficient support systems. What they have instead are peers who in their own way define what life should be and how they should live. By being responsible adults, I know we can change the negative direction that many of those young people take—if we are there for them. They just need someone who is willing to listen, to hear what is on their minds, to hear their wishes for a better life, and to work with them to get where they want to go.

When I was growing up during segregation in Toccoa, Georgia, each of the caring adults in my community played a part in taking care of me and every other child, the old village approach. Children who entered our home without adequate clothing did not leave that way. My five siblings and I would note visitors' dimensions and hope that they were not our size. We knew that our mother would raid the closet and drawers of her same-gendered child who was closest in size to our guest. As children, we didn't understand. As adults, we are grateful for the values that were instilled in us. As a people, we have begun to experience soaring success.

lock us in and seek to barricade us from all that we fear, particularly from our young people. The sad reality is that the very people we will be protecting ourselves from tomorrow are the ones most in need of our help today. These young people need our help before it's too late, before they turn to a life of crime, before they run out of ethical options, before they believe that their lives and the lives of those around them are worthless, before they murder, before they die a violent, premature death. It is that urgent.

Mentoring works. Today, at age 60, I have mentors. I've always had mentors and people who looked out for me, even when I was rocking and rolling to success. Today I

"We've moved up, moved on, moved away—and one unintended consequence is that the children who were left behind are suffering."

We've moved up, moved on, moved away—and one unintended consequence is that the children who were left behind are suffering. They are no longer surrounded by the loving elders in the village who wanted a better life for every child, not just for the children in their own families, not just for the children who were fortunate enough to have been born into a loving, educated, progressive family. The children no longer have an abundance of positive role models right in the community. Today we have to re-create and strengthen what should be the village that surrounds the young men and young women in our community. We can no longer afford to have the I-take-care-of-mine-and-you-take-care-of-yours mentality.

If we don't step up as a people, we are going to find ourselves incarcerated—incarcerated by our protective fences, incarcerated by the security systems that

do this work, in part, because I understand that I didn't get to where I am by happenstance. I had a foundation. I had help. I had, and still have, people to lovingly guide me.

I find myself still checking in on the young people I started mentoring years ago. Though they are now adults and professionals, I still work with them, still give them advice. Until the day we die, we will always count on somebody who has meant something to us, who has been there for us. My mentors are a diverse group. Former U.S. Senator Sam Nunn is my mentor. Ambassador Andrew Young, who has been a mentor over the years, is still there for me. I still think about the lessons I learned from my late mentor Mayor Maynard Jackson and the late Jondelle Johnson (one of the most influential women in the NAACP). I have had male and female mentors.



We sometimes forget that there is something to be learned from all people.

One of the greatest joys I have today is reflecting on the young people I have worked with and marveling at how far they have come. Many of them were surprised when I told them that when I was growing up, I got into trouble. I did not violate the law, but I got into trouble. I remind them that there are no perfect people. It is important for young people to know we have all made mistakes, but we overcame them or we kept going in spite of them. We have to share our lives, share our journeys. We have to help young people understand that success is not magical. There are basic things that we all have to do. We need to help them achieve whatever they want in life, against

a state court and the department head of one of the largest juvenile-court systems in the country. She is my friend, and during my tenure as the chairman of 100 Black Men of America, Inc., she often called upon me and my staff to help with young people who were entangled in the legal system.

When I showed up for Nigel, he was in another court on a probation violation. I told the judge I would be responsible for him. I would employ him. I would watch over him. The judge knew of my work and the great work of the 100 Black Men. He trusted that we could give Nigel what he so desperately needed. Though the prosecutor was seeking a three-year prison sentence, the judge admitted openly in court that to give Nigel a



“We have to share our lives, share our journeys, and help young people understand that success is not magical.”

whatever obstacles they face.

I am especially proud of the intervention I had with one young man who had already turned to crime. At 17, Nigel had his own bevy of prostitutes. He had been in trouble with the law several times and was hooked on marijuana. He had been involved in an incident in which he had waited in a friend’s car while his companions committed a robbery. Though Nigel did not participate in the robbery, he was found with a small amount of marijuana in his possession and he was arrested. He was referred to Judge Glenda Hatchett, who for her television show, *Judge Hatchett*, would help young offenders get back on the right track. Judge Hatchett had been Georgia’s first African American chief presiding judge of

three-year sentence was, in essence, to sentence him to life. Nigel would inevitably be back in the courtroom, each time more damaged and having done more damage than the time before. The judge concluded that it was in the best interest of Nigel, the court and the community to release him under my supervision.

Before he was an adult, Nigel was the CEO of an illegitimate operation. What I saw was an enterprising young man whose talent was not channeled properly. Nigel was great with technology. He was highly intelligent. He simply needed direction. I was thankful that I was there to help him recognize his value, his talents and his skills. I only wonder where Nigel might be today if he had had a

mentor when he was younger, if he had had someone to help him realize all his potential before he turned to crime, before he gave up.

Our children are not born bad. They are valuable. Our forefathers knew this, and the decisions they made reflected this truth. They all gave of what little they had to help their children as a whole. They came together. They always sacrificed and fought for a better life. That was their focus. With so little, they did so much. Today, though we are more fortunate, we are, unfortunately, more broken. In all our blessings, let us not forget that we still have a responsibility to help those less fortunate. When we don't, we all suffer.

One hour a week can be all that it takes to transform a life. There are more Nigels out there who just need someone to listen to their dreams, to help them discover their talents, to care about them. The phenomenal thing about this 60-minute investment is that when you give to a child, you get the best return possible. You are enriched. You are lifted. Your life has more meaning. Mine sure does.

I cannot imagine life without the young people I have mentored. I will leave this earth peacefully, knowing that I gave—I helped to change one person's life, which may have a positive impact on the lives of that person's children for generations to come. That's a legacy to be proud of, a legacy no amount of money can guarantee. Through mentoring, I will have gained more than I ever gave, and so will you.

Our children need a caring soul to be there periodically, yet consistently, to talk, to listen, to encourage. Many children are waiting. One hour a week is the commitment, one hour to give hope, to make a child feel valuable, to give a child direction, to save a life, to enrich yours. One hour.

THE NEXT GREAT GENERATION

The underlying principle of why we mentor our children

BY REV. DAMON LYNCH III

Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.

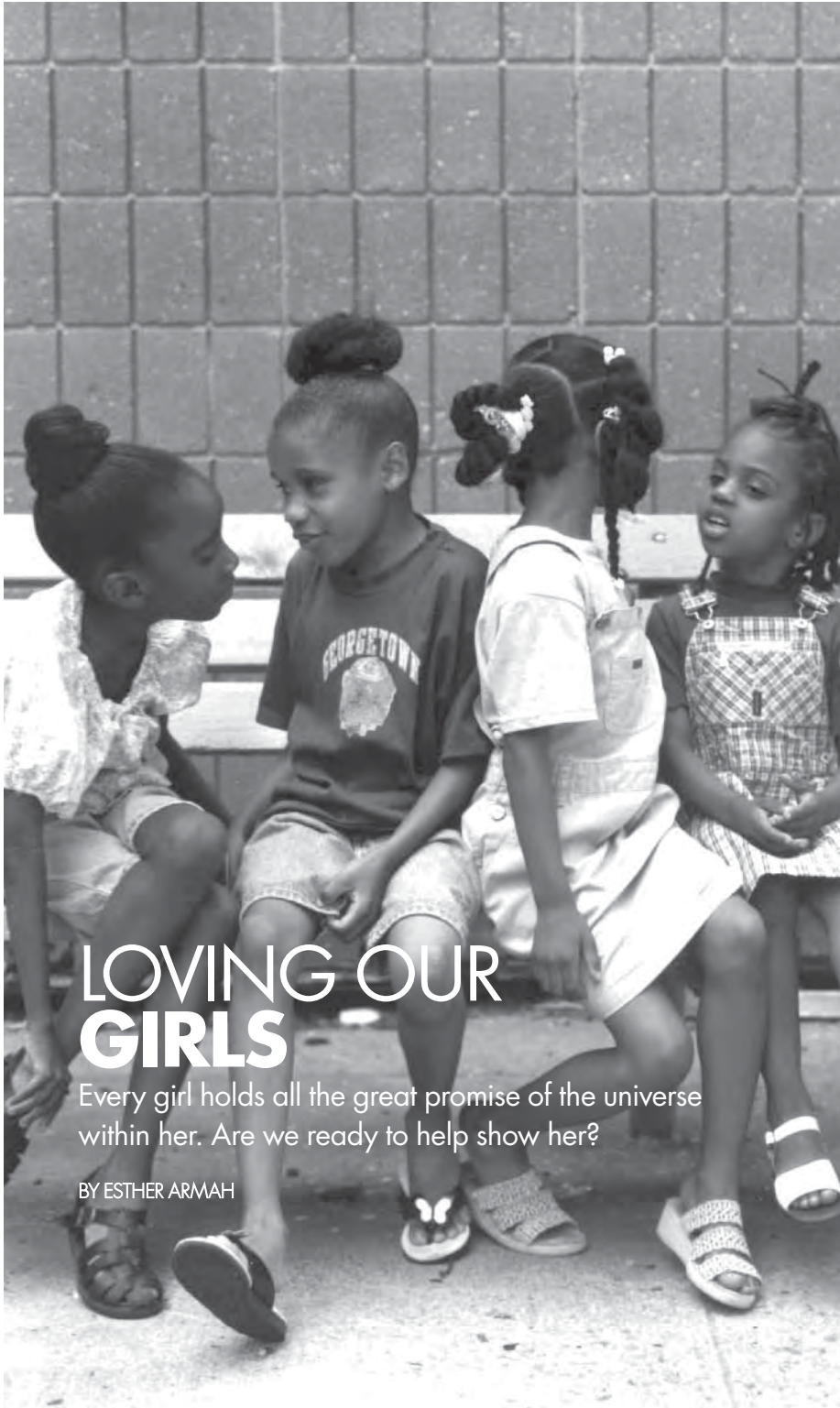
They come through you but not from you, And though they are with you, yet they belong not to you. —Kahlil Gibran

Our children do not come to us as empty vessels waiting to be filled; rather they come to us as bundled gifts of potential and promise, like the babe in scripture wrapped in swaddling to whom wise men brought gifts, realizing that the babe himself was a gift. If we mentor because we see our children as needy, disadvantaged and underprivileged, then we mentor from the wrong vantage point, and our results will mirror the results of community revitalization efforts based on community needs rather than assets.

Recent community building efforts in the States and abroad are now focusing on community assets and strengths as the building blocks for community renewal. The question is often raised, Is the glass half empty or half full? The answer is both. The half-empty part represents the needs and deficiencies of communities and people, while the half-full part represents the gifts, assets and strengths, and capacities of community and people.

Our young people are half-full glasses of potential and beauty, and it's only when we focus on their talents that we begin to make a difference in their lives. Our goal is to discover and then increase their capacity. We say to our youth, "What's important to me is your gift." We don't label them; we love them.

Together we will lock arms and aims, and witness the next great generation.



LOVING OUR GIRLS

Every girl holds all the great promise of the universe within her. Are we ready to help show her?

BY ESTHER ARMAH

Our girls are as diverse as their environments. Whether they hail from public schools to prep schools, dilapidated urban centers to affluent suburbs, from one- and two-parent households or from group homes, raised as Christian, Muslim, Yoruba, Buddhist, nondenominational or without a formal religious practice at all, there are nevertheless universal needs that define them all. Every girl who comes to us needs and deserves to be supported

of truth, awareness and positive action. In these places, too many of our girls are floundering and in some cases falling. For all our girls, we have an opportunity to shine a light, lend a hand, and make a difference.

What Is Real Wealth?

It is so important for us to consider how we measure success. For too many of us, success has to do with things superficial—fancy cars we can never afford, designer

“You don’t become what you want. You become what you believe.”

—OPRAH WINFREY

and nurtured, loved, validated, relentlessly encouraged and regularly affirmed. And we have to say yes, she is beautiful and smart and a treasure of our community. For our girls to grow sturdy, confident and wise, we must create a place for them to feel safe—physically, mentally and emotionally.

Many have the support they need to rise above the myriad challenges they face on their journey from girlhood to womanhood. Who brings this home more beautifully than our own Michelle Obama and her inspirational relationship with her parents and now with her daughters? The Michelle Obamas of the world, the First Ladies of our communities, are a testament to the fact that we do indeed possess blueprints for success, and that sometimes our village works for some of us in some ways. Our challenge is to expand on these success stories and find ways to proliferate them into those corners of our village that need the light

clothes, big jewels we wear in small places. Children can go to the best schools, live in great neighborhoods, have a stable home environment, and still feel empty inside.

While these supports have their significance, if they are not married to an ethic and demonstration of abiding love, they may provide no shield against the ills that detour and too often diminish the quality of our girls’ lives. The bottom line: Money has virtually no power over what transpires on the inner landscape of our girls. Illegal or prescription drug abuse, obesity and anorexia, aggression and depression are all flip sides of the same coin, reflecting a deep pain and dissatisfaction with “self.” Media images of young Black females are predominantly toxic and serve to besiege our girls with spiritual, psychological and sexual messages from a world around them that not only doesn’t value them but also threatens to destroy them.

Profiting From the Pain

Girls learn early on to swallow their pain, their rage, and what feels like impotence—turning these emotions inward. We know how the search for peace and place makes us grown folks vulnerable. Multiply this for children. In the struggle for safe harbor amid the war zones of their minds and environments, some of our young have drifted toward unhealthy coping mechanisms, holding their pain tenuously at bay. Profit is made from our girls' confusion. Industries thrive on the multitude of ways in which young females hurt themselves to numb pain and neutralize rage. Their feelings have been alternately ignored and sensationalized by a society that devalues them and has little interest in understanding what they most need and want: love. Throughout this nation and others, there are far too few stories about what real love is, how it feels, what it looks like, and how it shows up

We do not exaggerate when we declare that too many of our young Black girls are facing a death sentence. From ages 12 to 21 and beyond, HIV/AIDS, prison, violence, sexual and physical abuse, drugs, poverty, obesity, mental health issues and neglect are factors conspiring to undermine their very existence. The statistics tell their own story.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta, although Black women represent only 12 percent of the U.S. female population, they represent 61 percent of all new HIV infections among women—a rate nearly 15 times that of White women. An astounding 83 percent of Black women were infected through heterosexual activity, and for our girls who are between 15 and 25, AIDS is the leading cause of death.

But AIDS is not the only stalker after our girls. The juvenile justice system locks them up 2.6 times as often as it locks up



“For too many, success has to do with the superficial—fancy cars, designer clothes, big jewels we wear in small places.”

healthy. The absence of love for Black girls—continuously reflected in the messages of the mass media, political and social policies, education systems, our communities and, sadly enough, sometimes families—has created a void in many a young sister's psyche, leaving her with a deep craving for connection. It's their seeking to fulfill this urgent need for love that often puts their young lives at risk.

Who's Stalking Our Girls?

Here's what we know: Vulnerable girls crave love but settle for attention, even violent, life-threatening attention.

White girls. Why? Is it because our girls commit more crimes, or is it because they are seen as disposable? Consider the case of the 5-year-old in Florida who was taken, handcuffed, out of her kindergarten classroom because she had a tantrum. Or the 14-year-old from Dallas who was incarcerated for an indeterminate time until she was 21 for shoving a teacher's aide. At the same time, a White girl in Paris, Texas, was convicted of arson—she burned down her family's home on purpose. That child got probation. Underscoring these terrible figures is the concurrent reality that the numbers of African American women being

incarcerated—generally for nonviolent drug or property crimes—has exploded.

According to the April 2009 Women in Prison Project of the Correctional Association of New York, Black women are incarcerated at three times the rate of White women; 62 percent of women in state prisons are parents of children under 18. More than 64 percent of mothers in state prisons lived with their children before being incarcerated. So what does this mean for our girls?

figures are solely about obesity—not being juicy, round, curvalicious and bountiful, but grossly overweight, a state of being in which health is seriously threatened.

African American women are the most obese people in the nation, and our girls are 1.6 times as likely to be overweight as White kids.

What a Girl Wants

All of this said, ultimately, our girls are our girls; the brilliant, the challenged, the

“Vulnerable girls crave love but settle for attention, even violent, life-threatening attention.”



Consider Ashley, 16. She has lived in 11 foster homes, and her mother has been in and out of jail since Ashley was age 3. Ashley says she has no guidance, no mother love, no tenderness in her life; she’s been abused and “left out there.” She talks about foster caregivers treating her and her brother so badly that she has just wanted to give up. Ashley’s hurt is turned inward, but for many others the response to abuse is external, a public cry. If we follow the potential narrative arc of Ashley’s story, there is no happy ending. It’s no coincidence that an estimated eight in ten women in prison have experienced severe abuse as children. They’ve had, in other words, Ashley’s life.

But going to prison, misusing alcohol or illicit drugs, or staying in unhealthy relationships are likely not the most common reactions to pain. Arguably, for most who are left alone to wrestle with the demons, our salve is food.

The Office of Minority Health at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports disturbing facts about weight for girls between 12 and 17. These

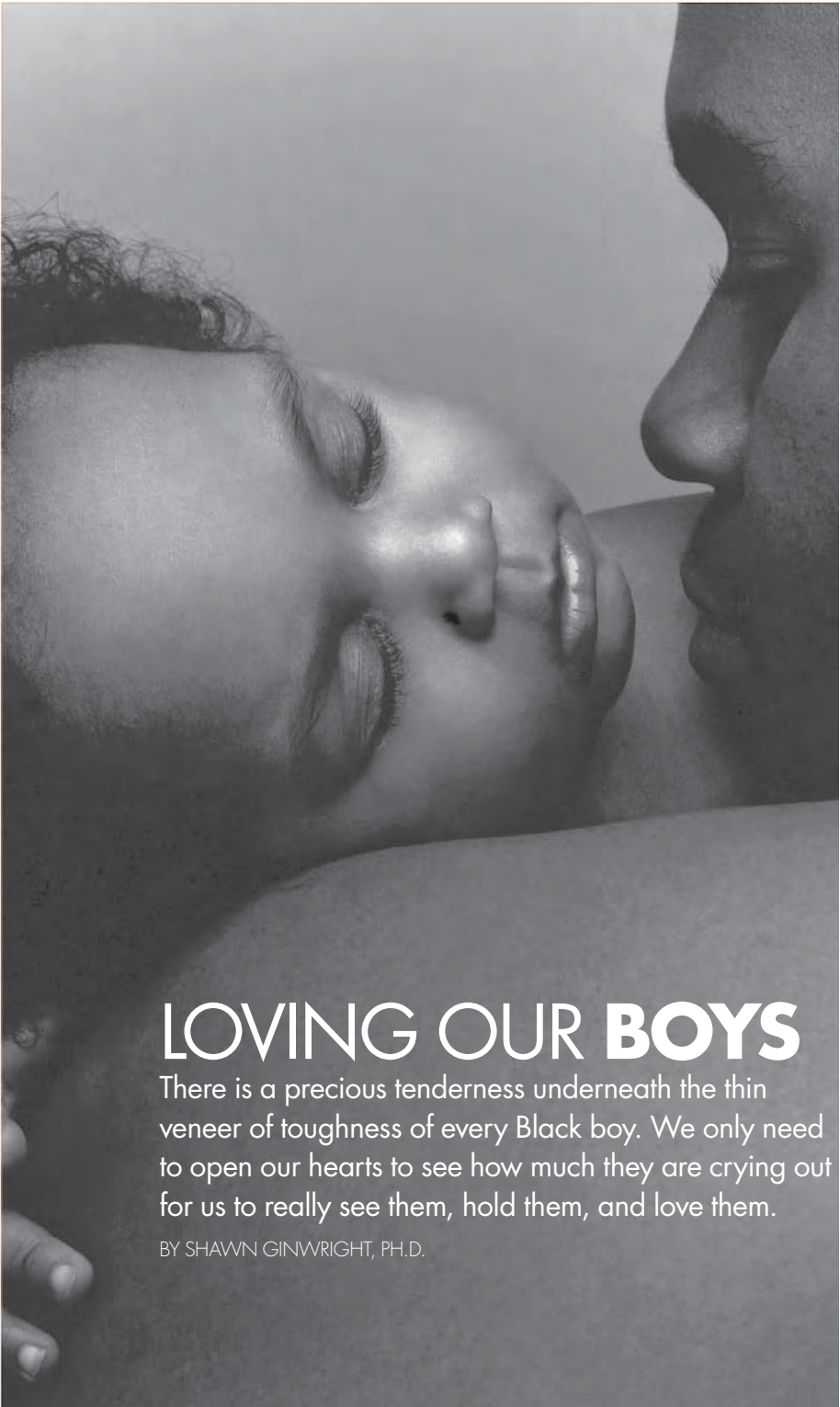
successful, the walking wounded, those who are hurting, those who are on the path to healing: They are ours. Both those who are thriving and those who are struggling are waiting—waiting for us. And we are late. Our girls want truth without judgment, compassion without condemnation. Our girls want a way—and not just one way, not just your way or their way—but an understandable, useful way, to traverse all the forks in the road, the roundabouts, and avenues, some tree-lined, some bare. They want a way that declares loud and strong that we are here with them and for them, so they can shine and fly and fail and grow and be loved, and then love in return as they learn, each one of them, what it means to be truly whole.

Team Leader:

Esther Armah

Team:

Michaela Angela Davis, asha bandele, Dr. Sheila Evans-Tranumn, C. Diane Wallace Booker, Shani Jamila, Rev. Iyanla Vanzant



LOVING OUR **BOYS**

There is a precious tenderness underneath the thin veneer of toughness of every Black boy. We only need to open our hearts to see how much they are crying out for us to really see them, hold them, and love them.

BY SHAWN GINWRIGHT, PH.D.

Love is a term we rarely use to describe what Black boys need in order to mature into healthy adults. Often we point to quality education, strong role models, consistent mentoring and manhood training. While all of these are important, loving relationships allow us to pierce through their toughness and truly see them. Unfortunately, when we only focus on the exterior toughness, we focus only on the problems facing Black boys rather than the possibilities for their lives.

Some may ask, How can love shift the tide of deep despair our Black boys are facing? bell hooks responds to this question with simple brilliance. She says that if love does not bring an end to difficulties, it gives us the

for you.” Our Black boys need love. With our guidance and support, they can begin to find it in themselves—and in one another.

Boys Should Be Boys

Dr. Noel Anderson, an associate professor at the City University of New York, has commented that rather than teaching our boys how to become men, we need to consider teaching them how to be boys. Our focus on manhood has robbed Black boys of their childhood, a precious time to learn how to love, feel and grow. In many ways, gangs have fulfilled the function of providing meaning, purpose, support, protection, and love to Black boys in urban neighborhoods. Gangs have been a presence in our

“If you hear how wonderful you are often enough, you begin to believe it, no matter how you try to resist it.” –DR. BEN CARSON

strength to cope with difficulties in a constructive way. Our young Black boys are filled with the anger of not having their fathers in their lives. They are enraged about the conditions of neighborhoods. They are frustrated by schools that do not seek to educate them but appear, at times, only willing to train them for prison. They are angry at being constant and unfair targets of law enforcement. They miss green spaces and community centers in their areas that might provide an alternative to both rage and the streets. They are frustrated at watching their mothers work so hard with little to show for their efforts. It is a heavy burden that no single school, job-training program, or mentoring program can address. These feelings fester in Black boys, and at times erupt as an act of power to proclaim, I matter in the world! However, in the midst of darkness and misery, our love says to our Black boys, “Good morning, my child, the sun is bright and a beautiful day is waiting

neighborhoods for decades, and the negative activities they foster are partly responsible for the deterioration of our communities. Yet research on gangs does not equate their presence only with violence. In fact, it shows that only a small percentage of gang-affiliated young men can be labeled hard-core members, an indication that many have only loose affiliations and may simply equate gang association with peer acceptance and support. Scholars have documented how young people will seek ways to have their need for purpose, guidance and love met, either positively or negatively.

Amid the array of negative connotations they present, youth gangs also show that young men have the capacity to be leaders. But our boys need support and opportunity to take on positive leadership roles. We can do our part by viewing our young men as community assets and by helping them expand their possibilities so that they lead lives they have reason to value. When they

lead lives they value, they telegraph positive messages to other boys; they build self esteem and self-efficacy in themselves and in others.

The Political Is Personal

We must develop a range of ways to love and build healthy relationships between Black men and boys. But our men and boys first require healing. Healing from the trauma of oppression—poverty, racism and sexism—is an important political act. As bell

look tougher than he actually is. During one of the support groups at Leadership Excellence, a community-based organization that provides Black youth with love and transformative leadership development in Oakland, California, Vince mentioned to the group that he wanted to see if he could get over the hatred that he held for not having his father in his life. He wanted to go up to the county jail, where he had recently heard that his father was incarcerated, and tell his



“We can save our boys from a life punctuated by one terrible statistic after another. All we need is love.”

hooks wrote, daily trauma, hopelessness and nihilism “prevent us from participating in organized collective struggle aimed at ending domination and transforming society.” Healing happens when we offer personal testimony to reconcile the painful experiences stemming from oppression, and when we call what may seem at first to be simply personal misfortune or self-blame what it really is—systemic oppression and discrimination.

Healing requires a consciousness of possibilities, strong caring relationships, and safe spaces that encourage our young men to navigate current circumstances in their communities as well as see a brighter future for themselves. When young Black men are conscious of the root causes of the problems that confront them, they tend to find ways to transform their own lives and the lives of their communities.

A Story of Love, Radical Healing and Boyhood

Fifteen-year-old Vince always wears a dark hooded sweatshirt and baggy pants. Even though he has a fake set of gold front teeth, he rarely smiles. Instead, his emotionless “I’m cool” demeanor and dreadlocks makes him

father how he felt about not having him around. With support from one of the adult counselors, Vince took one of most courageous steps of his life: He placed his name on the visitor list at the jail and wrote his father’s name next to his. Vince described the emotional visit:

I told him how much he hurt me for not being there. I told him I wished he was around to show me how to knot my tie on prom night. I wanted him to tell me to run faster at my football practices. I wanted him to get on me for not doing my homework! You know, all that kind of shit. I got emotional and started to cry because I was so angry at him. I wanted him to know how much he hurt me and my family.

Vince’s father didn’t respond with excuses, blaming his mother, or blaming the system the way Vince had anticipated. What his father said shook him to the core. His father looked directly into his eyes and said with a low, sincere voice that he was so very sorry for causing Vince and his mother so much pain: “Nothing I can say or do will ever heal that. I did y’all wrong, and I’ll have to live with that for the rest of my life. But you, Vince, can make another choice and not

repeat the mistakes I made.” Vince wasn’t ready to hear that from his father. He was prepared for excuses and would have preferred a heated confrontation. Instead, he saw his father shed tears for the pain he had caused. The encounter was overwhelming. They both cried without words, not really knowing what to say, but feeling they were headed in the right direction. During a subsequent support group meeting, Vince commented:

Meeting my father changed my life, because when I released all the hate that I was holding, it was like there was more space for positive things to come in my life.

By letting go of his pain and anger, Vince was able to heal from the pent-up frustration he held for his father. Vince’s visiting his father was more than reconciliation, it illustrates how adults can provide loving support for Black youth to heal. Leadership Excellence and other organizations can support young Black men to develop clear visions of their lives and a sense that they can change things in their communities. Love requires that we tell the bold truth about our lives and struggle with young people rather than distantly lecturing to them. This is not an easy task, because as adults we have the idea that we know more than young people, and they need only to heed our wise advice. While adults certainly have experiences from which young people can learn, it is equally as powerful to simply listen to understand what we adults can learn from Black youth. Listening is loving, and this simple act starts us on our healing journey together.

Team Leader:

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GETTING IT RIGHT: ORGANIZATIONS THAT KNOW HOW TO LOVE BLACK BOYS

THE BROTHERHOOD/SISTER SOL, HARLEM, NEW YORK

Brotherhood/Sister Sol (BHSS) was established in 1994 to offer supportive programs for young Black and Latino men in economically impoverished communities. Cofounders and childhood friends Jason Warwin and Khary Lazarre-White founded the Brotherhood when they were seniors at Brown University on the south side of Providence, Rhode Island, at the John Hope Community Center. They recognized the obstacles young men faced growing up in poverty, and they believed that the creation of a strong, supportive community could help youth overcome challenges of circumstance and succeed in life. They began work with a group of 15 deeply disaffected youth, and within one year had helped guide all but one of these young men away from criminal activity and disassociated behavior and back into school and stable lives.

They brought their innovative and successful youth development model for young men to New York City in 1995 and incorporated the Brotherhood as a nonprofit. Jason and Khary began working with about 45 young men in two public schools—one of them was Jason’s former high school, Central Park East, in East Harlem. Over the next three years, they hired additional staff, grew the organization, and doubled the number of young people in the program.

Brotherhood/Sister Sol provides comprehensive, holistic and long-term support services to Black and Latino youth who range in age from 6 to 21. It focuses

on such issues as leadership development and educational achievement, bias reduction, sexual responsibility, sexism and misogyny, political education and social justice, Pan African and Latino history, and global awareness. The organization offers four- to six-year rites-of-passage programming, thorough five-day-a-week after-school care, school and home counseling, summer camps, job training, college preparation, employment opportunities, community-organization training, a community-garden stewards and environmental-education program, and free legal representation. The group continually seeks to expose its young people to new opportunities through wilderness retreats, cultural performances,

supervision of the prison system, none of BHSS members or alumni members are incarcerated, and fewer than 1 percent have a felony conviction.

LEADERSHIP EXCELLENCE OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

Leadership Excellence was started in 1989 by college students at San Diego State University to give African American youth meaningful ways to improve conditions in their schools and communities. While in college, cofounders Shawn Ginwright and Daniel Walker believed they could create an organization that focused on training young Black people in low-income neighborhoods with positive leadership and organizing.



“The creation of a strong community can help a child overcome challenges of circumstance.”

college tours and monthlong intensive study programs to places such as Ghana, South Africa, Egypt, Mexico, Morocco, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and Brazil.

Brotherhood/Sister Sol (BHSS) is an evidence-based model, and its documented results over the past 15 years are clear. The City of New York’s teenage pregnancy rate is 9.4 percent, while BHSS alumni members have a rate of less than 2 percent. Eighty-eight percent of BHSS alumni have graduated from high school, with 94 percent either graduating from high school or earning their graduate equivalency degree, while West Harlem’s graduation rate is 42 percent. Ninety-five percent of BHSS alumni are working full-time or enrolled in college, versus 30 percent of 18–25-year-olds in West Harlem. And while one out of three Black men in America ages 20–29 are under

They began working with a small group from Gompers Middle School in southeast San Diego, training them how to think critically about root causes of social problems and providing them with hands-on organizing and leadership activities.

In 1989 they created Camp Akili, a summer transformational leadership camp for African American high school students. The camp utilizes powerful and interactive workshops that encourage participants to discuss the painful experiences in their lives, and it creates an environment where youth can be open and reflect on their lives, communities and personal struggles. The camp is located in the tranquil mountains of northern California and offers young people a quiet, peaceful wilderness environment to reflect, talk and heal.

The camp’s curricular goals are threefold:

(1) to provide structured activities that develop and enhance cultural and racial awareness, (2) to provide participants with opportunities that encourage and promote psychological and physical wellness, and (3) to provide

and resources to implement a community-service project that addresses the problem. The fourth phase, international and global awareness, empowers and trains participants to organize and implement an international

“AIDS is the leading cause of death for our girls who are between 15 and 25.”

hands-on experiences that will stimulate learning about leadership.

In “villages” consisting of up to ten teen youth, trained college student and young adult volunteer counselors (ages 18–25) lead group discussions about various community and youth issues, such as confronting racism, accepting sexual responsibility, and avoiding violence. Youth are exposed to a series of hard-hitting experiential activities that force them to look beyond the surface of issues.

In 1993, the organization moved to Oakland, launching its signature four-phase model of youth development for African American youth. The first phase, cultural and self-awareness, develops children’s self-esteem and racial and cultural pride through Oakland Freedom Schools (OFS), which is a six-week summer and yearlong after-school program that provides academic support and self-esteem-building activities. The second phase, community and social awareness, is accomplished through an intensive summer camp called Camp Akili. The five-day summer camp educates participants about the root and systemic causes of social inequality. The third phase, civic action and community organizing, is accomplished through a yearlong leadership development program that trains teens to examine a community problem and are given the tools

service project that addresses and/or eliminates a problem and improves the social, educational, economic and health conditions for people who live in the targeted community. This is accomplished through Camp Akebulan, a three-week summer abroad program in which teens implement an educational or economic community-service project in Ghana, West Africa.

Finally, those of us who work closely with Black boys and young men should constantly ask, Where is the love in our relationships with these boys? How do we build and sustain love in our interactions with our boys? The answers to these questions require us to make difficult choices about our own lives. Effective work with African American youth demands more than simply following step-by-step recipes for success. The conditions in which our young people find themselves did not come about from a simple three-step recipe, so we should not expect simple solutions to difficult problems. Effectively working with Black youth requires a commitment to love, justice and a vision for freedom. No course, training program or book can adequately provide this type of commitment. However, if we dedicate ourselves to the relentless pursuit of love, peace and justice, perhaps we can achieve a better quality of life for young people, ourselves and our society.

BOYS TO MEN

BY DR. LEON D. CALDWELL

We are held back by the socialized belief that “real men” don’t express emotions, as are our White counterparts. But for us it goes deeper. Popular images of Black men expressing their normal reactions to trauma, pain, fear, marginalization, disappointment and hurt are regularly interpreted as rage. Love is reduced to lust. And these become the primary proxies for a host of real emotion.

There is a gender- and race-based expectation of emotional expression, whether we are conscious of it or not. Consider Chad Ocho Cinco of the Cincinnati Bengals. How many times has he gotten in trouble for his “end zone” celebration dance, a spontaneous—and Black male—expression of happiness that was banned a few years ago in college and professional football, a sport dominated by us. So even in our accomplishments the message sent to Black boys is that just being yourself is a penalty.

What do we do? Listening is probably the most powerful tool we have. We have to sit with ourselves and our sons and hear what they are trying to say. It’s a selfless act of surrender and will work wonders. We are often accused of not speaking. But we do, though in select circles—in barbershops and at sporting events where we are not the focus of the conversation but part of the experience. Black men enter into covenants on golf courses and basketball courts and around barbecue grills. Our deepest feelings are coded in stories because they are safe. Our own healing requires us to find places and spaces where we can listen to one another. As healers our role is to acquire and practice the skill of listening to our boys. They need us to really listen, hear and “feel” them.

WHAT WORKS

LOVING OUR CHILDREN

BY ESTHER ARMAH AND
SHAWN GINWRIGHT, PH.D.

Choosing to mentor is one of the most incredible, life-affirming gifts you can ever give someone. Together, you and your mentee will likely explore everything from education, relationships and self-love to spirituality and history. The universal needs of children are love, affirmation, validation, relentless encouragement and support. Children come from all different types of families, backgrounds, situations. They may or may not have a supportive parent in their home and they may or may not have a healthy, loving family environment. In short, mentoring—which falls into two distinct categories, formal and informal, is not one size fits all. Crucial to its success is your ability to be flexible and adapt. Here are steps to help guide you as you embark on the beautiful adventure that is mentoring.

WHAT IS FORMAL MENTORING?

Formal mentoring means working with an organization that will likely ask that you volunteer just one hour a week of your time to help guide and encourage a youngster.

WHO ARE MENTORS?

A mentor is an advocate, coach, developer of talent, an encourager, a supporter, a nonjudgmental listener, an active affirming presence. A mentor is the power of example; one who teaches best by how s/he lives her life, not how s/he tells her mentee to live hers or his. A mentor loves and respects her or his mentee enough to allow for failure and then growth. A mentor is not a mentee’s parent, teacher, lecturer, minister, fairy godmother, professional counselor, financier or playmate.

WHAT IS MENTORING?

It is the process of developing a trusting, caring relationship for the purpose of offering guidance, support and encouragement. Formal mentoring is when an adult enters into a structured program specifically with the intent to engage in a supportive relationship with a young person. The National CARES Mentoring Movement connects our recruited volunteers to programs that offer training and conduct background checks if the mentee is 18 years of age or younger. Mentor programs often have a set time for the mentor to meet with the mentee. The program will have guidelines to follow and will usually provide training to help the mentor prepare for his/her role.

This lets the child know that you are willing to inconvenience yourself to check in to see how s/he is doing.

2. Do be committed to your own development and self-improvement.

Participate in intergenerational discussions about your own struggles and challenges as adults; understand that you can learn from youth as much as you can teach them by simply listening and not telling them what to do; and work through your own negative attitudes about young people.

3. Do learn how to really listen.

Sit, make eye contact, and listen to our children's truths, stories and lives without interrupting or judging or lecturing. Try to identify instead of

"In the midst of darkness and misery, our love says to our Black boys, 'Good morning, my child.'"



HOW SHOULD I MENTOR? THE DOs & DON'Ts

DOs

1. Do be consistent, stay involved, and encourage relentlessly.

Set up scheduled times that are convenient for each of you. Add the scheduled times to both the mentor and mentees calendars on a semester basis. Choose your activities together—research demonstrates that a mentor/mentee relationship is stronger when the mentor and mentee select the activities they will do. The act of deciding together strengthens the bond between two people and assures the mentor that the mentee is indeed engaging in activities that she likes. Staying involved can be done in person, on the telephone or on the computer. If the mentor is out of town on business or for personal reasons, send the mentee an e-mail or a text message, or give him/her a call at the regularly scheduled time.

compare. Sometimes our "back in the day" stories condemn or put down the current generation, expanding the gap and lessening the potential for positive impact. Use humor to lighten the work. Encourage relentlessly. We learn through repetition.

As a mentor, become the CEO of our girls' and boys' fan club, without condoning actions that may endanger him or her. Challenge, but with hope. Don't lecture your mentee. If she tells you she is engaged in activities you do not approve of, do not lecture her. Ask questions to help uncover alternatives, warn about some of the dangers of the activities, and practice harm reduction. That is, mitigate some of the dangers if your mentee is not willing to stop right away. So if, for example, you are mentoring a girl who is having frequent intercourse with different guys, ask her if she's using protection. If not, why not? Does she understand the role of protection against disease? Once she feels you care about her health and you

are not there to lecture her about morals and values, she will open up more about her feelings. You can then have a more constructive discussion about why she is engaging with multiple partners. You may get her a book to read that deals with this issue. Your goal is to work to keep the lines of communication open rather than closing them by judging and lecturing.

4. Do discover your mentees' passions, likes and dislikes—and help expand their horizons.

Use your home city to expose our children to new experiences. Go to a museum or an exhibit, check out a play at the theater, watch a socially conscious film, see a dance performance, or go to your job or your friends' offices. If your mentee is passionate about fashion, embrace and encourage her passion and use creativity and resources in the process. The two of you could develop weekly activities, such as going to a local fashion show, shopping at secondhand stores to create a new look, or taking a sewing class together. Perhaps you have a friend who works in the fashion industry. Introduce him/her to your mentee; have her share with your mentee what steps it took to arrive at this stage. Afterward, you talk with your mentee about the experience and intentionally point out the steps your friend took to get to her position. If you're mentoring a boy who is interested in entertainment or sports, as many young men are, show him the behind-the-scenes and off-the-court jobs. Show him that he can have a good career in one of these fields without being an athlete or a rapper—and that there is a better chance for a stable life beyond the cameras and spotlight.

5. Do make yourself aware of any preexisting challenges.

Does your mentee have any physical or mental health challenges, dietary restrictions, prescriptions or therapy sessions you should be aware of? Find out immediately. We want to be a support in their health, not an enabler to their illness.

6. Do explore spiritual mentoring.

Every young woman needs a spiritual foundation. Maybe her quiet time, her quiet place is writing in her journal. Maybe it is listening to music. Discover how she connects, how she expresses her soul. Her ways of connecting may be myriad. A spiritual foundation is different than religion. Religion is tricky water. Tread carefully. Share your religious beliefs, but don't shove them. If your mentee asks you about God or your religion, as you would any friend who asks, share that information. Do not bring it up at every session, do not force your mentee to pray with you, and do not take your mentee to church with you unless it is agreed upon with the parent and the mentee. Do not offer your mentee overtly religious books unless you have cleared it with her parent first.

7. Do explore her relationship with money/finances.

All of our young people today must understand and engage a meaningful concept of money and finances. S/he must value money for the benefits, not just the property it brings into her life. S/he must value saving, sharing, even investing. S/he must be willing to earn money, not just "get" money. She must also have clear boundaries about what s/he will and will not engage in to receive money.

8. Do offer feedback.

Regular feedback enables a mentee to see and enjoy their growth. It builds confidence. The mentor should be in communication with a parent or guardian at least once per week to keep them in the loop and support the work that you are doing.

In giving feedback there should also be suggestions and recommendations for how to correct/enhance/improve whatever the issue is. You should as well consider a level of confidentiality with the young person you're close to. This, however, must not include withholding vital information. If at any time the young woman or man you're mentoring shares something with you that could be harmful or dangerous, you must encourage the young person to share the informa-

tion with the parent. Or you must inform them that this information will be shared. It would not be a bad idea for you to create a feedback form or sheet that can be mailed to the parent with an invitation for further conversation. Again, this will really depend on the girl or boy and the child's home situation and relationship with the parents.

9. Do be understanding.

Realize that the young man or woman you are working with may often bring his or her issues to your relationship. S/he may not have money to pay for transportation to meet you, for example. Or the responsibility of caring for younger siblings may lead him or her to cancel a meeting with you at the last minute. A young person's cell phone may get cut off, and he or she may have difficulty reaching you. Perhaps your mentee hasn't eaten that day, or they witnessed violence. When these situations crop up, be supportive and understanding so that your mentee does not feel you are angry with him or her, but flexible and empathetic. And realize that you will face developmental issues; a 12- or 14-year-old boy will present a set of developmentally appropriate behavioral patterns that are far different from those of a young man who is 16 or 17 years old. Similarly, a girl just reaching puberty has a set of psychological and physiological challenges that a young woman of 20 doesn't likely have. Be sensitive to this. Seek out advice from loving, healthy people you know who have confronted and successfully dealt with the variable you're facing with your mentee.

MENTORING DON'Ts

1. Don't force tutoring on your mentee

Research has shown that when mentors insist that the mentee do homework before a mentor session or the mentor insists upon knowing the mentee's grades or how she's doing in school, the relationship shifts from a friendship to a student-teacher or parent-child relationship. If your mentee asks for help with schoolwork or openly talks about her difficulties in school, she

or he is inviting you into that part of their life. Still, be careful not to become too aggressive in this area out of your own desire to want to see your mentee do well in school. They will need to develop that desire for themselves and will pull away from you if they feel you judging them.

2. Don't share your frustrations or disappoints.

Keep your frustrations to yourself. We should be a soft place to land for our children, not burdened by our history, staying centered and optimistic even when they disappoint us.

3. Don't try to replace a parent.

Be careful about giving advice about sex, sexuality or religion. These are highly personal family issues that should be discussed with a parent, depending on each young person's situation. If your mentee asks you about any of these subjects, you should always answer from your own perspective and end the brief conversation by encouraging your mentee to talk to their parent about the issue. If you know there is no other person in their lives that they can talk to, you should use your judgment about how much advice to give. Do more listening than talking. If your mentee is engaged in sexually dangerous activities you need to report this to your program manager of your mentor program.

INFORMAL MENTORING

You may not have the time to engage in a formal, structured mentoring program. Here's the great news. Pick at least one thing from the list below that may help transform the life of a young person. Moments are transformative too, so your input is invaluable. Select from this list and become part of the village of mentors and supporters of our girls.

1. Invite the young woman or man with you to an event or activity as a way of exposing him or her to opportunities and people not in the child's present circle.

2. E-mail youngsters who are in need of a friend just to see how they are doing and to give a word of encouragement.

3. Have a breakfast, lunch or dinner meeting on a periodic basis with one or a group of young people to have critical face-to-face time.

4. Walk a child to school and listen or talk with her or him.

5. Text words of encouragement to a young girl or boy.

If you are looking to start a mentoring program of your own, here are some important guidelines:

1. Develop community venues and activities that showcase youth culture and allow hard-to-reach youth to build social support networks and social capital.

Set up a program in your community that allows young people to express themselves and share through art, dance, academics, sports and peer mentoring. There are numerous programs throughout the country, including larger ones like the Boys and Girls Clubs of America and smaller community- or church-based programs that work with young men to build community, provide safety, and allow for self-expression.

2. Increase resources through faith-based institutions, fraternities, sororities and business groups that provide hard-to-reach youth platforms that allow them to redefine themselves as future artists, poets, engineers,

architects, doctors, lawyers and other professionals.

Black civic and religious organizations provide fertile examples of the potential for sustained mentoring of young men. For example, creating links through the National CARES Mentoring Movement allows organizations to work together to reach youth who may not already be a part of a positive community of young people.

3. Propose initiatives that use transformed individuals returning from jails and prisons to provide coaching, counseling and mentoring for hard-to-reach youth.

The transition from prison back into the community is terribly hard for both girls and boys, but especially our boys. There's very little strategic support on how to find housing and work and ways to adjust to life outside of prison. To link young people with those who have successfully adjusted to "life on the outside" is powerful and often lifesaving.

4. Develop peer education programs that provide stipends and training for hard-to-reach high-school-age youth so that they can teach younger

children about anger management, self-responsibility, cultural empowerment and youth leadership development. Working through programs like Brotherhood/Sister Sol in New York and larger organizations like the National Urban League, which has affiliate offices throughout the country that provide peer mentoring initiatives to address academic and social issues.

A NEW WAY FORWARD

BRAINTRUST

PROFILES IN EXCELLENCE



CAROL L. ADAMS, PH.D.

Carol L. Adams, Ph.D., is president and CEO of the DuSable Museum of African American History in Chicago, Illinois. Since the age of 16, when she became president of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in Louisville, Kentucky, she has remained engaged in the struggle for the freedom of African Americans and Africans as she evolved from civil rights activist to Pan-Africanist. Adams also launched an award-winning model community-development and social-services program, raising more than \$400 million to fund its activities. She later served as secretary in the Illinois Department of Human Services. As a woman who reveres her African ancestors and as the mother of a daughter, Nia Mallika, Adams looks to support “the promise of the current generation, as much assailed as we have ever been, struggling mightily to survive the vicissitudes of contemporary America.”



NA'IM AKBAR, PH.D.

Na'im Akbar, Ph.D., president and CEO of Na'im Akbar Consultants, is a leading scholar in the field of Black clinical psychology and has worked for 40 years as a researcher, author, teacher, and healer. At age 27, he was appointed chair of the department of psychology at the prestigious Morehouse College. For the past 12 years, he has cohosted study groups traveling to Ghana and Egypt with Dr. Wade Nobles (see Wade Nobles profile). An active and engaged father of three successful adult children (a daughter and twin sons), Dr. Akbar was among the invited speakers at the historic 1995 Million Man March in Washington, D.C. Author of seven books, Dr. Akbar has also received two honorary degrees from Lincoln University and Edinboro University of Pennsylvania (both doctorate of humane letters). “The passion of my life,” he says, “has been to spend each day of the last 40 years doing something to raise the consciousness and help restore healing to the minds and lives of African people.”



NOEL S. ANDERSON, PH.D.

Noel S. Anderson, Ph.D., associate professor of political science at the City University of New York, Brooklyn College, says his deepest passion is “helping youth find freedom.” He is the author of *Our Schools Suck: Students Talk Back to a Segregated Nation on the Failures of Urban Education* and *Students Talk Back: African-American Educational Thought and Activism*, which won the 2008 Whitney M. Young Junior Education Leadership Award. Dr. Anderson notes that for him, critical personal milestones include the birth of his son, Avery Lloyd Anderson, witnessing the election of President Barack Obama, and spending time with the late and iconic South African musical performer and activist Miriam “Mama Africa” Makeba.



ESTHER AKASI ARMAH

Esther Akasi Armah, an international journalist, playwright, author and radio host, has worked in Africa, Britain and the United States. She is widely noted for her composition “I Want a Gun for Christmas,” a BBC radio broadcast monologue about an 11-year-old girl who wanted to trade in her Christmas gifts for a gun so that she could feel safer at school. The first of Armah’s plays staged in New York City was *Forgive Me?* The drama was produced by Debra Ann Byrd’s theater company, Take Wing & Soar, and directed by Tony Award winner Trazana Beverley. (She won Best Supporting Actress in the original Broadway production of Ntozake Shange’s *for colored girls*...) Armah declares that her choice to travel widely “shaped my world, molded my vision, influenced my view of people, the legacy of my ancestry, and taught me the majesty of God’s bounty and beauty.”



BAAYAN BAKARI

Baayan Bakari is a filmmaker, community educator and director of mentor training at the Mentoring Center in northern California’s Bay Area. He was called to do this work when he was 15 years old and, in 1996, received the prestigious Echoing Green Fellowship for community service, which he used to develop his first rites-of-passage curriculum. Bakari is married to Dr. Na’ilah Nasir, and they have four children. “Working on behalf of my people is the greatest purpose of my life, outside of family,” he says.



ASHA BANDELE

The executive editor of *A New Way Forward*, Asha Bandle is also a mother, a journalist and an award-winning author of *The Prisoner’s Wife* and four other books. Her work has been widely anthologized and published in outlets as diverse as *The New York Times*, *Vibe* and *Family Circle*. A onetime performance poet and senior editor at *Essence* magazine, Bandle lives in Brooklyn, New York, and devotes most of her time now to her greatest passion: traveling with and homeschooling Nisa, her wild-as-the-wind 10-year-old daughter.



HARRY BELAFONTE

Harry Belafonte says he is a second-term high school dropout who got lucky. But the world knows him as an artist and a human rights activist, as the first artist in the history of the music industry to sell one million records, as a Tony Award recipient and the first African American to win an Emmy. The world knows Harry Belafonte as an adviser to President John Kennedy in launching the Peace Corps, as a confidant of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and as an advocate who financed the Freedom Rides during the Civil Rights Movement and helped organize the 1963 March on Washington. He was at the forefront of the Antiapartheid Movement, organized the recording session for “We Are the World,” and initiated The Gathering, an event that culminated in a lasting truce between rival gangs in California. But his greatest accomplishment, Belafonte boasts proudly, is his five grandchildren.



CARL C. BELL, M.D., F.A.P.A., F.A.C.

Carl C. Bell, M.D., F.A.P.A., F.A.C. Psych., is CEO and president of the Community Mental Health Council, Inc., in Chicago, Illinois; a director at the Institute for Juvenile Research; and a professor in both the Department of Psychiatry and the School of Public Health at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He has planned, collaborated in and/or led groundbreaking research studies on mental health, ethnicity and race, and ways to intervene in violence affecting children, youth and families. The father of three, Bell says he manages to stay grounded by attending to his spiritual center daily. He feels it is essential to know one's gift and to live with purpose—his is “saving lives and making a difference.” But he also recommends understanding such basics as how to breathe and how to cultivate resiliency.



DERECA L. BLACKMON

Dereca L. Blackmon is project director of Oakland/Bay Area CARES. Her work for Oakland residents ranges from having raised more than \$3.1 million for area youth as director of Leadership Excellence (a community-based nonprofit group) to organizing thousands of residents to speak out for justice in the aftermath of the widely covered police killing of Oscar Grant. Nationwide, she uses radical healing to help thousands of young people confront internalized racism, violence and sexism. Blackmon is a firm believer in the art of learning, practicing and teaching forgiveness, and is deeply passionate about helping people reveal their divinity. She notes that raising her blended family of four daughters to “love themselves and each other unconditionally” is a great joy. Her proudest moment was when she was the Women’s Day speaker at her family’s church. Her 88-year-old nana, who has never believed that women should be in the pulpit, turned to Blackmon’s husband to say, “How about that!”



C. DIANE WALLACE BOOKER, ESQ.

C. Diane Wallace Booker, Esq., executive director, U.S. Dream Academy, Inc., in Columbia, Maryland, was the first person in her family to earn a law degree. She has helped build a national organization to reach children of incarcerated parents, as well as a team of bright, committed and compassionate individuals with the mission of helping young people live up to their potential. Her personal commitments include raising her two children to love God; being kind to others; embracing the diversity of their friends, family and community; nurturing and enjoying lifelong friendships; and, she says, “accepting myself for who I am and all that I can be in the future,” as she works to secure fairness and justice for people who have been traditionally oppressed.



LASHAN BROWNING

Lashan Browning, founder and CEO of Nola Productions, Inc., based in Brooklyn, New York, started her business at age 32, realizing that innovation is making it up as you go along. Her multimedia imaging company is dedicated to preserving family histories and documenting special occasions. She says she has been blessed by a father “who shared his feelings with me.” A critical turning point in Browning’s own life was her decision to work on location for six months on the film *Waiting to Exhale*. She points out that she stays in focus by “peeling back the layers of me.”



KHEPHRA BURNS

Khephra Burns is a playwright, author, producer and scriptwriter. His play *Tall Horse* toured South Africa, Germany, France and the United States in 2006; it opened the New Wave Festival at the Brooklyn Academy of Music and closed out its run at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. He also wrote the NBC News prime-time special *Images & Realities: African American Men*. And for 18 years, Burns has edited the *Boulé Journal*, the official publication of the distinguished African American men's organization Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity. He credits "direct experience of the transcendent reality" for grounding his spiritual life and self-knowledge. He cherishes his 21-year marriage to National CARES Mentoring Movement CEO and founder Susan L. Taylor. He notes that his deepest passion is "dispelling ignorance—my own and that of others—which is the source of the world's fear, injustice and pain, from which the Black community suffers inordinately."



MICHAEL A. BURNS

Michael A. Burns is a training consultant and entrepreneur. He holds an M.B.A. from the UCLA Graduate School of Business. He previously worked at 20th Century Fox Film Corp. Burns cites the three critical influences that shaped his life as being born in the United States in the fifties; being introduced to jazz music as a child; and being married to the former Michele Pierce, who has a child with autism (see Michele Pierce Burns profile). Burns is motivated "to be of service to someone each and every day and looks to inspire others to create works of art that bring us all closer to truth and to God."



MICHELE PIERCE BURNS

Michele Pierce Burns is executive director of the Academy of Excellence for Autism and administrative director of the Children's Academy at McCarton Center in New York City. She has cofounded two charter schools and an academic enrichment program for inner-city youth, and she homeschooled her son, Danson Mandela Wambua (who has autism), for two years. She holds certifications as a teacher, administrator, reverend, yoga instructor, reiki master and bartender. Burns says she is dedicated to "being the best parent I can possibly be; learning to really listen to my beautiful husband, Michael; and honoring elders and children every day."



MADELEINE MOORE BURRELL

Madeleine Moore Burrell is the retired founder of Moore Creative Marketing, which was awarded one of South Africa's first postapartheid contracts. In addition, she launched a sister-city agreement between Johannesburg and New York City. As president of the New York Coalition of 100 Black Women, she spearheaded the launch and endowment of mentoring programs for young African American women in four New York City colleges. The mother of a grown son, she feels affirmed that he has become a loving and active parent in his own right. She also feels blessed that as "a woman fully grown," she found her husband, Tom Burrell, and continues learning with him "the true meaning of being wholehearted." Burrell aspires to "reach the hard-to-reach with power tools and to assist them in becoming world-class legacy builders."



TOM BURRELL

Tom Burrell, chairman emeritus of Burrell Communications in Chicago, has been inducted into the American Advertising Federation Advertising Hall of Fame and identified by *Advertising Age* as one of the “100 Most Influential in the History of Advertising” as well as “Fifty Who Made a Difference in the History of Television.” Burrell is the author of *Brainwashed: Challenging the Myth of Black Inferiority*. He takes pride and joy in having witnessed not only the strength and vitality of his mother but also the success and promise of his three children. Burrell cherishes his marriage to Madeleine Moore Burrell, who he maintains is “the love of my life whom I found late in my life,” and he still looks to “contribute significantly to the psychological and spiritual healing of Black people.”



IVA E. CARRUTHERS, PH.D.

Iva E. Carruthers, Ph.D., professor emerita at Northeastern Illinois University, has built a camp and several schools that model principles of community engagement and African-centered education. An innovator in educational software, she received the ComputerWorld Smithsonian Award for Innovation and Design and, in 2000, was named Woman Entrepreneur of the Year. She worked with Ghana’s educational ministry on an initiative that established a model computer and community educational center in Saltpond. She celebrates the joys of being a mother, wife, sister, daughter and mentor, and the privilege of mentoring young people for twenty-first-century global leadership, while remembering and honoring the sacrifices, power of the spirit and faith of our people.



VERONICA CONWAY

Veronica Conway, founder of Tribe Coaching, Inc., also founded and runs the Black Professional Coaches Alliance. Conway has created financial coach training programs that have transformed the lives of thousands of low-income urban clients across the United States. Among results produced in her own coaching practice is an African American female CEO who led her team to generate \$5 million in the 30 days following a single coaching session. Conway is especially proud that as a single mother, she managed to obtain top-tier education for both her children, including a son with a severe ADHD diagnosis, whose symptoms were completely remediated without drugs. She describes her son and her daughter as “the sanest, most loving teenagers I know.” Her deepest passion is “the rapid and sustainable transformation of the mind-set and performance of people of African descent, locating and deploying cutting-edge technologies for behavioral change, empowerment and peak performance.”



MICHAELA ANGELA DAVIS

Michaela Angela Davis, a cultural critic and writer, describes herself as a lover of Black girls whose deepest passion is to “free the girls.” She has been editor-in-chief of *Honey* magazine; an editor at *Essence*, where she spearheaded the Take Back the Music campaign; and a founding editor of *Vibe* magazine. The mother of college-age daughter Eleni Davis-Knight, Davis declares pride and gratitude for her experience recovering from a physical, mental and spiritual disorder, and growing ever closer to her God.



JOY ANGELA DEGRUY, PH.D.

Joy Angela DeGruy, Ph.D., is an assistant professor at Portland State University in Oregon and president of JDP, Inc., a consulting firm. The author of *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*, she is a sought-after scholar, lecturer and keynote speaker who has addressed both the United Nations Conference on Race in Barbados and The Oxford Round Table at Oxford University in the United Kingdom. DeGruy relies on her deep and abiding spiritual foundation as a member of the Bahá'í Faith. She is the vanguard of the racial healing movement taking root.



THOMAS W. DORTCH, JR.

Thomas W. Dortch, Jr., is the founding chairman of the National CARES Mentoring Movement. He is also an Atlanta-based entrepreneur and the owner of seven companies. He was the first African American to serve as an executive officer of the Democratic Party of Georgia when he was appointed associate director. In 1985, he founded the National Black College Alumni Hall of Fame Foundation, Inc., of which he is chairman. In 1990, having served as a trusted adviser, Dortch became the first African American to be appointed state director for any U.S. senator (Sen. Sam Nunn). He also served as national chairman of 100 Black Men of America (1994–2004). The author of *Miracles of Mentoring: How to Encourage and Lead Future Generations*, Dortch says his deepest passion is “working to secure the future for our youth.”



MICHAEL ERIC DYSON

Michael Eric Dyson, a professor of sociology at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., is the author of 17 books and has won two NAACP Image Awards and an American Book Award. He is the father of Michael Eric Dyson II and has been married to the Reverend Marcia L. Dyson for 18 years. He cites the mentorship of both the late renowned Baptist preacher Dr. Frederick G. Sampson II and *Essence* Editor-in-Chief Emerita Susan L. Taylor as crucial to his development. His greatest passion, he says, is “writing and speaking on behalf of the oppressed everywhere, and making the life of the mind sexy.”



REV. ANDRIETTE EARL

The Reverend Andriette Earl, founding minister of the Heart and Soul Center of Light in Oakland, is the author of *Embracing Wholeness: Living in Spiritual Congruence*. Published the year her mother died and when her marriage ended, this book was the key to her own continuing peace and sanity. Prior to her ministry, Earl worked for 30 years as a corporate executive, empowering and mentoring many. In fact, she is most passionate about “empowering others to realize that the good they seek they already possess.”



GLENN ELLIS

Glenn Ellis, president of Strategies for Well-Being, LLC, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is a health writer and columnist, media commentator and health advocate. Ellis is an avowed Black book and film history buff, as well as an avid collector of Black art. He declares that his deepest passion is “working for social justice and equity in health care.”



THERMAN E. EVANS, M.D.

Therman E. Evans, M.D., pastor of Morning Star Community Christian Center in Linden, New Jersey, is the author of *From Purpose to Promise Driven Life: A Prescription for Making the Difference You Were Born to Make*. He has been married to his wife, Bernetta, for 44 years, and is the father of two sons, Therman Jr. and Clayton, and the grandfather of Taylor and Mitchell. Evans is the recipient of honorary doctorates from Meharry Medical College, Bethune-Cookman College and Rust College, and in 2000, he was nominated by his alma mater, Howard University, as a distinguished alumnus. He asserts that he is driven to be “at my best in all I do, to make a positive difference for others, and to experience joy.



DR. SHELIA EVANS-TRANUMN

Dr. Shelia Evans-Tranumn, a systems improvement and performance-based management consultant, is trustee/secretary of the Casey Family Programs and retired associate commissioner of education, New York State Education Department. She has been education adviser to President George W. Bush and the U.S. Department of Education, a consultant to various educational ministries internationally, including Denmark, Sweden, China, Taiwan and American Samoa. She led the U.S. effort to develop a methodology of accountability for state schools that received an A rating on National Assessment Evaluations. An ordained minister in the A.M.E. church and the mother of one daughter, DeAnna Elizabeth Evans, Evans-Tranumn notes that another critical turning point in her life was buying a tractor trailer truck at age 22. Currently residing in Brooklyn, New York, she says that her deepest passion in life is “to serve God with gladness and to show the power of His love for ‘the least of them’ by improving institutions to better serve vulnerable children and families.”



GEORGE C. FRASER

George C. Fraser, founder and CEO of FraserNet, Inc., in Cleveland, Ohio, is a popular speaker and author (*Success Runs in Our Race*, *Click: Ten Truths for Building Extraordinary Relationships* and *Race for Success*), and the entrepreneur responsible for the PowerNetworking Conference and SuccessGuide Worldwide, a directory of Black professionals, business owners and community leaders. He has been married for 37 years and has raised two sons. He professes that his deepest passion is “making a difference and adding value to all things I’m a part of,” and he takes particular pride in making a difference in Black America.



MARCIA ANN GILLESPIE

Marcia Ann Gillespie, a writer, consultant and adjunct professor at the State University of New York at Old Westbury, was editor-in-chief of *Essence* from 1970 to 1980 and editor-in-chief of the trailblazing feminist publication *Ms.* from 1993 to 2001. She considers Jamaica a homeland although she has no actual roots there. While living and working in this predominantly Black country as an adult, she was privileged to discover what it was like to be a part of a majority. Another powerful life influence, she says, was “standing in the Door of No Return in the slave fort on Goree Island in Senegal and feeling the spirits of our ancestors all around me.” She acknowledges blessings in having “a powerful, ever-growing extended chosen family that includes people of different cultures, countries and walks of life.” Her daily motivation comes from two questions she always asks: “Can I be of service?” and “Am I bringing light?”



SHAWN A. GINWRIGHT, PH.D.

Shawn A. Ginwright, Ph.D., Special Training Consultant to the A New Way Forward initiative, is an associate professor of Africana Studies at San Francisco State University. He is the author of *Black Youth Rising: Radical Healing in Urban America*. He also founded and directed Leadership Excellence, a community-based nonprofit organization in Oakland, California. He takes pleasure in watching his 13-year-old son, Takai, develop a passion for drumming and his 9-year-old daughter, Nyah, write her first book. Ginwright’s greatest passion is to create places for Black people to heal, love and dream together, and he and his wife both dream of creating a healing retreat for Black people in Napa, California



ADELAIDE L. HINES-SANFORD

Adelaide L. Hines-Sanford is vice chancellor emerita at the Board of Regents of the State of New York. For 19 years, she was principal of Crispus Attucks School, P.S. 21, in Brooklyn, New York. She was also visiting practitioner at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a Mellon Scholar at Columbia University’s Teachers College. Sanford established the first recognition award for research in African and African American history at the Board of Regents, developed the Board of Education of People of African Ancestry in Harlem, and inspired the creation of the Adelaide L. Sanford Institute. Her daily motivation continues to be “to make sure the sacrifices of our ancestors were not in vain.



SHANI JAMILA

Shani Jamila produces and hosts a radio talk show on Black culture and politics in Washington, D.C.. Her show is a platform for independent voices grounded in progressive hip-hop. She has also designed and directed a tutoring and arts-based mentorship program for incarcerated teens. A graduate of Spelman College, Jamila won the prestigious Fulbright Fellowship to study at the University of the West Indies, and then earned a master’s degree in African studies from UCLA, followed by postgraduate research at Cornell University and the International Institute for Human Rights in Strasbourg, France. “So far,” she says, “I’ve visited and/or lived on five continents and in more than 30 countries.” Jamila’s deepest passion is learning about Black culture and exploring what it means to be an informed, aware and engaged global citizen.



TERESA KAY-ABA KENNEDY

Theresa Kay-Aba Kennedy, Ph.D., M.B.A., is president of Power Living Enterprises, Inc. She founded VH1 Interactive in 1994, and as vice-president of Business Strategy and Operations, she ran MTV Interactive and launched an online radio network and six digital cable networks. She was the youngest staff member at Harvard Business School, consulting and writing case studies on Fortune 500 companies. In 2009, the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, named Kennedy one of its Young Global Leaders. She enjoys traveling with her “amazing family,” and has reclaimed her practice of yoga to transform her health and life. “Being present with this gift of life” is her deepest passion.



BISHOP DR. BARBARA LEWIS KING

Bishop Dr. Barbara Lewis King is a highly revered minister and spiritual leader. She was the first non-psychiatrist to direct the South Central Community Mental Health Center of Emory University, housed in the Southside Comprehensive Health Center in Atlanta. She wrote the paper “Serving the Community Through Projects Designed by the Leadership,” which she delivered at the International Social Work Conference in Helsinki, Finland. Bishop King is also the first female chief enstooled in the Ashanti tribe in the village of Nsuta, near Accra, in West Ghana. Her most important personal milestones are the birth of her son when she was 37 and the arrival in her life of her grandson, who is a recent graduate of Morehouse College in Atlanta.



DR. JOYCE E. KING

Dr. Joyce E. King, Benjamin E. Mays Endowed Chair for Urban Teaching, Learning and Leadership and professor of Educational Policy Studies, Georgia State University, is president of the Academy for Diaspora Literacy, Inc., and editor of *Black Education: A Transformative Research and Action Agenda for the New Century*. She also chairs the American Educational Research Association’s Commission on Research in Black Education. She is the nana (grandmother) of Jordan Maya and Makena Jaye Reeves, Joyce Adama Maiga and many granddaughters and grandsons of the village Thirissoro in Gao, Mali. She holds the honored title of Amiira Songhoy, wife of the Amiiru, Paramount Songhoy Chief, Dr. Hassimi O. Maiga. Dr. King lives by a process expressed best in the Songhoy language: *alasaal-tarey*, which means “how we come to know our origin as human beings in order to save humanity.”



KOFI A. KONDWANI, PH.D.

Kofi A. Kondwani, Ph.D., assistant professor at the Morehouse School of Medicine and president and CEO of Consciously Resting Meditation Programs, is known for his research contributions on the use of meditation to reduce cardiovascular and other risk factors among African American populations. He has also taught meditation to thousands of people from different ethnic groups, cultures and beliefs. He is principal investigator on a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention grant to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of HIV/AIDS in Ghana. He has watched with pride as his son Heru has “grown into a fine young man striving to fulfill his purpose for this lifetime.” Dr. Kondwani’s deepest passion is “helping ordinary people experience ‘pure silence’ when accessing ‘their source of thought.’”



KHARY LAZARRE-WHITE, ESQ.

Khary Lazarre-White, Esq., is executive director and cofounder of Brotherhood/Sister Sol, a Harlem-based nonprofit youth organization that provides comprehensive, holistic and long-term support services to young people from ages 6 to 22. The organization also publishes curricula and trains educators. Lazarre-White earned his B.A. from Brown University in Africana studies and his J.D. from Yale Law School. The daily motivation for his work is “to create a world of greater equity, to work for social justice and to seek to educate and provide access for young people.”



CAROL D. LEE (SAFISHA L. MADHUBUTI), PH.D.

Carol D. Lee (Safisha L. Madhubuti), Ph.D., Edwina Tarry Professor of Education and professor of African American Studies at Northwestern University, is cofounder of four African-centered schools, including the Institute of Positive Education, the New Concept School and the Betty Shabazz International Charter Schools, where she also chairs its board of directors. She was elected to the National Academy of Education and is president of the 25,000-member American Educational Research Association. Married to poet, publisher and activist Haki R. Madhubuti for 36 years, they have raised three children, Laini, Bomani and Akili. She cherishes the long-term friendships made over the last 40 years as she worked to develop independent Black institutions. “Beyond the lifelong work of loving and supporting my children,” she declares, “my deepest passion is educating Black youth.”



SARA LOMAX-REESE

Sara Lomax-Reese is president of WURD Radio, LLC, Philadelphia’s only African American talk radio outlet. She was founder of the nationally circulated African American health magazine *HealthQuest: Total Wellness for Body, Mind and Spirit* and continues to integrate yoga, meditation and holistic nutrition in the culturally relevant workshops she leads. She has been married for 17 years and is the mother of three boys. Her daily yoga and meditation practice keeps her grounded and uplifted as she strives to “live a life imbued with truth and purpose.”



DAMON LYNCH III

Damon Lynch III, pastor of New Prospect Baptist Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, teaches and preaches across generations on a daily basis and sees lives being changed by the power of God. Pastor Lynch led a national boycott in Cincinnati to protest the city’s racial profiling in law enforcement and also its economic segregation. He is president of an organization that filed a class action lawsuit that changed how policing is done in Cincinnati. Pastor Lynch says, “My wife is someone I can trust, love and lean on when all else fails.” They have two sons, ages 26 and 21, and have just adopted a girl, born July 1, 2010. Pastor Lynch cites his travels in Kenya, Ghana and Ethiopia as giving him a greater sense of his own cultural identity and the sources of the greatness and the struggles of the Black race. “I share the tears, joys, sorrows and laughter of those who are trying to make it and feel like the odds are against them,” he says. “My deepest passion is justice for all.”



HAKI R. MADHUBUTI, PH.D.

Haki R. Madhubuti, distinguished poet and founder of Third World Press, is the Ida B. Wells University Professor at DePaul University and the author of nearly 30 books. In its 43 years of operation, Third World Press has published hundreds of poets, writers and scholars. Madhubuti also helped to develop four schools and the Institute of Positive Education in Chicago, Illinois. With his wife, Safisha Madhubuti (See Carol D. Lee profile), he also built a home and foundation for their family of three children. In addition to his family, he values his relationships over the years with such mentors as Malcolm X, Margaret and Charles Burroughs, Hoyt W. Fuller, Dudley Randall, Barbara A. Sizemore and Gwendolyn Brooks. In his opportunities to mentor young men and women around the country, he passes on their influence. “My daily motivation is the love of Black people and the love of all children from all cultures,” he says.



JULIANNE MALVEAUX, PH.D.

Julianne Malveaux, Ph.D., an economist and author, is president of Bennett College for Women in Greensboro, North Carolina. Her first book, *Sex, Lies and Stereotypes: Perspectives of a Mad Economist*, a collection of columns, was published in 1994. She cites a 2001 trip to Ghana, particularly a walk through Elmina Castle—a port of the historic Atlantic slave trade—as bringing her powerful new insights about anger, history and slavery, and perceptions that continue to inform and enrich her life. Malveaux values her connections with nephews Anyi and Armand, godson Matthew Brown, and numerous mentees, because they all “deepen her heart, enrich her soul and tickle her imagination.” Her deepest passion is for social and economic justice and “for young women to be equipped with the tools they need to thrive as they live through always challenging times.”



DR. JOEL P. MARTIN

Dr. Joel P. Martin, a transformational trainer, consultant, speaker and coach, is president of Triad West, Inc., and Positively Powerful Transformational Events. She was the first Black woman to own and operate a full-service advertising firm in New York City. She recently led a five-year corporate culture change initiative that generated industry recognition, leadership in diversity and inclusion, and employee satisfaction. A breast cancer survivor, Martin started her postgraduate work late in life, earning an M.A. in psychology and a Ph.D. in communications; she was named a Wharton Fellow as well. She is the loving and supportive wife of a fine artist and the proud mother of a daughter, who is a cinematographer.



LINDA JAMES MYERS, PH.D.

Linda James Myers, Ph.D., professor of psychology at Ohio State University, is recognized for developing a theory of human functioning grounded in the African wisdom tradition that incorporates the spiritual aspects of our being. This is the basis upon which she has developed the psychology curriculum in African American and African studies at Ohio State and the Institute for Optimal Transformation and Leadership. She has also served in leadership roles in organizations devoted to the liberation of the African mind and illuminating the African spirit and human psyche. The mother of two accomplished sons, Ptah Harrison Myers and Ikenna Sekou Myers, she spends time with family and friends while pursuing lifelong learning and a closer relationship with the Divine. “My motivation for the work I do is to uplift fallen humanity,” she says.



WADE W. NOBLES, PH.D.

Wade W. Nobles (Nana Kwaku Berko I, Ifagbemi Sangodare, Bejana), Ph.D., professor emeritus of Africana Studies and Black Psychology at San Francisco State University, is founder and executive director of the Institute for the Advanced Study of Black Family Life and Culture, Inc. He is the author of *Seeking the Sakhú: Foundational Writings of African Psychology*, an anthology of 30 years' research and scholarship, published by Third World Press. He has been married to Vera Lynn DeMoultrie since 1967, and they have two sons and three daughters. Nobles has been initiated into the Ifa spiritual system by Bablawo Ifaymi Elebuibon, the Araba of Osogbo, Nigeria, and he also received the high honor of being enstooled as the Nkwashohene (development chief) of the Akwasihoh-Kwahu region of Ghana in West Africa. Dr. Nobles engages himself daily in contributing "to the liberation of the African mind and the worldwide development of African people."



WILLIAM PADEN

William Paden, retired educator and cofounder of the Village Nation in Reseda, California, an organization dedicated to the successful education of African American youth, was voted Teacher of the Year by the local chapters of the NAACP (Los Angeles, 1987 and again in San Fernando Valley, 2008). His organization's work was featured on *Oprah* in May 2007, and he was tapped as a resource on strategies for moving our people forward in the twenty-first century by Bill Cosby. Paden and his wife, Laura, are parents of two sons, Ahmad and Khalil.



JESSICA C. PINKNEY

Jessica C. Pinkney, a productivity consultant, is principal of Relativity Consulting/My Relative Assistant, in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. Her consulting and coaching practice supports clients using harm-reduction strategies to create safe and reliable resources that move them beyond survival mode to long-term sustainable solutions. The motivation for Pinkney's work is delivering services to people who seek empowerment, and her deepest passion is "love, or acknowledging every individual's unique qualities and helping them to see that they have something to contribute."



KEVIN POWELL

Kevin Powell is a writer and activist in Brooklyn, New York. His appearance in the cast of the pioneering reality show *The Real World* on MTV launched him into the media spotlight; he went on to become a founding staff writer for Quincy Jones's innovative hip-hop magazine, *Vibe*. Powell also hosted the landmark MTV documentary *Straight from the Hood*, about young people in postriot Los Angeles. He credits his mother's taking him to the library as a child for his lifelong love of books and reading. As a young man in his twenties, Powell made a conscious decision to live a healthy, holistic life. He says, "My deepest passion is the people—all people—and helping them to help themselves."



BELOVED REESE

Beloved Reese, founder of Chance to Change, Inc., in Charlotte, North Carolina, is an ordained interfaith minister, spiritual life coach and chairwoman emerita of Charlotte CARES. A dedicated mom to three children—Maurice, Thomas and Sophia—she prides herself in being a great listener and an advocate for love. Her deepest passion is to serve others.



SHEILA R. RULE

Sheila R. Rule is the founder of Resilience Multimedia, a publishing company that presents a more accurate and just image of the incarcerated, the formerly incarcerated and their loved ones. She also founded the Think Outside the Cell Foundation, a nonprofit that helps people with prison backgrounds build more successful lives. Rule retired after a long and distinguished career at *The New York Times*, where she rose to senior editor. An activist since college, she is the mother of one son, Sean William Rule, and the wife of Joseph Robinson. “My deepest passion is giving,” she says.



REV. YVONNE SAMUEL

The Reverend Yvonne Samuel is founder and chief executive officer of Samuel Communications, a St. Louis–based marketing and public relations firm. Previously she was a reporter for 29 years at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, where she also served as diversity facilitator and community outreach coordinator. As a spiritual leader, she has pastored five churches and received the Dr. Martin Luther King Community Service Award from the governor of Missouri. Rev. Samuel says her deepest passion is simply “helping others.”



LENA SHERROD

Lena Sherrod is currently executive director of the Shrine of the Masters Jazz Gallery in New York City, where she curated the Lee Morgan Legacy exhibit. A founding member and first treasurer of the New York Association of Black Journalists, Sherrod was also a longtime program coordinator/editor at the National Urban League and retired as *Essence* magazine’s finance and careers editor. She spent two years living and traveling throughout Africa, including West Africa, East Africa, North Africa and southern Africa. Sherrod aspires “to learn to incorporate the spiritual laws of the universe into her life, understanding that they—like the laws of gravity, electricity and mathematics—operate with indisputable precision.”



APRIL R. SILVER

April R. Silver, managing editor of *A New Way Forward*, is a social entrepreneur, writer activist, and founder and president of Akila Worksongs, Inc., a communications firm in New York. The firm is dedicated to arts and activism in the African American, people of color, and progressive communities. Coleading a 1989 protest at Howard University launched Silver as an activist. The author of *Be a Father to Your Child*, she continues to lavish loving attention on her relationships with her mother, her father and her siblings. She is dedicated to using her “God-given skills and talents to add more light to the world, to tell the truth and to embody balance.



SOBONFU SOMÉ

Sobonfu Somé, president of Wisdom Spring, Inc., in Sacramento, California, is the author of three books: *The Spirit of Intimacy: Ancient Teachings in the Ways of Relationships*, *Welcoming Spirit Home: Ancient African Teachings to Celebrate Children and Community* and *Falling Out of Grace: Meditations on Loss, Healing and Wisdom*. She teaches African wisdom in universities and other institutional settings and communities in North America, Europe, Asia and Africa. Somé founded www.walkingforwater.org to help give African communities clean water and better health, and she has created a scholarship fund for children in her native Burkina Faso, which today supports the education of at least 1,000 children. “I yearn to see a revolution around the way we birth and care for children and our elders,” she writes. “My deepest passion is to see healthy people living in healthy communities, where they can find deeper meaning in life, knowing who they are and what gifts they bring to the world.”



DR. JOSEPH A. STRICKLAND

Dr. Joseph A. Strickland is a research specialist at the Jane Addams College of Social Work at University of Illinois in Chicago. He currently teaches a course on community violence to graduate students in social work and has conducted a research study on postprison employment experiences of Black males. A founder of MAGIC, the Metropolitan Area Group for Igniting Civilization, Inc., a youth empowerment organization in Chicago, Illinois. Strickland is a board member of the Woodlawn Children’s Promise Community and the University of Chicago Charter Schools. He has mentored more than 40 former Chicago-area students who continued on to college or have since earned college degrees, and he has created a support network for former prisoners and former gang members who are striving to transform their lives. He is committed to “helping people connect the dots so that they can reach their full potential.”



SUSAN L. TAYLOR

Susan L. Taylor, founder and CEO of the National CARES Mentoring Movement, is also editor-in-chief emerita of *Essence* magazine. She was the first to make spiritual growth and development a subject of popular media with her widely read *Essence* column, *In the Spirit*. In the 27 years she wrote the column, she influenced the personal development of three generations of Black women. Taylor also guided the phenomenal growth of the magazine while authoring several books and helping to expand the *Essence* brand into sectors beyond magazine publishing, including entertainment, book publishing, merchandising, and special events and conferences.

Meanwhile, as a single mother, she raised a conscious and committed daughter, Shana, and is devoted to her 21-year “sacred union” with husband Khephra Burns. Today, Taylor says she is focused on “becoming the best possible leader I can be in service to our vulnerable children. So many Black children are living in dream-crushing pain on our watch. All they need is us. Our love and support is their only hope.”

**REV. IYANLA VANZANT, J.D., M.A., SP. PSY.**

The Reverend Iyanla Vanzant, J.D., M.A., Sp. Psy., is a well-known author and spiritual life technician/coach. Her professional milestones include self-publishing her first book, opening her spiritual center in Silver Spring, Maryland, and becoming the first certified African American master EFT (emotional freedom techniques) practitioner. Critical touchstones in her personal life include supporting her late daughter through her encounter with cancer and her transition, raising her grandson and granddaughter, and participating in the inauguration of President Barack Obama. Vanzant says, “My deepest passion is facilitating the evolution of human consciousness one Mind, one Heart, one Spirit, one Life at a time.”

**TERRIE M. WILLIAMS**

Terrie M. Williams is an author, mental health advocate and public relations practitioner. She launched her highly successful marketing and communications firm, the Terrie Williams Agency, in 1988 with two high-profile clients, Eddie Murphy and Miles Davis. She also founded the Stay Strong Foundation in 2001 to change lives through educational and support programs. Its motto is, “If we don’t give our kids time, the system will.” She is the author of five books, including *Black Pain: It Just Looks Like We’re Not Hurting*, written after she discovered that the pain she had suffered for many years had a name: depression. She was blessed with the courage to speak out and share her story with the hope that others would share theirs as well, and, if needed, seek professional help. The motivation for her work is “knowing that when you go through the fire, you will come out on the other side whole and understand, with every fiber of your being, what you are called to do.”

**AKOSHIA FATIMAH YOBA**

Akoshia Fatimah Yoba is a writer, speaker, mother and mentor. She is completing her first book while raising four beautiful children. In addition, she devotes time to nurturing her dearest friendships and “discovering the love inside of me.” Her deepest passion, she contends, is to “use my creativity to inspire others to recognize the beauty of life to align with well-being.”

**MALIK YOBA**

Malik Yoba, actor, entrepreneur, producer, musician and educator, has a career that spans three decades. The father of three children, he says, “My deepest passion is life itself, the breath God breathes in me every day and the opportunity to make what is not, exist.”



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We Are Grateful

There are many people whose hands have helped craft this manual. Their help has ranged from offering encouraging words to editing pages to keeping us organized. The support has been critically important, and we are grateful, for without their skill, patience and personal sacrifice, this manual would not exist.

We thank: Yasmin Bedward, our amazing young intern; the young people who appear in the foreword with Susan L. Taylor (clockwise from noon): Bakari Taylor, Ania Hughes, William Plummer, Zakiya Moore, David Wright, Amina Suzanne King, Nisa Bandele, and Malaika Taylor; Daniel Gonzalez, who made the space available for the initial Braintrust gathering; Janice K. Bryant, Hope Wright, Susan McHenry and Claire McIntosh for their exceptional editing and proofreading talents; Phillip Shung for so generously assisting the art team with his computer expertise; Peter Chin, Saddi Khali, Delphine Fawandu, Dwight Carter, Leroy Henderson and Nicky Woo (the greatest photographers); Leah Rudolfo, our photo editor; Keba Konte for the inspiring photo assemblage on the cover; Brenda M. Greene, Ph.D., for hosting an editorial meeting at her home; Cybel Martin for helping us to see things differently; Tamara Y. Jefferies for her review of chapter drafts; Gayle Graves, who always stands up; Eddie Bridgeman, comptroller, for keeping track of the ANWF expenses; and Debra Parker, who holds us all together.

FOR YOUR LIBRARY

Selected Books and Films by A New Way Forward's Braintrust

NA'IM AKBAR, PH.D.

- *Breaking the Chains of Psychological Slavery*
- *Know Thy Self*
- *Visions for Black Men*

DR. NOEL S. ANDERSON

- *Education as Freedom: African American Educational Thought and Activism* by Noel S. Anderson and Haroon Kharem
- *Our Schools Suck: Students Talk Back to a Segregated Nation on the Failures of Urban Education*

ESTHER AKASI ARMAH

- *Can I Be Me?*

BAAYAN BAKARI

- *Equinox: Boys Are Born, but Men Are Made* (a film written and directed by Baayan Bakari)

ASHA BANDELE

- *The Prisoner's Wife*
- *Something Like Beautiful: One Single Mother's Story*

CARL BELL, M.D.

- *Sanity of Survival: Reflections on Community Mental Health*

KHEPHRA BURNS

- *The Boulé Journal* edited by Khephra Burns
- *Confirmation: The Spiritual Wisdom That Has Shaped Our Lives* by Khephra Burns and Susan L. Taylor

MICHELE PIERCE BURNS

- *Danson: The Extraordinary Discovery of an Autistic Child's Innermost Thoughts and Feelings* by Michele Pierce Burns and Danson Mandela Wambua

TOM BURRELL

- *Brainwashed: Challenging the Myth of Black Inferiority*

IVA E. CARRUTHERS, PH.D.

- *Blow the Trumpet in Zion! Global Vision and Action for the 21st Century Black Church*

VERONICA CONWAY

- *The Black Paper* (an e-book found at www.theblackpaper.com)

JOY ANGELA DEGRUY, PH.D.

- *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* by Joy DeGruy Leary
- *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: The Study Guide*

THOMAS W. DORTCH, JR.

- *The Miracles of Mentoring: How to Encourage and Lead Future Generations* by Thomas W. Dortch, Jr., and Carla Fine

MICHAEL ERIC DYSON

- *Born to Use Mics: Reading Nas' Illmatic* edited by Michael Eric Dyson and Sohail Daultazai
- *Come Hell or High Water:*

Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster

- *Holler If You Hear Me:*

Searching for Tupac Shakur

- *I May Not Get There With You:*

The True Martin Luther King, Jr.

- *Is Bill Cosby Right? Or Has the Black Middle Class Lost Its Mind?*

REV. ANDRIETTE EARL

- *Embracing Wholeness:*

*Living in Spiritual Congruence***GLENN ELLIS**

- *Which Doctor? What You Need to Know to Be Healthy*

THERMAN E. EVANS, M.D.

- *From Purpose to Promise Driven Life:*

A Prescription for Making the Difference You Were Born to Make

- *What Are the Leading Causes of Life? A Prescription for Living at Your Highest and Best*

GEORGE C. FRASER

- *Race for Success: The Ten Best Business*

Opportunities for Blacks in America

- *Success Runs in Our Race: The Complete Guide to Effective Networking in the Black Community*

MARCIA ANN GILLESPIE

- *Maya Angelou: A Glorious Celebration* by

Marcia Ann Gillespie, Rosa Johnson Butler and Richard A. Long

SHAWN A. GINWRIGHT, PH.D.

- *Black Youth Rising: Activism and Radical Healing in Urban America*

- *Black in School: Afrocentric Reform, Urban Youth, and the Promise of Hip-Hop Culture*

TERESA "TERRI" KAY-**ABA KENNEDY, PH.D., M.B.A.**

- *40 Days to Power Living:*

Think, Eat and Live on Purpose

- *Seven-Day PWR Detox:*

*Cleanse your Body, Mind and Spirit While**Living Your Daily Life***BISHOP. DR. BARBARA LEWIS KING**

- *Transform Your Life* (revised and expanded to include "How to Have a Flood and Not Drown")

DR. JOYCE E. KING

- *Black Education: A Transformative Research and Action Agenda for the New Century*

- *Black Mothers to Sons: Juxtaposing African American Literature with Social Practice*

by Joyce E. King and C.A. Mitchell

CAROL D. LEE, PH.D.**(SAFISHA L. MADHUBUTI)**

- *African-Centered Education: Its Value, Importance, and Necessity in the Development of Black Children* by Haki R. Madhubuti and Safisha L. Madhubuti, Ph.D.
- *Culture, Literacy, and Learning: Taking Bloom in the Midst of the Whirlwind*

HAKI R. MADHUBUTI

- *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous*

- *Enemies: The Clash of the Races*

- *Tough Notes: A Healing Call for Creating Exceptional Black Men*

JULIANNE MALVEAUX, PH.D.

- *Surviving and Thriving:*

365 Facts in Black Economic History

- *Paradox of Loyalty: An African American Response to the War on Terrorism*

DR. JOEL P. MARTIN

- *How to Be a Positively Powerful Person*

LINDA JAMES MYERS, PH.D.

- *Blessed Assurance: Deep Thought and Meditations in the Tradition of Wisdom from Our Ancestors*

- *Understanding an Afrocentric World View: Introduction to an Optimal Psychology*

WADE W. NOBLES, PH.D.

- *African American Families: Issues, Insights and*

Directions by Wade Nobles, Lawford Goddard and William Cavil

- *African Psychology: Towards Its Reclamation, Reascension and Revitalization*
- *The Km Ebit Husia: Authoritative Utterances of Exceptional Insight for the Black Family* by Wade Nobles, Lawford Goddard, William Cavil and Pamela George

KEVIN POWELL

- *The Black Male Handbook: A Blueprint for Life*
- *Open Letters to America*

SHEILA R. RULE

- *Counting the Years: Real-Life Stories About Waiting for Loved Ones to Return Home from Prison* edited by Sheila R. Rule and Marsha R. Rule
- *The Hard Journey Home: Real-Life Stories About Reentering Society after Incarceration* edited by Sheila R. Rule and Marsha R. Rule

APRIL R. SILVER

- *Be a Father to Your Child: Real Talk from Black Men on Family, Love, and Fatherhood* edited by April R. Silver

SOBONFU E. SOMÉ

- *Falling Out of Grace: Meditations on Loss, Healing and Wisdom*
- *The Spirit of Intimacy: Ancient African Teachings in the Ways of Relationships*

SUSAN L. TAYLOR

- *All About Love: Favorite Selections From In the Spirit*
- *Lessons in Living*

REV. IYANLA VANZANT

- *Peace from Broken Pieces: How to Get Through What You Are Going Through*
- *Until Today! Daily Devotions for Spiritual Growth and Peace of Mind*

TERRIE M. WILLIAMS

- *Black Pain: It Just Looks Like We're Not Hurting*

- *The Personal Touch: What You Really Need to Succeed in Today's Fast-Paced Business World* by Terrie Williams and Joe Cooney

AKOSHIA FATIMAH YOBA

- *Please Return My Phone Call: Preventing the Demise of Personal and Professional Relationships* by Malik Yoba and Akoshia Fatimah Yoba

MALIK YOBA

- *Please Return My Phone Call: Preventing the Demise of Personal and Professional Relationships* by Malik Yoba and Akoshia Fatimah Yoba

SELECTED WORKS RECOMMENDED BY A NEW WAY FORWARD'S BRAINTRUST

Our History

- *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality* by Cheikh Anta Diop
- *African Origins of the Major Western Religions* by Yosef ben-Jochannan
- *African People in World History* by John Henrik Clarke
- *Balancing Written History with Oral Tradition: The Legacy of the Songhay People* by H.O. Maiga
- *Beautiful Also Are the Souls of My Sisters* by Jeanne Noble
- *Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America, 1619–1962* by Lerone Bennett, Jr.
- *The Black Jacobins* by C.L.R. James
- *Children of Fire: A History of African Americans* by Thomas C. Holt
- *The Destruction of Black Civilization* by Chancellor Williams
- *Disintegration: The Splintering of Black America* by Eugene Robinson
- *Ella Baker and the Black Radical Tradition* by Barbara Ransby
- *From Slavery to Freedom* by John Hope Franklin
- *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* by Frederick Douglass
- *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander

- *A People's History of the United States*

by Howard Zinn

- *A Shining Thread of Hope*

by Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson

- *Slavery by Another Name:*

The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II

by Douglas A. Blackmon

- *The Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B. DuBois

- *There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* by Vincent G. Harding

- *They Came Before Columbus*

by Ivan Van Sertima

- *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves* by Deborah Gray White

- *A Voice from the South* by Anna Julia Cooper

- *When and Where I Enter* by Paula Giddings

- *World's Great Men of Color, Volume II: Europe, South and Central America, the West Indies, and the United States* by J.A. Rogers

Self, Family, Youth and Community Development

- *African American Families: Issues Insights and Directions* by Wade Nobles and Lawford Goddard

- *Africinity and the Black Family: The Development of a Theoretical Model*

by Wade Nobles

- *An American Paradox:*

Young Black Males by Dr. Renford Reese

- *Becoming a Woman of Destiny: Turning Life's Trials into Triumphs* by Suzan Johnson Cook

- *Beyond Resistance! Youth Activism and Community Change: New Democratic Possibilities for Practice and Policy for America's Youth* by Shawn Ginwright, Ph.D.

- *Black Families in Therapy: Understanding the African American Experience*

by Nancy Boyd-Franklin

- *Black Men in Their Own Words,*

Khephra Burns, Contributor

- *The Black Parenting Book: Caring for Our Children in the First Five Years*

by Anne Beal, M.D.

- *Black Stars in Orbit* by Khephra Burns

- *Choosing Truth:*

Living an Authentic Life by Harriette Cole

- *Cornrows* by Camille Yarbrough

- *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Historical Analysis of the Failure of Black Leadership* by Harold Cruse

- *Dare to Take Charge: How to Live Your Life on Purpose* by Glenda Hatchett

- *The Games Black Girls Play: Learning the Ropes from Double-Dutch to Hip-Hop* by Kyra Gaunt

- *Having What Matters* by Monique Greenwood

- *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* by Alice Walker

- *Like Loving Backward*

by Cheo Tyeimba Taylor

- *Mansa Musa: The Lion of Mali*

by Khephra Burns

- *Stay Strong: Simple Life Lessons for Teens*

by Terrie Williams

- *Welcoming Spirit Home: Ancient African Teachings to Celebrate Children and Community*

- *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? A Psychologist Explains the Development of Racial Identity*

by Beverly Daniel Tatum

Relationships

- *How to Be an Adult in Relationships: The Five Keys to Mindful Loving*

by David Richo and Kathlyn Hendricks

- *How to Love a Black Man* by Ronn Elmore

- *How to Love a Black Woman* by Ronn Elmore

- *The Spirit of Intimacy: Ancient African Teaching in the Ways of Relationships* by Sobonfu Somé

Race, Identity, Gender and Society

- *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* by Khalil Gibran Muhammad

- *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* by James Baldwin

- *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* by bell hooks and Ellen P. Shapiro

- *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin

- *Gender Talk: The Struggle for Women's Equality in African American Communities*

by Johnnetta B. Cole and Beverly Guy-Sheftall

- *Love, Race, and Liberation: 'Til the White Day Is Done* edited by JLove Calderon and Marcella Runell Hall
- *The Maroon Within Us: Selected Essays on African American Community Socialization* by Asa G. Hilliard
- *Naked: Black Women Bare All About Their Skin, Hair, Hips, Lips, and Other Parts* edited by Ayana Byrd and Akiba Solomon
- *Race and Reality* by Guy P. Harrison
- *Race Matters* by Dr. Cornel West
- *Race Rules: Navigating the Color Line* by Michael Eric Dyson
- *Shades of Black: Diversity in African American Identity* by William Cross
- *Shifting: The Double Lives of Black Women in America* by Charisse Jones and Kumea Shorter-Gooden
- *Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack: White Privilege* by Peggy McIntosh
- *The Violent Social World of Black Men* by William Oliver
- *Walking Proud: Black Men Living Beyond Stereotypes* by George Edmond Smith and Gwendolyn Goldsby Grant
- *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* by Ira Katznelson
- *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip-Hop Feminist Breaks It Down* by Joan Morgan
- *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son* by Tim Wise
- *Who's Gonna Take the Weight: Manhood, Race, and Power in America* by Kevin Powell
- *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional! Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* by Robin D.G. Kelley
- *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior* by Marimba Ani

Education

- *Can We Talk About Race? and Other Conversations in an Era of School Resegregation* by Beverly Daniel Tatum
- *The Courage to Teach* by Parker Palmer
- *The Mis-Education of the Negro*

by Carter G. Woodson

- *Pass It On: A Guide to Navigating the Public School System* by Marilyn J. Goodard
- *The Power of One: How You Can Help or Harm African American Students* by Dr. Gail Thompson
- *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* by Jonathan Kozol
- *Walking in Circles: The Black Struggle for School Reform* by Barbara A. Sizemore (Foreword by Safisha L. Madhubuti)

Business, Networking, Wealth-Building and Entrepreneurship

- *Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality* edited by Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro
- *Click: Ten Truths for Building Extraordinary Relationships* by George C. Fraser
- *Good Is Not Enough: And Other Unwritten Rules for Minority Professionals* by Keith Wyche
- *Leadership from the Inside Out: Becoming a Leader for Life* by Kevin Cashman
- *Love Leadership: The New Way to Lead in a Fear-Based World* by John Hope Bryant
- *Martin Luther King, Jr., on Leadership: Inspiration & Wisdom for Challenging Times* by Donald T. Phillips
- *Outliers: The Story of Success* by Malcolm Gladwell
- *Speak Like a Pro: In Business and Public Speaking* by Margaret M. Bedrosian
- *Who Moved My Cheese* by Spencer Johnson, M.D.
- *Words into Type* by Prentice Hall (Rules of Grammar)
- *Zero Limits: The Secret Hawaiian System for Wealth, Health, Peace, and More* by Joe Vitale and Ihaleakala Hew Len

Politics

- *Democracy Remixed: Black Youth and the Future of American Politics* by Cathy Cohen
- *Letters to a Young Brother: MANifest Your Destiny* by Hill Harper
- *Some of Us Did Not Die* by June Jordan
- *The Substance of Hope: Barack Obama and the*

Paradox of Progress by William Jelani Cobb

▪ *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* by bell hooks

Spirituality

▪ *Acts of Faith: Daily Meditations for People of Color* by Iyanla Vanzant

▪ *The Age of Miracles: Embracing the New Midlife* by Marianne Williamson

▪ *Becoming a Woman of Destiny: Turning Life's Trials into Triumphs!*

by Rev. Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook

▪ *Deep Is the Hunger* by Howard Thurman

▪ *Embracing Wholeness: Living in Spiritual Congruence* by Rev. Andriette Earl

▪ *Faith in the Valley: Lessons for Women on the Journey to Peace* by Iyanla Vanzant

▪ *For the Inward Journey* by Howard Thurman

▪ *Growing Edge* by Howard Thurman

▪ *In the Meantime: Finding Yourself and the Love You Want* by Iyanla Vanzant

▪ *In the Spirit: The Inspirational Writings of Susan L. Taylor* by Susan L. Taylor

▪ *Life Is for Living* by Eric Butterworth

▪ *Light from Ancient Africa* by Na'im Akbar, Ph.D.

▪ *Meditations of the Heart* by Howard Thurman

▪ *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of "A Course in Miracles"* by Marianne Williamson

▪ *The Roots of Transcendence*

by Edward Bruce Bynum

▪ *The Sacred Yes: Letters from the Infinite*

by Deborah L. Johnson

▪ *Self-Healing Power and Therapy:*

Old Teachings from Africa

by K. Kia Bunseki Fu-Kiau

▪ *Strength to Love*

by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

▪ *This Thing Called You* by Ernest Holmes

▪ *Too Blessed to Be Stressed: Words of Wisdom for Women on the Move*

by Rev. Dr. Suzan D. Johnson Cook

▪ *The Value in the Valley: A Black Woman's Guide Through Life's Dilemmas*

by Iyanla Vanzant

▪ *Of Water and the Spirit: Ritual, Magic and Initiation in the Life of an African*

by Malidoma Somé

▪ *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times* by Pema Chödrön

Mind

▪ *African American Mental Health*

edited by Reginald L. Jones

▪ *African American Psychology:*

From Africa to America by Dr. Faye Z. Belgrave and Dr. Kevin W. Allison

▪ *African American Psychology:*

Theory, Research and Practice by Ann Kathleen Burlew, W. Curtis Banks, Harritte Pipes MsAdoo and Daudi Ajani ya Azibo

▪ *African/Black Psychology in the American Context: An African-Centered Approach*

by Kobi K. Kambon

▪ *African-Centered Psychology:*

Culture-Focusing for Multicultural Competence

edited by Daidi Ajani ya Azibo

▪ *African Origin of Biological Psychiatry*

by Richard King

▪ *The African Personality in America: An African-Centered Framework*

by Kobi K. Kambon

▪ *African Psychology: Toward Its Reclamation, Reascension and Revitalization* by Wade Nobles

▪ *Akbar Papers in African Psychology*

by Na'im Akbar, Ph.D.

▪ *Black Psychology* by Reginald Jones

▪ *Boys No More: A Black Psychologist's View of Community* by Charles Thomas

▪ *Breaking the Chains of Psychological Slavery*

by Na'im Akbar, Ph.D.

▪ *Choke: What the Secrets of the Brain Reveal About Getting It Right When You Have To*

by Sian Beilock

▪ *Even the Rat Was White: A Historical View of Psychology* by Robert Guthrie

▪ *Kambon's Reader in Liberation Psychology*

by Kobi K. K. Kambon

▪ *Our Health Matters: Guide to an African (Indigenous) American Psychology and Cultural Model for Creating a Climate and Culture of Optimal Health* by Linda James Myers

▪ *Psychopathic Racial Personality*

by Bobby E. Wright

▪ *Psychotherapy with African American Women:*

Innovations in Psychodynamic Perspectives and Practice by Leslie C. Jackson and Beverly Greene

- *Seeking the Sanku: Foundational Writings for an African Psychology* by Wade Nobles
- *Standing in the Shadows: Understanding and Overcoming Depression in Black Men* by John Head
- *Understanding an Afrocentric World View: Introduction to an Optimal Psychology* by Linda James Myers
- *Understanding the Black Family: A Guide for Scholarship and Research* by Wade Nobles and Lawford Goddard
- *Voodoo or IQ: An Introduction to African Psychology* by Syed Khatib

Body

- *An American Health Dilemma: A Medical History of African-Americans and the Problem of Race* by W. Michael Byrd and Linda Clayton
- *The Black Women's Health Book: Speaking for Ourselves* by Evelyn C. White
- *Blessed Health: The African-American Woman's Guide to Physical and Spiritual Well-Being* by Melody T. McCloud and Angela Ebron
- *The Cancer Journals* by Audre Lorde
- *The China Study: The Most Comprehensive Study of Nutrition Ever Conducted and the Startling Implications for Diet, Weight Loss, and Long-Term Health* by T. Colin Campbell, Thomas M. Campbell II, Howard Lyman and John Robbins
- *The HeartMath Solution* by Doc Childre and Howard Martin
- *Living Matrix: A Film on the New Science of Healing* directed by Greg Becker (Film)
- *Medical Apartheid* by Harriet Washington
- *Menopause, Sisterhood and Tennis* by Alice Wilson-Fried
- *The Mocha Manual to a Fabulous Pregnancy* by Kimberly Seals-Allers
- *A Path to Healing* by Dr. Andrea D. Sullivan
- *Prime Time: The African-American Woman's Complete Guide to Midlife Health and Wellness* by Marilyn Hughes Gaston, M.D., and Gayle Porter, Psy.D.

▪ *Sacred Woman: A Guide to Healing the Feminine Body, Mind and Spirit* by Queen Afua

Soul

- *A Plentiful Harvest: Creating Balance and Harmony Through the Seven Living Virtues* by Terrie Williams
- *Power Choices: Signpost on Your Journey to Wholeness, Love, Joy and Peace* by Brenda Wade
- *Seven Soulful Secrets for Finding Your Purpose and Minding Your Mission* by Stephanie Stokes Oliver

Art, Culture and Media

- *Blues People* by LeRoi Jones
- *Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes* by Byron Hurt (Film)
- *Television Myth and American Mind* by Hal Himmelstein
- *Theatre of the Oppressed* by Augusto Boal
- *To the Break of Dawn: A Freestyle on the Hip Hop Aesthetic* by William Jelani Cobb
- *What Would Google Do?* by Jeff Jarvis

Poetry

- *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*
- *Morning Haiku* by Sonia Sanchez
- *Our Dead Behind Us* by Audre Lorde
- *Selected Poems* by Gwendolyn Brooks
- *Selected Poems* by Paul Laurence Dunbar
- *Things That I Do in the Dark* by June Jordan
- *Where a Nickel Costs a Dime* by Willie Perdomo

Biography, Memoir and Conversations

- *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* by Maya Angelou
- *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* as told to Alex Haley
- *Dust Tracks on the Road* by Zora Neale Hurston
- *Fist Stick Knife Gun* by Geoffrey Canada
- *Gather Together in My Name* by Maya Angelou
- *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou
- *The Naked Truth: Young, Beautiful and (HIV) Positive* by Marvelyn Brown
- *No Momma's Boy: How I Let Go of My Past and Embraced the Future* by Dominic Carter

- *Open Wide the Freedom Gates*
by Dr. Dorothy I. Height
- *With Ossie and Ruby: In This Life Together*
by Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee
- *The Other Wes Moore: One Name,
Two Fates* by Wes Moore
- *Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like
Christmas* by Maya Angelou
- *Sister Outsider* by Audre Lorde
- *Soldier: A Poet's Childhood* by June Jordan
- *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* by Maya Angelou
- *W.E.B. DuBois* by David Levering Lewis
- *The World Has Changed:
Conversations with Alice Walker*
by Alice Walker and Rudolph P. Byrd

The selections suggested by A New Way Forward's Braintrust represent just a small sampling of titles for your library.

Dear God,
Let the community come.
Let us use all our oars in the water
to pull smartly in the same direction.
Let the healing flourish.
Let us see our children through.

Susan

HEALING WHAT'S HURTING BLACK AMERICA

VOICES OF

Carol L. Adams • Na'im Akbar • Noel S. Anderson • Maya Angelou
Esther Akasi Armah • Baayan Bakari • asha bandele • Harry Belafonte
Carl C. Bell • Dereca L. Blackmon • C. Diane Wallace Booker
Lashan Browning • Khephra Burns • Michael A. Burns • Michele Pierce
Burns • Madeleine Moore Burrell • Tom Burrell • Leon D. Caldwell
Iva E. Carruthers • Veronica Conway • Michaela angela Davis
Joy Angela DeGruy • Thomas W. Dortch, Jr. • Michael Eric Dyson
Andriette Earl • Glenn Ellis • Therman E. Evans • Shelia Evans-Tranum
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William Paden • Jessica C. Pinkney • Kevin Powell • Beloved Reese
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