

ARE WE WHO WE REALLY THINK WE ARE?



Sugar - pg. 5

What many of us may not know is that Diabetes accounts for more deaths than Breast Cancer and AIDS combined. According to statistics, a person is diagnosed with diabetes every 17 seconds. Recent figures indicate that close to 26 million Americans, or in other words, more than 8% of the population, are living with Diabetes.



Ken Bevel, The "Courageos" Interview - pg. 7

A native of Jacksonville, Florida, Ken Bevel is a graduate of the University of Memphis with a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Engineering Technology and also a graduate of the Naval Postgraduate School with a Master of Business Administration degree in Logistics Management. After 20 years of active service in the United States Marine Corps, Captain Bevel retired to serve in the ministry on the staff of Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, Georgia.

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As we move toward the Presidential election in 2012, some interesting things have been happening, which in my opinion will make for a very interesting election. For starters, former Godfather's Pizza C.E.O. Herman Cain has been leading the pack on the Republican side for President. It should be noted that Herman Cain is an African-American with no previous political experience. He has been able to tap into a base of conservatives that seem to like what he

is saying. There are those that will argue that the majority of Cain's base likes what he says especially when he is talking about black people. One statement that Cain made that raised an eyebrow with me was that of his belief that the playing field is level when it comes to economic issues for Blacks in this country. That's right, you read it correctly. I'm sorry, Mr. Cain, but in my opinion, nothing could be farther from the truth, as the statistics speak for themselves. I would love to see where Mr. Cain got his facts from that would prove my opinion wrong. Additionally, Mr. Cain has come under fire recently for his alleged sexual harassment of three women. I would reserve my judgment on that issue until the facts concerning the allegations are verified. As a result of those allegations, Mr. Cain has slapped his trump card down on the table, like he was in a game of spades and holding the big joker, by playing the race card in saying that they are attacking him because he was black. This seem like deja vu in that a few years back, there was another black man that played his card when the heat was on his behind, that being Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. Thomas made the statement that it was nothing more

than a high-tech lynching for uppity blacks. This coming from a man who opposed affirmative action, when he himself was an affirmative action pick to replace the first black to ever serve on the Supreme Court: Thurgood Marshall. Whatever the case may be, voters will be paying a lot more attention to the candidates this election, as Republicans, Democrats and Tea Party members will be out in full force trying to spread their message.

There have been countless people over the years that have laid down or dedicated their lives to change in this society. Some are well-known people that have changed things in a big way, i.e. Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, A. Phillip Randolph and Malcolm X, just to name a few. There have also been countless unsung heroes that nobody has ever heard of that have changed their cities, towns, communities and neighborhoods by taking a stance on something they perceived as right. Oftentimes, these individuals face harsh criticism from their peers as well as others when they seek to stand up for justice. These unsung heroes pave the wave for a better life for those that follow in their footsteps. Do you know someone like that? If so, please take the time to tell them that you appreciate what they

did and to thank them for opening doors for others and to let them know that their efforts were not in vain.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the St. Louis Cardinals on their World Series Championship victory over the Texas Rangers in seven exciting games. The sixth game of the series will probably go down in history as one of the most exciting game sixes in the history of the World Series. Now that manager Tony Larussa has decided to retire, I would hope that my friends Jose Oquendo or Terry Pendleton are given serious consideration as a managerial candidate. They both deserve an opportunity, as they have both paid their dues. Stay tuned.

This month's cover story, written by Kim Gordon, is titled "Are We Who We Really Think We Are?" Readers, this story is a must read for you this month. Also in this month's edition is an interview with actor Ken Bevel from the movie "Courageous," written by Kam Williams and an article written by Kim Connor called "Sugar," which examines diabetes. I hope you enjoy this month's edition.

Michael Pittman

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IN THE NEWS

Sugar

by Kimberly D. Conner



What many of us may not know is that Diabetes accounts for more deaths than Breast Cancer and AIDS combined. According to statistics, a person is diagnosed with diabetes every 17 seconds. Recent figures indicate that close to 26 million Americans, or in other words, more than 8% of the population, are living with Diabetes. What's scary is that one out of three of them do not know that they have the disease. Another 79 million are at risk to developing Type 2 Diabetes. Diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death. For those over the age of 45, diabetes is the 5th leading cause of death. There are reportedly close to 2 million new cases reported and diagnosed each year. Among African-Americans, age 50 or older, nearly 20% of men and almost 30% of women have the disease. Among seniors over the age of 65, more than one out of four, or 27% have diabetes. There are nearly 830,000 adults in Illinois living with the disease. November is Diabetes Awareness Month.

To begin, dispelling the myths, diabetes is not caused by having too much sugar in our diets. Often referred to as "Sugar" in the black community, defined, Diabetes is a group of diseases characteristic of

elevated blood glucose levels resulting from defects in insulin production. The pancreas produces the hormone, insulin, which helps the body absorb glucose. Depending on the type of diabetes, one of two things happen, either the body does not make enough insulin, or the body does not properly or cannot effectively utilize the insulin. Untreated, diabetes can lead to a myriad of other health problems and concerns. African-Americans are affected at disproportionately higher rates when compared to other groups. The rate of diabetes within the Black population has tripled over the last few decades. One in 7 Blacks has diabetes. African-Americans are twice as likely as Whites to have the disease. Other statistics indicate that 7% of non-Hispanics Whites, 8% of Asians, 11% of Hispanics, and 12% of non-Hispanic blacks have the disease.

There are two types of diabetes, Type 1 and Type 2. There are misconceptions associated with both types. Type 1 can occur at any age, but most often appears during childhood and teen years. Characteristic of this type, the body no longer produces insulin. Individuals affected by Type 1 diabetes generally have to take insulin injections and/or oral medications to regulate their glucose levels. According to the American Diabetes Association, a normal blood glucose reading is 126 mg/dl or lower.

Most African-Americans have Type 2 diabetes, which represents 90% to 95% of new diabetes cases. Type 2, the most common, previously referred to as adult-onset diabetes, can actually occur at any age, more recent studies indicate. Interestingly enough, Type 2 diabetes, defined, is when the body develops a resistance to insulin. Essentially, the body fails to properly utilize the insulin it produces on its own.

Gestational diabetes is another form of the disease, posing a major risk for mothers, affecting up to 5% of pregnant women. According to recent figures, women that have had gestational diabetes have a 35% to 60% chance of developing full-blown diabetes within 10 to 20 years. Gestational diabetes occurs in African-American women at a rate of 50% to 80% higher than that of White women. Some diabetic women have larger babies, posing a danger to mother and baby. As a result, their babies are often taken early.

Pre-diabetes is a condition in which the blood glucose levels are higher than normal but not high enough to be considered "diabetes". We are beginning to see a rise in these instances within the younger population, including adolescents and young adults. Many live a sedentary lifestyle and have a diet consisting

of high processed foods. But, with the proper diet and exercise, Type 2 diabetes can be avoided, many times. Otherwise, unchecked, pre-diabetes can develop into Type 2 diabetes within several years. The Center for Disease Control estimates that 1 in 3 adults have pre-diabetes.

Risk factors for developing Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes include obesity, a family history of the disease, and physical inactivity, experts say. Individuals with hypertension are also at a greater risk of developing diabetes. High cholesterol also raises the risks. According to guidelines, a body mass index lower than 25 is considered a normal weight, while 25 – 29.9 is considered overweight. A BMI of 30 or more is considered obese. Even then, there are cultural differences, in terms of how we interpret and view weight. There are different perceptions in terms of body image, what's "healthy" and what's not, depending upon cultural ideas.

Symptoms of diabetes and pre-diabetes include but are not limited to frequent thirst and urination, unusual hunger, rapid weight loss, fatigue, slowly healing sores, frequent infections, and blurred vision.

African-Americans are 50% more likely than Hispanics to go blind as a result of diabetes. African-Americans are 5 times more likely to suffer from kidney disease, as a result of diabetes. It's no surprise that Black people are twice as likely to suffer from amputations, than Whites. A very interesting fact, however, when it comes to children, diabetes rates are lower in Black children than in Whites. Juvenile diabetes rates in White children are nearly two times higher than in Black children.

Diabetics are more susceptible to other illnesses. Diabetes has the ability to hide itself in other illnesses, resulting in complications such as

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Sugar

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heart attack and stroke, amputation, kidney failure, blindness, even gum disease. African-Americans experience higher rates of diabetes complications than Whites. Diabetes is the leading cause of kidney failure. Blacks are 4 times more likely than Whites to experience end stage renal failure. However, Blacks have a better survival rate when compared to Whites, experiencing kidney failure. Depression increases a person's chances of developing Type 2 diabetes by sixty percent. Diabetics are twice as likely to suffer from depression. Diabetes causes the arteries to harden. According to statistics, heart disease and stroke account for 65% of diabetic deaths. Diabetic neuropathy also presents a problem for diabetics, resulting in nerve damage. Sixty to seventy percent of diabetics report mild to severe nervous system damage, including pain and numbness of the hands and feet. Many experience erectile dysfunction. In terms of blindness resulting from diabetes, Blacks are at a higher risk, at nearly fifty percent.

We have become an overweight society in America, our belt sizes increasing, in both children and adults. Doctors warn that weight carried in the midsection poses the most serious health risks. Interestingly enough, on average, Blacks tend to carry their excess weight in the upper-body, it appears, and have higher obesity rates. But, even when compared to obese Whites, obese Blacks still have higher rates of diabetes. Researchers are not sure why.

While there is no cure for diabetes Type 1, studies indicate that much can be done to eradicate Type 2, beginning with diet and exercise. Physical activity, such as walking, protects the body from illness and disease. Exercising for 30 minutes a day, five days a week, and eating a balanced meal, can benefit the body immensely, keeping it healthy. A recent survey indicated that 50% of Black men and 67% of Black women engaged in little or no exercise. Unless we make positive lifestyle changes, experts estimate that diabetes cases will continue to climb, expected to triple, by 2050.

Experts estimate that one in 3 Americans will have diabetes. Some believe that simple lifestyle changes like eating a balanced diet and exercising can cut one's chances of getting diabetes. Much of our health is in our hands. Diabetes is not a death sentence, managed and controlled properly, diabetics can live a normal, healthy life. The Diabetes Prevention Program conducted a study of people at risk for developing diabetes and found that weight loss and exercise reduces the development of Type 2 diabetes by nearly 60 percent.

In terms of treatment, fifty-eight percent of patients take oral medication for diabetes. Twelve percent take insulin shots. Fourteen percent use a combination of insulin and oral medication to treat their diabetes, while 16% opt to take no medication at all. According to medical professionals, the best time to test your blood sugar level is before a meal. But some test after meals, or before bed. Monitoring blood glucose levels is a must for diabetics that want to live a healthy lifestyle.

The Illinois Diabetes Prevention and Control Program's mission is to improve the health of people at risk for, or affected by, diabetes. Another resource is the National Diabetes Prevention Program, bringing together professionals, community organizations, healthcare organizations, and government agencies in an effort to address diabetes disease, by fostering lifestyle intervention programs in the community, and by providing education about health and fitness. Education is the key in preventing and maintaining this disease.

For additional educational resources, please visit the American Diabetes Association at www.diabetes.org. The National Diabetes Education Program is another avenue, www.yourdiabetesinfo.org, along with the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation International at www.jdrf.org, and the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases at www.niddk.nih.gov.



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INTERVIEW WITH KAM WILLIAMS

Ken Bevel “Courageous”



A native of Jacksonville, Florida, Ken Bevel is a graduate of the University of Memphis with a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Engineering Technology and also a graduate of the Naval Postgraduate School with a Master of Business Administration degree in Logistics Management. After 20 years of active service in the United States Marine Corps, Captain Bevel retired to serve in the ministry on the staff of Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, Georgia.

As Senior Associate Pastor, his responsibilities include coordination of major events, coordination of the Security, Usher and Greeter ministries and, lastly, assisting new members and visitors with connecting to the Body of Christ and the Sherwood Family. He and his wife, Lauana, have been happily married for 14 years and they have two children, Kyra and Kaleb.

Ken is also recognized for having played Lieutenant Michael Simmons in the inspirational film “Fireproof.” Here, the Marine Corps Captain-turned-pastor/actor talks about life and about his latest role as Nathan Hayes in Sherwood Pictures’ new movie “Courageous.”

Kam Williams: Hi Ken, thanks for the interview. It was great meeting you Julie, Paul and Pastor Alex in person the other night.

Ken Bevel: Thanks Kam. We enjoyed meeting you and your wife and we definitely enjoyed the conversation.

KW: What interested you in *Courageous*?

KB: There are two things that drew my interest to the movie *Courageous*. The first was my conviction to the messages told by Sherwood Pictures. In each of the four films, the Sherwood Pictures team handles with care the

weighty issues of honesty, integrity, marriage and fatherhood. As these topics are addressed through the silver screen, I have seen lives changed and families restored. So, seeing the fruit of the movies drew me more than anything. The second is the topic, Fatherhood. There are many men who deeply desire to be a man of integrity upon whom their children can look to for guidance, instruction, affirmation and love. However, due to a lack wise counsel many are straying from the path of true fatherhood and settling for good instead of great. As a man, I long to be a part of the solution that will assist men in being the fathers they were designed to be.

KW: Tell me a little about your character, Nathan Hayes?

KB: *Nathan Hayes is a man most of us would consider a “good” man. He is a hard-working African-American male, with a beautiful wife and three wonderful children. Although his life may seem picturesque initially, his earlier years were filled with identity struggles, violence and doubt due in part to the absence of a father. However, through the assistance of a mentor, William Barrett, Nathan was able to learn what it means to be a man. While the presence of a mentor helped his belief in God and personal growth, he believed there was more to being a father and was willing to seek after it.*

KW: Are there any parallels between Nathan’s life and your own?

KB: *Very much so. I see myself in the same light as Nathan Hayes. I too grew up with my father being absent from our home for many years. As a result of the lack of affirmation and encouragement, I grew up doubting myself as a young man and struggling to understand how to deal with the issues of life.*

KW: Editor/Legist Patricia Turnier would like to know: What message you want people to take away from the movie?



KB: *The message I pray people walk away with is one of hope and the ability to understand “failure is not final.” As fathers and parents, each of us has missed the mark in one way or another. We have provided incor-*

rect advice, scorned our children excessively or crushed their spirits. This is not the end. Our children still need us for encouragement, instruction and for the greatest commodity,

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Ken Bevel, The “Courageous” Interview

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love. So our approach should not be as one who withdraws him or herself from their lives. We should be willing to ask for forgiveness and earn their trust through intentionally rebuilding the relationship.

KW: She also asks: What interested you in acting after serving in the Marine Corps?

KB: I wanted to act because I was excited about the impact the Sherwood Movies were having on my life and countless others. Although there were many jobs on the set, acting drew my attention the most.

KW: Finally, Patricia says: The focus of Courageous is on fatherhood. What does fatherhood mean to you?

KB: Fatherhood means acting as a guide for our children. The job of the guide is assisting our children to safely navigating through life by providing continual love, warnings, protection, and guidance.

KW: Harriet Pakula Teweles asks: How did the Marine Corps prepare you to embody and accurately portray the bonding in Courageous?

KB: Just like the Marine Corps, most paramilitary organizations are a band of brothers, who seek unity and are willing to go the extra mile for his or her fellow officers. So, this aspect of portraying the character was very easy because the environment was familiar.

KW: Documentary director Kevin Williams says several other Marines became actors and did very well at it. Guys like Steve McQueen, Lee Marvin and Harvey Keitel. Has your Marine Corps training come in handy in your acting career?

KB: The Marine Corps training was VERY handy during the filming of Courageous. There were many physically challenging scenes that required more than a “thirty minute morning work-out.” So, in those times I prayerfully asked the Lord to give me the same strength and endurance used during my Marine Corps training to make the character seem real and believable. I really enjoyed the action!

KW: Kevin also notes that Sherwood Pictures’ films like Fireproof and Courageous have really helped bring the genre of Christian-based

movies to mainstream audiences. How do you feel about that being part of your film legacy?

KB: As mentioned, I have enjoyed working with Sherwood Pictures and the seeing firsthand how our culture is being impacted by the movies. With that said, a film legacy is not what I am seeking after. My joy comes from seeing mainstream audiences enjoy an entertaining movie, which happens to be produced by Christians, while at the same time being challenged in their faith, family, marriage and level of integrity.

KW: Is there any question no one ever asks you, that you wish someone would?

KB: Why do you believe what you believe? I feel this is an important question, because it outlines one’s motives for every action on and off the screen.

KW: The Tasha Smith question: Are you ever afraid?

KB: Yes, I am. There are times in my life when I get extremely anxious. However, I understand that I have a heavenly Father who sees my struggles and insecurities. It is in those times, He gives me peace and endurance to be strong and courageous amidst my problems.

KW: The Columbus Short question: Are you happy?

KB: Rather than say I am happy, I would rather say “I am joyful.” To me, joy is something I can always have and it is based upon truth versus short-term feelings. An example would be: I would be “happy” to see my children receive academic awards, but I take joy in the fact that they receive academic rewards due to their honesty, integrity and desire to impact their community. Joy has a more lasting impact.

KW: The Teri Emerson question: When was the last time you had a good laugh?

KB: The last time I had a good laugh was watching the “Snake King” scene in Courageous. Hilarious!

KW: What is your guiltiest pleasure?

KB: My guiltiest pleasure doesn’t come from a dark secret. It’s being a kid with my kids. Some may say it’s getting on the kids level, but I really

enjoy doing things like getting inside the “kiddie” jumpy house with my kids and doing back-flips, falling down and laughing with them or playing hide-and-seek with my kids when all other adults are sitting around talking. I feel like I should be engaged with other adults during those times, but I really enjoy spending time with my children!

KW: What is your favorite dish to cook?

KB: Wow! This is a great question. I haven’t prepared a meal in years. In times past, spaghetti has been my favorite dish to cook. However, I have a wonderful wife who prepares healthy and delicious meals for our family. She loves to cook and honor her family. Her favorite dish that I love to eat is Lasagna.

KW: The bookworm Troy Johnson question: What was the last book you read?

KB: The last book I read was Courageous Living by Michael Catt. The book went into the details of living a courageous life in the face of constant adversity. He provided several examples to clarify what courageous living looks like. The book challenged me personally and caused me to question, “Am I living a courageous life or just getting by?” A great book and a MUST READ!

KW: The music maven Heather Covington question: What are you listening to on your iPod?

KB: I listen to mostly gospel and contemporary Christian music on my iPod. When I am working out and need the extra push, I put in a little gospel rap by Lacrae. That really gets my heart pumping!

KW: The Nancy Lovell Question: Why do you love doing what you do?

KB: I love doing what I am doing because it has eternal purpose. Many of the things we do are called, “time stealers.” Time stealers are things that have little to no value or purpose, but consume the majority of your time. I have decided to focus on things which will last through eternity and those are the things I have grown to love.

KW: The Judyth Piazza questions: How do you define success? And, what key quality do you believe

all successful people share?

KB: For me, success is defined and is dependent upon achieving an expected outcome. For Sherwood Pictures, I define success as seeing lives changed for the better. All successful people share the common quality of identifying the needs of the person who is being served. By understanding people, successful people can anticipate the needs of customers before the issues are raised.

KW: Judy also asks: What is the most important lesson that you learned from your time in the military?

KB: Real leaders never announce they are leaders, people are just willing to follow them.

KW: The Toure question: Who is the person who most inspired you to become the person you are today?

KB: There have been many people in my path, throughout the years, that have helped me to go the extra mile when I wanted to give up. The person who has inspired and encouraged me the most is my wife, Lauana. She has been in my corner faithfully and has always believed in me when I didn’t believe in myself. I truly have a virtuous woman that exponentially adds to my life and I am grateful to be married to her.

KW: The Dulé Hill question. Do you attribute the success you’ve achieved in your career to yourself, to a higher power, or to a mixture of both?

KB: Without a shadow of doubt the Lord has been my help! There is no way I could come close to being the man I am today without Jesus Christ. He has changed my life and given me a renewed mind to follow Him. I am nothing without Him and to Him be all the credit and glory.

KW: What has been the biggest obstacle you have had to overcome?

KB: Pride! As a young child, I experienced many difficult times where I felt like a failure who could not be accepted. As I began to mature, I was recognized for many achievements like sports, academics and physical fitness. As I climbed the ladder of success, my pride was far ahead of me. When I learned of how

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Ken Bevel, The “Courageous” Interview

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pride’s damaging effects destroyed relationships and lives, I asked for forgiveness and began putting the needs of others before my own. This was a very difficult obstacle to overcome.

KW: The Flex Alexander question: How do you get through the tough times?

KB: The way I get through tough times is with prayer. It is impossible for me to handle life’s challenges on my own.

KW: The Pastor Alex Kendrick question: When do you feel the most content?

KB: I feel the most content when I have my family around me and we are content with spending time with each other. During these times, I can see my children playing or quietly reading and my wife by my side. These are the special moments that I cherish!

KW: What do you wish other people would note about you?

KB: Nothing particularly.

KW: What defines who you are?

KB: Since I desire to be identified

as a Christian, the Bible defines who I am. This is the very blueprint from which I base my marriage, relationship, and integrity.

KW: What motivates you?

KB: My motivation comes from assisting others to achieve their goals. I have realized that life is more about others than it is about me. I have determined that I must be able to give of my resources and time unselfishly to equip others for great things.

KW: The Sanaa Lathan question: What excites you?

KB: Preparing to spend time and spending time with my family excites me. Some may say money or an event, but my family is one of the most important elements in my life.

KW: Dante Lee, author of “Black Business Secrets, asks: What was the best business decision you ever made, and what was the worst?

KB: The best business decision I ever made was purchasing a home. Although intimidating, after the

purchase we received quite a few financial benefits from owning our own home. One of the worst business decisions made was investing in a home purchasing workbook for purchasing foreclosed homes with a credit card. Bad move.

KW: When you look in the mirror, what do you see?

KB: In the mirror, I see an unworthy man that is incredibly blessed. The question I often ask is, “Why me?”

KW: If you could have one wish instantly granted, what would that be for?

KB: For my lifelong friend to have a relationship with Jesus Christ. My heart’s desire is to see him live out his remaining days with the Lord.

KW: The Ling-Ju Yen question: What is your earliest childhood memory?

KB: My earliest childhood memory is meeting my dad on the street corner everyday as he was walking home from work and racing him home. What fond memories because

our time didn’t depend on material things. Just time spent together.

KW: What advice do you have for anyone who wants to follow in your footsteps?

KB: Don’t try to follow in my footsteps. Everyone has a unique path for their lives. If you live out this purpose, there will be a great sense of accomplishment and fulfillment that cannot be achieved by following the footsteps of another human being.

KW: The Tavis Smiley question: How do you want to be remembered?

KB: I would like to be remembered as a man who loved God, loved his wife, loved his family and walked in integrity.

KW: Thanks again for the time, Ken, and best of luck with Courageous.

KB: Kam thank you and I really appreciate the opportunity to interview with you!

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BARRY MESECHER:

Tasting The Rainbow with “Last Man Standing Productions!”

by Michael Pittman

Barry Mesecher, A.K.A. Skiddlz, was born and raised in Springfield, Illinois. He is the owner of “Last Man Standing Productions” based in Springfield, Illinois, and also has a partnership arrangement in a studio in Chicago, Illinois.

CCC: How did you get started in the music industry?

BM: *I’ve been in music for as long as I can remember. I remember being six years old and banging away on pots and pans wanting to play the drums. I grew up in a very musical household, so it kind of spawned from there. It just evolved to where I am now.*

CCC: Did you ever take any formal lessons? Or did you teach yourself music?

BM: *I do play the drums, the piano, the guitar, I play the bass. I’ve never had lessons. I was in the school band. It was one of those where the teacher was showing me what I was playing rather than them teaching me how to play. That was always a big thrill that the other students as well as my parents thought was kind of funny. I’ve taught myself by listening to other music and imitating on the internet. If I wanted to learn how to play a certain song, I just went online and figured out how they did that. I was basically self-taught. I am able to play by ear. About anything that I can hear, I can replay on an instrument.*

CCC: Do you feel that is a gift, or can anybody do it?

BM: *I’d like to think that anybody could do it. I’ve had lots of people tell me that it is impossible. I’d like to think that anybody could do it with a little bit of determination. It may be easier for some than others. I believe it’s up to that person if they want to do it.*

CCC: When did you start “Last Man Standing Productions”?

BM: *I have been doing “Last Man Standing Productions” for about 4 years now. I started my own company.*

Before that, I started a small company called “Legacy Records” with two other friends of mine. It didn’t pan out the way that we wanted it too, but I’m still close with those guys. They just did their thing and I did mine. “Last Man Standing” was a name that was given to me by Max A Million when he came to Springfield. There were a lot of people there waiting to go and coming his way. He said I was the last man standing. So that is how the name came about.

CCC: What exactly does “Last Man Standing Productions” do?

BM: *I do instrumentals, also known as beats. I do that for artists. I’ve also done it for commercials and jingles, if I can get away with it. It’s a production, so it’s not just solely beats. I also do vocals on recordings for singers, rappers or any type of vocalist that comes in. I also do mixing and mastering. So, when a band comes in or another artist comes in or any type of musical person that has tracks and they say, “Can you mix this for me?” or “Can you master this for me?” I make sure the levels are right if it is going to be used for radio or for their album or cd. I enjoy more of doing the beat part of it.*

CCC: How do you market your beats to other artists?

BM: *I put them out there with anybody who can rap. I get them out there that way. There is no charge or anything like that. I ask them to tell me what they think of this beat and to rap on it. That’s how I get a name. They say, “Who did that?” “Oh, it’s a local guy.” Then the word got around, so then I was able to charge for my beats. Then, it got to the point that people were contacting me for beats. So, it got to the point where I didn’t have to put myself out there like I used to. It’s to the point now where people can now just go to the website and see this is what I have and this is what I can do. They can say, “I like this beat; how much is it?” Or “Can you make me a beat similar to this artist?” Recently there have been more people contacting me.*

CCC: What do you enjoy

most about what you do?

BM: *The people. The artists that come through and the people that I meet is mind-blowing. You learn so much from people. I enjoy being in the ‘lab,’ which is what we call the studio. I enjoy being in the lab at 2 or 3 in the morning, just knowing that I am making something that is going to be hot, then waking up the next morning and seeing what I have done is great. The reaction you get out of people when a song is done or a beat is done and people say, “You did that?!” well, that is priceless to me.*

CCC: What are some of the challenges that you face, and how competitive is the industry that you are in?

BM: *It’s very competitive. It’s to the point now that everybody is making beats. Everybody is a rapper. So, you have to find a way to go above the next person. Luckily, hip hop is changing and evolving as a culture, to where there are different styles now. The challenge is being better than the next person or having the right style for the right artist. That’s what makes it challenging. You just hope that you measure up to what everybody else is doing, and to be able to go beyond that as well.*

CCC: Tell us about Max A Million and some of the other artists you have worked with.

BM: *Max A Million is my mentor. More than that, he is also my big brother. He is golden platinum in 62 countries alone. I owe a lot of my success to him. He is the one that showed me the ropes in the business. He’s the one who showed me the formula to put beats together. He has helped me get in contact with other artists. I’ve things submitted to Ice T and Kanye West. I owe that to Max as well.*

CCC: How do you assess someone else’s talent? What type of barometer is used, if you will?

BM: *There are so many people out there that have talent, so the first thing I look at is their attitude. Do they come in overconfident, or do they come in not sure of themselves? It’s all about that “it” factor. It’s so hard to explain about “it”*

or what “it” is. But when you see “it,” you know what it is. For rappers, it’s all about delivery on your rhymes. Singers need to be developed the right way. Are you one-sided? Can you only do one song? Same thing with rappers. Can you rap one way and not another way? Will I be bored with your cd? Can singers harmonize? Can they write? That are some of the ways that you can judge.

CCC: You talked about beats. Explain to us what it is.

BM: *What a beat is is the instrumental behind the rapper. So, if you took the rapper away, the song is what would be left, so that is the beat. There is a time frame that you like to stay in, which is usually about three minutes and fifty seconds. You don’t go over that. If you are a well-known artist, you can go maybe four minutes and fifteen or twenty seconds, because people want to hear your stuff. When I go to make a beat, there are two different styles that I use. There is sampling and making a beat from scratch. For a long time, I was against sampling with me being a musician and being able to play numerous instruments. I wanted to be able to do it myself. I already had melodies in my head, and I didn’t want someone else to do it for me. It got to the point where I was not only a hip hop guy, but also a rock guy. I think that also helps to spread the culture of that song. So, when it comes to sampling, I will do it that way if possible.*

CCC: Who would you like to work with in the industry?

BM: *Right now, the person who I am loving is a new guy named Machine Gun Kelly, a.k.a MGK out of Cleveland. He just recently got signed to Bad Boy Records with Puffy. I’ve never met him or been in touch with him. He is just an underground artist that I think is incredible. He is very diverse. He talks about things that are relevant and that people can relate to. So, if I ever get a chance, I would like to work with him.*

CCC: Is rap pretty much your genre?

BM: *Well, right now that seems to be*

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Barry Mesecher: Tasting The Rainbow with "Last Man Standing Productions!"

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the easiest. I grew up playing in rock bands, but listening to hip hop. It's easier for me to do hip hop because of the beats and vocals. Those are very easy to record. I also produce rock bands as well when I come in and say, "That song sounds nice, but the timing is off," or the drum and bass is off. Being a producer, your job is to make sure that everything sounds perfect. The beats are on time, the highs and lows, the whole thing. It doesn't have to just be with hip hop, but with rock as well.

CCC: How well are you received in the predominately African American hip hop community?

BM: *I'm received now, but I wasn't always at first. They didn't look down on me, but I definitely had to prove myself. I didn't have an open invitation. It was, "Who is this white boy coming in doing that? We're about to check him out, and he'd better be on his game," because I was going to be the last person picked to play the game, if you know what I mean. Thank God for people like Eminem, who kind of blew the door wide open for white people in the rap game. It does help that I have rhythm and with a name Skiddlz, it gives me some flavor. I have*

my stripes. I've shown people that I am real. My music was an added bonus. I was right there with everybody else.

CCC: You have a studio in Springfield and Chicago. Is most of your work done out of town.

BM: *I like to do a lot of work in Springfield if I can. This is the city that I grew up in. This is the city that I represent everywhere I go. The studio in Chicago that I work with is a sister company called "Voice Works Productions" and that is with a guy named Trademark and Max A Million. Now all of us are a crew. They just have their company up north and I have my company down south. So, if I have some work to be done, I can send someone up north, and visa versa. They have an excellent studio up there. We are brother and sister companies. I travel between St. Louis and Chicago.*

CCC: What does it take to have staying power in this industry in that there have been many one-hit wonders?

BM: *I think some people are cocky after they get one hit and they say, "It's all over from here." People do get lucky sometimes. But I think it's all about dedication and will-power. It's also*

very important to stay humble and remember your roots and be good to the people around you. You have to be good to your band, because the band is the one that got you there. You have to be willing to keep putting forth the effort and going that extra mile.

CCC: Do you think hip hop will follow in the footsteps of Jazz, R&B and Soul and be around, say, 50 years from now?

BM: *Not only 50 years from now, but a 100 years from now. I think hip hop will be around for a very long time. People thought it was going to be a flash in the pan back in the '80's when they weren't sure about it. I was born in 1983. When I first got into hip hop, it was the whole east coast verses west coast thing with Tupac and Biggy Smalls and Dr.Dre. They took a big hit through all of that. Then, here comes Puffy with a different style. The thing about hip hop when compared to other music such as rock, which has so many different styles. There is heavy metal, punk rock, classical rock there is soft rock. There are so many different ways one can get into rock, and it doesn't have to be one style. Well, hip hop is now like that. It is not just gangster rap. There*

are backpack rappers, poetic rappers, spoken word rapper and the fast tongue type rappers. There are so many different styles to get into now, so I don't think hip hop is going anywhere.

CCC: Where would you like to be five years from now?

BM: *Still thriving. Still wanting more. Still staying humble. I'd like to see my company grow in the aspect of more artists. I would like to have my name known as the guy that does great music.*

CCC: Do you have anything else that you would like to add?

BM: *I want to big up Springfield and the 217. Somebody out of Springfield is really going to blow, and I can't wait to see who it is. There is a lot of talent here in Springfield. I hope we can still stay bonded. I want people to stay humble so they can achieve their goals. A big up to Max A Million, Agent Orange, 40 Hurts Productions and everybody out there that is supporting me and "Last Man Standing Productions."*

CCC: Thanks for the interview.

BM: You're welcome, Mike.



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THE WINNING TEAM

Unconditional Love

by Aeneas & Tracy Williams



HE SAID:

We have all heard the phrase “give unconditional love”. That is love with no strings attached. It is so much easier said than done. This phrase though often, thrown around, is seldom practiced in our society today. Inherent in mankind is a gene of selfishness. “You scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours.” Even in our best efforts, there is still this part of us that wants something in return. This is not a bad thing; it’s just a human thing. When this concept of unconditional love is practiced in marriage, it can have incredible results on both the giving and receiving spouse. This is especially true if the marriage is at a breaking point. It is at this time when either of the spouses has to decide to give his/her all no matter the cost to them. In this place it is either do or die. In other words, you are either all in or you can just walk away, but if you haven’t tried the principle of unconditional love, you can’t say you have tried everything. Even if your marriage is not in a crisis, this practice of giving without expecting anything in return can have a powerful affect on your relationship. My wife and I have been married for 18 years and it has not always been smooth sailing. There are times when we both get extremely frustrated with each other. In life, we are all going to experience things that will challenge our marriage relationship, but it is at these times when one of us has to decide to give sacrificially to the other.

I can remember a time when I had just retired from the NFL, and was having to make some critical decisions in my car dealerships. This was not a good time for me. The game I had been playing since I was 4 was no longer a part of my life, and

here I was forced to deal with issues in my business. At this time I sort of shut it down emotionally and went into what I call “the cave”. Wives, get familiar with this term, because most men have a time when they may be dealing with stressful situations and rather than talk them out, they choose to shut down and retrieve into “the cave”. My wife is very familiar with the cave, and she has learned what to do to get me out. During this challenging time in my life, while I shut it down, my wife chose to love me with unconditional love. I was giving nothing; no words, no sincere time (going through the motions) with her and the kids, and no affection. I had temporarily disappeared. Oh, I was there in the house but, emotionally I was gone. During this time, my wife continued to pursue me in talking to me, asking me about my day, she even went out of her way to buy me a cd to encourage me and my favorite cookies. Tracy was not receiving anything from me, but she had chosen to give to me at a time when I needed it most. She did question what was going on with me, but after she realized I was in the cave, she stopped nagging and just encouraged me and loved me until I decided to come out.

In marriage, you have to be willing to give even when you are not getting anything in return. When you do this, it’s just a matter of time before your spouse sees your heart, feels your love, and chooses to give back to you without you expecting it.

SHE SAID:

Wow honey, thanks for sharing! I do remember that tumultuous time in our lives. We all at some time in our lives need to be loved unconditionally by our

spouses, especially during the tough times. Each of us, during our lives together will need this kind of radical and extravagant love. Unconditional love requires one of the spouses to die to themselves, their feelings, emotions, and desires.

Unconditional love has the power to “resurrect” any relationship, even for couples who are at their “wits end”. There are few people in the world that will walk away from a “free” gift. That’s what unconditional love is. Given without expecting anything in return! It has the power to cross the tallest of communication walls, soften the hardest of hearts and heal the deepest of wounds.

In marriage, life happens, the good, the bad and the ugly. If one of the partners will decide to give themselves unselfishly, a marriage can be saved from the brink of destruction. The key is that the partner who is willing to invest in what seems to be a lost cause, has to choose to die to themselves. When you choose to love this way, it may feel like you are being taken advantage of, being walked on, and it may seem like there is no change at all. But, just as when a corn seed is planted, there is an amount of time before the gardener can see even a blade of green coming from the soil. For a chance at a healthy plant, that seed while underground, away from sight, needs to be nourished with fertilizer, water and sunlight. The same is true in marriage. Just because you can’t see the results right away, unconditional love impacts the heart. It is an inside job, where no man can see, but over time, the harvest will be evident.

As each spouse chooses to give unconditional love, at some time during their lives together, they will experience the benefits of this time tested principle of giving without expecting in return.

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COVER STORY

by Kim Gordon



ARE WE WHO WE REALLY THINK WE ARE?

“What if...?” is the writer’s eternal question. “What if...?” has been the catalyst for untold numbers of books, novels, poems, short stories, movies, and endless discussions over countless cups of coffee on a cold, dark, rainy night. That question has bounced around in my head for ages, from a serious as well as a fictitious point of view. And one of the things I’ve wondered about is who I would be under different circumstances. For instance, suppose my grandmother had not gotten sick at the time that my mother was pregnant with me? You see, my mother and father were living in my father’s birth town of Bridgeport, Connecticut, and when she was pregnant with me, they moved back to my mother’s home town in the Midwest to take care of her mother. Once here, they stayed for the rest of their lives. (And my grandmother lived for another fifteen years.) Sure, we took the occasional trip back to Bridgeport, but only for a couple of weeks at a time. I’ve thought about that. How different would things have been if my parents had remained in Connecticut? What would have been my experiences, growing up on the East Coast just a stone’s throw

from the Big Apple? Would I have been more rebellious as a teenager, sneaking into the city against my parents’ wishes? What influence would growing up in a bigger town with a larger minority population have had on me? Who would my friends have been, and what kind of peer pressure would I have felt? In short, just how much does the environment affect people’s personalities?

Nature versus nurture. It’s a topic that has been hotly debated among social scientists, geneticists, and armchair philosophers for centuries. Are we the product of our environment, or did DNA...that cosmic soup of chromosomes...determine our fate from the moment that gleam shifted from our father’s eye to our mother’s belly? Many theories have been proposed, with people on both sides of the fence. Some say heredity is destiny, which can become a slippery slope down into the racism behind such notorious books as “The Bell Curve,” with its claims that Blacks come from “inferior stock” and are therefore intellectually deficient, and infamous movements such as eugenics projects that are designed to produce “superior human beings” by wiping out “undesirable

elements,” mostly through forced sterilization programs and extermination or genocide. In its heyday, the eugenics program boasted mandatory sterilization laws in twenty-seven states that resulted in at least 60,000 American citizens who were stripped of their basic right to procreate. Eventually, the concept behind the American eugenics program crossed the ocean into Nazi Germany, where Adolph Hitler took to it like a goose-stepping duck to water, outpacing the Americans in the number of “defectives” he could annihilate. In the U.S., the criteria for sterilization included “feeblemindedness,” mental defectiveness, poverty, vagrancy, criminality, belonging to the “wrong” race or religion, and certain diseases, such as epilepsy. In fact, in some states, ophthalmologists even advocated sterilizing those with imperfect vision in order to wipe out that “disorder” and the need for corrective glasses. So, the author, with her nearsighted, Black, and “definitely-not-wealthy” self, would certainly have been on somebody’s list!

In 1924, Virginia enacted the Racial Integrity Act, which was designed to “safeguard the purity of the white race from the possibil-

ity of contamination with nonwhite blood.” It promised strict penalties, including a year in prison, for anyone found guilty of falsifying the race of themselves, their children, or other family members. During that same legislative session, Virginia also passed a law allowing mandatory sterilization for anyone who was declared “mentally defective.” This was part of the overall eugenic plan, backed by millions of dollars in donations from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Carnegie Institution, and the estate of wealthy railroad magnate E.H. Harriman, to systematically rid the world of the “unfit.” Virginia’s State Registrar, Walter Plecker, worked overtime at identifying any “blemishes” in Virginians’ pedigrees, even researching records of whole families through several generations until he found that proverbial “negro in the woodpile.” Or Asian, or Jew, or Native American, or anything that was nonwhite. Throughout his career, Plecker affected millions of people, defining their lives as to where they could live, where they could go to school, who they could marry, where they could be buried, and even going so far as to have the

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Are We Who We Really Think We Are?

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bodies of “suspicious individuals” exhumed and re-buried elsewhere in order to remove their offending presence from the White cemetery. After all, “...to the white owner of a lot, it might prove embarrassing to meet with negroes visiting at one of their graves on the adjoining lot.” Yes, there are always those who want to limit and define our existence for us.

The attempt to breed a better human was being practiced in America long before the field of eugenics got its start. For centuries, slaveowners attempted to mate Blacks who they felt had the most “desirable” qualities in order to produce “sturdy, hard-working, obedient” offspring that they could exploit. On the auction block, men, women, and children were lined up to be inspected from head to toe like animals at a stockyard. Of course their efforts, besides being immoral and arrogant, failed miserably because human beings are among the most complex of all organisms on the planet. Genetics simply cannot control for all of the variables and possibilities contained in human DNA.

From the early days of genetic engineering to the present, building that superhuman has proven to be no easy task. Concerned with creating the perfect race of humans (Nordic types: blonde with blue eyes), eugenicists attempted to advocate and even legislate the “proper” mixing of bloodlines. Yet, no matter how they tried, their “designer genes” always ended up ragged and full of holes. But then, that’s what happens when you try to bleach all of the color out of them! The double helix of our DNA is a work of art. That tiny, twisted, spiraling bit of genetic matter contains all of the information about each one of us, from our eye color, to the shape of our noses, to the spiraling kinkiness of our hair, to the length our legs should be (long enough to touch the ground) and on it goes. Still, is that what makes us who we are?

So, let’s quickly run through DNA 101: Each and every cell in your body contains an exact replica of the original DNA strand that you inherited from your parents. This DNA is packed into twenty-three pairs of

chromosomes, each one governing a different aspect of you. There are two chromosome A’s, two B’s, two C’s, and so forth. Of these pairs, you received one A from your mother and one A from your father. Every pair of chromosomes is evenly matched, except for the pair of sex chromosomes...the ones that determine gender. With those, you received an X from your mother and either an X or a Y from your father. If it’s an X, then the combination of XX makes you a female and if it’s a Y, then you are a male (XY). Pretty basic, I know. But that’s where simplicity ends. First of all, while you do receive equal pairs of chromosomes, not all of the genetic material is equal. The combinations can be dramatically different among siblings, even fraternal twins (not identical twins, who grew from a single fertilized egg that split twice). There are traits that are dominant (such as brown eyes) and traits that are recessive (such as blue eyes), yet even with that, there are factors such as incomplete dominance and recessive traits that show up unexpectedly.

To make matters worse, all of the aforementioned rules can and have been broken. There are cases of extra or missing chromosomes that cause all sorts of unique, sometimes dangerous health conditions. Even the fact that every one of your cells contains the same DNA isn’t necessarily written in stone. There are rare instances of normal, healthy individuals who have two different types of DNA in their bodies. This condition, called a “chimera,” occurs when there is a fraternal twin pregnancy and one of the twins dies in the womb at a very early stage. The other twin “absorbs” the cells (which contain a different DNA). These are extremely rare and hard to detect because the mother might not have known she was carrying twins, and the “outsider DNA” could be part of an internal organ and is never identified. This happened to someone I know, and it was the most bizarre thing she could have imagined. It was discovered when her mother took her to the doctor because she was concerned that her daughter was almost twenty years old and had not gone through puberty. Through the years, other

doctors had assured her that her daughter was just a “late-bloomer,” but the mother was insistent. After an exhaustive series of tests, they were shocked to find out that she was a “chimera.” Inside a small lump on her shoulder was the DNA of her twin (who was genetically male), and it contained high levels of testosterone that prevented her from developing as a young woman should. Once that lump was surgically removed, she immediately went through puberty.

Mother Nature throws us a lot of curve balls. Some genetic abnormalities were intended to be helpful, such as the sickle cell trait that originally protected those of African descent from the ravages of malaria, Tay-Sachs disease that originally protected Eastern European Ashkenazi Jews from tuberculosis, and cystic fibrosis that possibly protected Europeans from cholera. All of these have mutated into life-threatening diseases that the field of genetic research is attempting to eradicate. However, genetics is in itself an area filled with dangerous possibilities. Eugenicists are still an active part of the field, still trying to “weed out undesirable traits” and engineer the “perfect” human. But now, with cloning, in vitro fertilization, embryonic testing, and savior babies (embryos that are genetically selected to be born for the sole purpose of donating organs to a sick sibling), the question of morality is becoming harder to answer.

The interest in genealogy has grown significantly in the decades since the publication of Alex Haley’s “Roots,” and the field of genetics and DNA testing has become the genealogist’s latest tool. It’s the quick and easy way to get definitive answers. Birth certificates aren’t always accurate, and census records certainly have their flaws. For example, it wasn’t until the 1870 census that the ethnic designations of Asian and Indian were even added; and the column for racial description was left up to the census-taker, who often entered whatever he thought the person was, instead of asking. But DNA never lies. A simple cheek swab can fill in the gaps that genealogists struggle for years to find. There are lots of companies that offer DNA

testing for genealogical purposes, but most of them have had mainly European databases to select from. That was until May 1991, when an 18th century African burial ground was unearthed in Manhattan. Over 400 graves were discovered, providing a unique look into slavery in the North in the 1700’s. For genealogists, this find represented the opportunity to gather the DNA of Blacks who were often first generation Africans, and the genetics lab at Howard University was able to put together an extensive database of African DNA, which added greatly to the information available to those seeking to know their ancestry. AfricanAncestry.com opened in 2002 to provide an analysis of African DNA. At that time, I ordered a test for myself and my brother (to get our paternal side) and the results came back that we are Somalian from Ethiopia on our mother’s side and Mende on our father’s side.

Before I sent this off, though, I had some concerns. As I’ve mentioned before in previous articles (for example, “Light-Skinned Blacks vs. Dark-Skinned Blacks,” Capital City Courier, September 2006), I am light-skinned. And while I don’t suffer the prejudice that darker-skinned Blacks have been subjected to, I have still had some hurtful experiences in my past. The most common thing I’ve heard is that I’m not “Black enough.” I’ve had to listen to “Light-bright, d**n-near White!” and other racial insults concerning my skin color. I’ve been told that “Obviously, there’s some cream in the coffee!” It took some time for me to build up my courage to take that test; I was worried there might not be enough African DNA to register! So, I was delighted when it came back with those results.

Now, let’s fast forward nine years to July 2011. I’m a true genealogy buff, and I want to know my entire history, not just one part. I decided to take a DNA test to find out the rest of the story. In fact, what I actually thought was, “OK, let’s see who the cream is in this coffee!” So, I did some research online, comparing services and prices, and I selected

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DNATribes.com. This DNA analysis service offered to provide the top twenty matches along with a breakdown of percentages. So, for my boyfriend's birthday, I ordered a test for him and one for me. What we got back started us both thinking seriously about who we are.

Let's begin with my results. As the instructions explained, the graph that came with my results showed the frequency that my personal genetic code appears among other world populations, or where my DNA is most commonly found. The example they gave was that if your DNA match was 24.38 for Switzerland, then your DNA was 24.38 times more common in Switzerland, giving you a strong Swiss ancestry. My top match was 858.53 times more common in Somalia, which was off the charts! My second match was Uganda, and it wasn't far behind. The third and fourth matches were Guinea Bissau and Tanzania; all African countries. By this time, I was thinking that all of those people in my past who have told me that I'm not "Black enough" could get a royal invitation to kiss my posterior. The majority of my DNA is African; my Somalian/Ethiopian genes contribute to the lightness of my skin.

Then, we came to the surprises in my report. They made up a significantly smaller percentage, but they were still a part of my total combination of genes. There was Malay from Malaysia, Malay from Singapore, there was Indonesia and even southern Thailand. So, I'm also part Asian. And who exactly are these Malays? Of course, I immediately began to read up on all of these areas. The Malays, I discovered, are the indigenous people of Malaysia. Being darker-skinned than the Chinese...who are the dominant group despite being the minority in numbers...apparently the Malay have gone through their own race riots. They've battled racial discrimination, unfair hiring practices, inequality in the distribution of wealth in their country, and the denial of opportunities that has kept many of them in poverty. Does any of this sound familiar? It dawned on me that perhaps my passion for writ-

ing and speaking out about racism and prejudice in all of its forms might be related to both my African and Malaysian genes? Maybe there are some behaviors that are genetically coded into us, and we are predisposed to feeling a certain way. This DNA stuff was really getting intriguing.

As for my boyfriend's report, he expected to find that Nigeria would be prominent, as he has been told by Nigerian people he's met that he looks Nigerian. (For the record, I've been told on several occasions by Ethiopians I've met that I look Ethiopian.) And actually, Nigeria is in his DNA, but only a small percentage. The top match for him was the Bubi people of Bioko Island. Neither one of us had ever heard of them, so we both did research on them. Bioko Island is a small island off the western coast of Africa. What I found really interesting is that the Bubi (actually pronounced "Boo-BAY") were isolated for centuries. They were left alone by the slave hunters and so-called "explorers" because the Bubi had gained a reputation for being fierce and "savage." It was said that they would fight and kill anyone who attempted to land on their island. In other words, when whites came at them with chains, they immediately picked up weapons and beat them back. "Not today! And not here!" Thanks to their diligence, the Bubi were unconquered by European imperialism until the start of the 20th century. It's fascinating because I see the Bubi's attitude very strongly in my boyfriend. When faced with a situation that borders on racism, he will respond immediately and he doesn't bite his tongue. It's not that he has a quick temper; it's just that he will fight, and has fought, the very second that racism rears its ugly head. "Not today! And not here!" is a sentiment that describes him perfectly.

While I don't think that we're completely defined by our genes, I do find it intriguing that, without knowing anything about our history, I am still the one who sees red whenever I hear about people being treated unfairly, and he's the one who will step right up to a bigot's face and call that person on their racism, even if it means a fight and even if it means

he's outnumbered. The other interesting thing about our DNA tests is that European DNA was very far down the line in our genetic makeup. I've read statistics that state a large percentage of Black men have European ancestry because of slavery, but I haven't seen that so far. In fact, from what I can see, it's actually the opposite...there are a lot more whites with African DNA in their past. There is a website in which people who have had DNA testing through DNATribes can talk about their results. It goes on for pages! It starts off with people's expectations, then their actual results, and finally their comments. The one thing that seems to really upset people is when the results come back without the "long history" that their parents told them, and instead shows some African DNA. Under the comments section, people protest that "...they must have made a mistake and mixed up my results with someone else's. There's no way I could be Black." One woman even went so far as to demand her money back! She was that upset that they had found traces of Africa in her bloodline. In my boyfriend's and my tests, Europe did not make it in the top twenty matches. (And, I repeat, people have called me "almost White.") This was an eye-opening experience for me!

Another interesting thing is that DNATribes cannot tell you if you are part Cherokee, because DNATribes does not have any Cherokee DNA to compare with. They explain this in their information that was included with the test. Actually, it's no surprise, because the Cherokee was the one nation that wholeheartedly embraced the European way of life, from their dress to their customs to their use of slaves and even their way of making a living. Many Cherokees had huge plantations and owned lots of Blacks as slaves that they abused and misused. And they tried their best to "marry White" and lighten up the race. Well, it appears they have succeeded, because now, the people who call themselves "Cherokee" are, for all intents and purposes, White. It seems there isn't any original Cherokee DNA left, and geneticists know this. To make matters worse, those who call themselves Cherokee

recently came under fire because of their attempt to throw all of the Black people who are part Cherokee out of the nation entirely, since Blacks cannot "prove" they have Cherokee blood. Now, does this sound like a Catch-22, or not? First of all, the "tribal leaders" know full well that the racism of the times prevented the kind of documentation that they are now requiring. Black Cherokees just don't have the written records, and they are being kicked out because they just don't have the written records. Secondly, as I've just stated, Blacks cannot get DNA testing done to prove they have Cherokee blood because...guess what?...there is no Cherokee DNA to compare it to! What a sick situation. And, thirdly, if these "tribal leaders" could get over their racism, they might realize that Black Cherokees probably have considerably more real Cherokee DNA in their blood than they do; and if geneticists could isolate that, they would have some actual Cherokee DNA! Instead, they're trying to get rid of what is probably the only real source of Cherokee DNA left in the world. Such a shame how prejudice blinds people.

Before we leave the Cherokees, I did want to mention a documentary that I watched recently concerning who "really" discovered America? This two-hour-long show went through everyone you could imagine (except Africans, of course), from the Vikings, the Chinese, the Welsh, the Polynesians, Irish monks, and so on. There was also a theory that Jews had come over and mated with the Cherokees, so that now, the Cherokees could trace their history back to biblical times! So, to prove this, they drew blood from one of the largest of the Cherokee tribes and tested it. And when the results came in, there was virtually no Jewish DNA, at least no more than you would expect in the general population, they said. Truth be told, they said there was more European DNA in the Cherokees than anything else. Just so you know I'm not the only one saying this! Yet they want to exclude the Black Cherokees...!

continued on page 16 >

Are We Who We Really Think We Are?

continued from page 15

But all of this brings up some interesting questions. Once we've discovered our roots, what do we do with the information? What if, in doing your genealogical research you find out your ancestor was Hitler's cousin? It makes you want to do some pruning in your family tree. But then, when we start asking the questions, we have to be prepared for the answers. When it comes to who we are, we have to take the good, the bad, and the mindlessly racist morons who try to exclude us. You have to ask, "Does this really affect me?" and "How much of what I am truly reflects who I am?" The cartoon, "Family Guy," has an episode in which the main character, Peter (who is White), researches his family tree and discovers he has a Black ancestor. "So, I just found out I'm Black," he tells his Black friend, Cleveland. "But I don't know how to BE Black. What do I do?" So, of course he ends up doing and saying the most stereotypical things he can. But the question remains, "What

do we do when we discover who we are?" For example, how do I include my Asian, Malaysian, and Indonesian heritage in the celebration of who I am? The BBC documentary, "Motherland: A Genetic Journey," follows three Afro-Caribbeans as they have themselves tested and then journey to the homeland of their ancestors. Expectations clash with reality. One young man finds the African tribe that he descended from, and decides he wants to take a tribal name. A British anthropologist who has been living with this group for all of a hot minute suggests the name of a powerful warrior, and that's the name he chooses. He goes through a spiritual naming ritual, only to discover afterwards that the warrior whose name he has chosen was the one responsible for selling his own countrymen into slavery. It demonstrates the need to research! Through DNA, a young woman finds, not only her ancestral people, but also a distant relative. She journeys there to meet them. Perhaps I'm a little cynical, but it appeared to me that they were doing their best to accommodate their "wealthy foreign relative" and provide her with the unique African experience she was seeking so that she would, in turn, help them. Still, all of the people who took part in this documentary came away with a greater understanding and appreciation of the history that we each carry inside of us.

Personally, I think everyone should do DNA testing. For one thing, it gives a wider sense of connection to the world and a greater appreciation of our fantastic human journey. It would also help to erase the feelings of superiority that some people have when they realize that we are all mixtures of many cultures. There are no "pure genes." And if someone tells you they're pure anything, it's because they're only looking at one of their ancestors and ignoring the rest. Because whenever two people come together, they bring all of the DNA of the countless people who came before them. Somewhere in there, someone "branched off." The human race has too long a history of love, war, conquests, arranged marriages, sneaking behind the bushes, infidelity, violence, and one-

night-stands to think anything could stay "pure." There are home births, lost records, embellished family pedigrees, and secrets that people take to their graves. Not to mention cherished "family traditions" and out-and-out lies. Many of the comments on the DNATribes website point to those family traditions that people expected to see in their DNA, such as the "great-grandmother was an Indian princess" story that is common. And when it comes to lies, there's the obvious hypocrisy... such as the notoriously racist senator, Strom Thurmond, who fathered a child with a Black woman and kept it a secret all of his life. The daughter waited until after Thurmond's death to come forward, giving Thurmond a measure of respect that he, himself, had never offered anyone of color. Sorry, but I prefer the good old "egg on the face" approach to hypocrites. I can hear the protests now: "But he was good to her! He gave her money, and he even put her through college!" (All things a father should do.) Very well then, if you insist, there's always, "Whoops! Sorry, Daddy; those reporters asked me who my father was, and 'United States Republican Senator from South Carolina, James Strom Thurmond' just slipped out. I meant to say, 'I dunno.'"

Who am I? Like Billy Crystal said in "Analyze This," "Who I am" is too deep and profound...almost... you gotta go in deep and pull out the thing, like with that movie where the thing came outta the stomach and ate all the people on the spaceship, may they rest in peace." "Who am I?" is also the most personal question we can ask, and one that only we can answer. Other people might hold up a mirror to tell us who they think we are, but it's up to us to decide if this mirror is accurate, or if the image is distorted by that person's own belief system. We also have to decide how much of our environment will we allow to become a part of us. Do we become angry and resentful over an impoverished childhood? Will we repeat the mistakes of our absent fathers, our alcoholic mothers, or our abusive ancestors who injured our grandparents, who abused our parents, who in turn abused us? Do

we let another person's treatment of us dictate how we feel about ourselves? How do we reconcile our past with our present and move on into the future? Perhaps the answer is to allow the past of our ancestors to serve as a beacon to illuminate our path, so that we can see the pitfalls before we come upon them. In that way, we can avoid the traps that our forefathers and mothers might have fallen into. We also have to realize that, at its core, the issue of self-identity involves whatever makes us feel best about ourselves. There are those who feel trapped in a body that does not reflect who they feel they are, whether it's the wrong gender or a perceived defect in the physical body (a condition called "body dysmorphic disorder"). This can result in eating disorders or seeking plastic surgery to correct the perceived flaw. Those are extremes, and I wouldn't recommend them. We should be able to find a way to be happy with ourselves that doesn't involve slicing off body parts.

Once we have discovered our past...and I believe that's extremely important or I wouldn't have spent the majority of this article talking about it...then it's up to us to decide what to embrace, what to identify with, and what parts to shrug our shoulders on and say, "Oh well; it is what it is." Hopefully, we can find the positive in all that has gone before us; in all of the bits and pieces of the past that make up our present. Maybe it means adding new traditions...like celebrating the Chinese New Year along with Kwanzaa. Maybe it means cutting out the negative parts of our lives...like severing ties with people who drag us down into destructive behaviors. Either way, it's a lifelong search to answer that question of who we are; but then, as the saying goes, life is the journey, not the destination.

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CHOOSING A LAWYER AND GETTING MARRIED:

How Are They Similar?

by Jack D. Davis

Marriage is a bond that is meant to last a lifetime. You choose your spouse after spending time during courtship, learning about their values, heritage, beliefs, meeting their family, and, carefully weighing the benefits of marriage. Choosing your lawyer should be no different. The attorney-client relationship is very similar to the spousal relationship in marriage. Trust, confidence and openness are key considerations to an effective and productive marriage, just as they are with an effective and productive attorney-client relationship.

When selecting a lawyer, there are several considerations you should take into account. Remember, you are- in a way- marrying yourself to your attorney. You should be confident that the lawyer you are considering is competent, effective, well respected, honest and straight-forward. You should have no reservations that your lawyer is going to handle your case as if you were one of his family members. Personal attention is vital to instilling the trust necessary to form a bond with your lawyer.

Now, we have all heard the complaints about lawyers. They aren't truthful with me about the status of my case. They don't return telephone calls. They never meet with me one on one. Unfortunately, these are all valid concerns that have their roots in the truth. But, to be certain, most lawyers are diligent and hard working representatives of their clients. As with any sector of our community, a few bad apples can spoil the bunch.

There are some ways in which you can be confident that your lawyer will meet your expectations. When you meet with your lawyer, ask them direct questions about:

1. *Their family background and beliefs.*
2. *Their educational background.*

3. *Their trial experience.*
4. *Their membership in professional societies and organizations.*
5. *Whether their peers and colleagues would recommend them.*
6. *Whether they have a policy of returning telephone calls within 24-48 hours.*
7. *Which courts they practice in.*

Obviously, this is not a complete list. But, this should give you a good place to start. You can also call the Illinois State Bar Association or visit their website www.isba.org to get more information about lawyers in Illinois.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jack D. Davis was raised in Springfield, Illinois. He and his family live there. His wife and three children are the most important thing in his life. They are members of Blessed Sacrament Church and are active in the community. Mr. Davis has achieved several million, and multi-million dollar settlements and verdicts for his clients. He is straight forward, and will tell you the truth, regardless of whether it is good, bad or indifferent. Mr. Davis is a member of the Illinois State Bar Association, the Sangamon County Bar Association, the Illinois Trial Lawyers' Association and the American Association for Justice. He serves as an officer of the SCBA and on the Board of Advocates of ITLA.

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by Lyle Johnson CPT

FITNESS

My Blueprint for Success!

Last month I ran a half marathon. Now, I should tell you that I'm not a runner. I'm not built to run. I'm built to lift. But I had wanted to do something way out of my comfort zone, so I chose the St. Louis Rock N Roll marathon to run.

Along the 13.1 mile run I learned and rediscovered some life lessons that I want to share with you here.

13.1 lessons I learned while running a half marathon:

1. *Preparation is the key. I trained for 12 weeks; I developed a training plan and stuck to it.*
2. *Taking action is a must. You can make all the plans you want but if you don't take action on your plans, vision or goals, then your plan is just a dream*
3. *Have good support around you. My Mother, Flora Johnson died from cancer while I was training for the marathon. Support is everything. I had my friends and family helping during*

4. *a very stormy period in my life. I had others giving me words of prayer and encouragement on Facebook. Have a support system.*
5. *Acknowledge then destroy negative self talk. Guess what? You're human, and you're going to have negative self talk when things get tough. I know I did from the first week of training all the way until race day. The trick is to know that you're having it, and then to tell yourself to shut up, and plow forward.*
6. *Trust people who are experts to teach you. Don't try to reinvent the wheel.*
7. *Success is 1% information and 99% application. In the process of challenging yourself to achieve something great there is personal growth that is greater.*
8. *Embrace pain – it is an indication of progress. Only dead people feel no pain.*
9. *Give it a try. Get out of your mental comfort zone—muscles expand when you give it resis-*

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tance and you're mind expands when you step out of your comfort zone.

10. *Be willing to do whatever it takes. For me it I had to run during the heat of the day most of the time. But I was willing to do that because I wanted to spend time with my Mom during her final days.*
11. *Lead by example. You tell your family to get out of their comfort zones, so you do the same.*
12. *Ignore the haters. You're always will have people who tell you that you can't do it. Ignore the haters.*
13. *Push yourself. Your mind, body and soul are infinitely more resilient than you give it credit for.*

13.1. Use the power of prayer. Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Matthew 19:26

I hope these lessons were as valuable to you as they were to me.

Lyle Johnson is a certified personal trainer and owner of St. Louis based MVP Fitness; he gives workshops and runs MVP Boot Camp. He is also the author of Get Fit 4 Christ. Before engaging in any exercise program, consult with your doctor. The materials and comments discussed in this article are to be considered general information only and may not apply to your particular health situation. For more information, log onto www.getfit4christ.com or www.mvpfitness.net. He can be reached at lyle@mvpfitness.net or call 866.487.4MVP (4687).

INSPIRATION

Use It or Lose It!

by Sherry Pittman



We're all given gifts and talents. Some have administrative gifts, while others have gifts of crafting, humor, compassion or other types of skills. Some are physically gifted, others are mentally gifted. Some have talents involving the arts while others include, say, creative cooking abilities. Regardless, of what our particular gifts and are talents may be, one thing is for sure. That one thing is this; if we don't use it, we will lose it.

Now no one wants to lose something that is of value. Obviously, the ability to easily do things that are appreciated and that others cannot easily do is something most of us would like to have. But being given a talent is not an end all in and of itself. Some are given talents and they use them very skillfully and do a lot of good not only for themselves, but for others as well. Examples include well known people who give their time and money to be philanthropic. They may help inner city children go to school or provide playgrounds and or activities center to assist in the children's development. Some may give of their talents and gifts, at times, without charge. While others, perhaps not known, make equally important contributions to society at large.

Others may not necessarily make financial contributions, but they may make contributions to assist the overall population with the discovery of basic needs. This could show itself in areas as varied as the arts that illustrate our daily lives and yet enable us to get a different perspective on not only who we are but who others are as well.

Before electricity was discovered, no one knew that it would provide such modern day inven-

tions as microwaves, heating and cooking elements, hair dryers, shavers or any of the many numerous conveniences we have today. But many have taken the gift of electricity and multiplied its' usefulness in almost endless possibilities.

So what about you and me; what potential do we have? What gifts have been given to us? How many gifts have been given? Here it is important to remember the story of the three that were given talents. One was given five, one was given three, and one was given one. To the one given five talents, he took his and did wonderful things with his five. To the one given three, he too did wonderful things with his three talents. But the one with the one talent took his and hid it. When the master returned and asked for an account of what had happen to what he had given them, he was pleased that the one with five had improved and increased in value on what was given him. The master was also pleased to find that the one with three had done well too. But the one who took his and hid his one, the master was disappointed and said that the one talent that nothing was done with should be taken and given to the one who had done much with his five talents.

The moral of this story is to take what has been given you and use it, improve on it, multiply it, and or build on it. Someway, somehow find a way to make what you have more valuable. If you are gifted with your hands, then use them and learn how to do even more than what you can do with them now. If you are gifted in speech then learn to deliver them even more eloquently. If you have musical abilities, stretch yourself to see what other musical abilities that may be just waiting to be discovered and fine-tuned. How about your problem solving abilities? Can

your gift be used to find answers that mankind desperately needs?

If you've been given five, three or one, use your gift(s) wisely. Know that there is so much more and that you can never exhaust the possibilities! Just think of the peanut, for example, many purposes have been discovered and people are still discovering others! To take a talent or gift and do absolutely nothing with it is not only an incredible waste, but it cheats the world of the potential benefits. Take a look at your gifts and talents. Find ways to utilize them in a way that is symphonic and harmonious! Use it and improve it!

Sherry Pittman is as monthly staff writer


for the Capital City Courier Newspaper. In addition to public speaking, she host two television shows "Heart to Heart" and "House to House." She is a licensed real estate broker and holds a Bachelor of Science in Speech Communications. She can be reached for speaking engagements or comments and questions at spittman@ameritech.net or 217.528.2998.

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ASK SARNIA



Q. Me and my 'sweetie' moved in together six months ago. No Problems. Then, three months ago his best friend needed a place to stay to "get through a rough spot." No problem, EXCEPT that the rough spot seems to be expanding, with no end in sight. We now have a roommate. The guy is not a slob and he is very respectful of me and my needs for privacy. I just don't like the situation. Should I have a talk with him and ask him what he thinks his moving date might be, even if he has to move in with some other friend(s)? I already know that my sweetie is too nice to ask his best friend to move. How can I/we move him out without hurting his feelings?

A. Surely having a second roommate was not your intention when you signed the lease/mortgage

six months ago. However, in my opinion, there could be two extenuating circumstances that affect the potential outcomes of your "situation" that I suggest you consider before making any 'moves'. First, consider the financial status of your second roommate – is he employed, not employed, or unemployable. In this current economy, the last two conditions very well could be true and they will seriously impact the longevity of your current arrangement. You can be sure that for you to essentially 'kick-out' your sweetie's unemployable best friend that there will be some residual effect, including Karma. Second, something for you to consider is if you might be feeling a bit displaced ... because your sweetie and his best friend do things together (e.g., watch or play sports) which decreases

the one-on-one time that the two of you no longer have. The closeness that you felt when it was just the two of you may now feel diminished. The reality is that nothing has changed except that now he lives with you. As time went on the probability that your sweetie would have been spending the same amount of time with his friend is high. In my opinion, have a talk with your sweetie and get his input on what to do about your houseguest's extended stay. He may be in total agreement with you but needs you to be the heavy, i.e., bearer of the notice of eviction. Once you've fully assessed the situation, if the roommate is truly without resources please remember that anyone's circumstances can change at any time, for better or worse.

Q. My children – three - have dif-

ferent fathers. My first son's dad has nothing to do with us. He is at the age where he resents the other's dads. He gets depressed when the other's dad comes around and spends time with them. I hurt for him. What can be done to help him until he gets old enough to not care?

A. This is really an unfortunate situation, and really needs handling with care. Talk as much as possible to your son at his level of understanding, and affirm that the situation is what it is. Be extremely supportive and let him know that you love and care about him. If he continues to become depressed and angry about this and other situations, please seek professional counseling for him.

Questions may be submitted to asksarnia@yahoo.com

OUR COMMUNITY

Local Events, Comments and Announcements



CIRCUIT JUDGE SELECTED BY PEOPLE MAGAZINE

The editors of PEOPLE magazine have selected St. Louis Juvenile Court Judge Jimmie Edwards as one of the publication's 'Heroes of the Year' for 2011. Judge Edwards was profiled in a recent issue of the magazine and the announcement comes in the November 7, 2011 issue, which is on newsstands today.

"We chose men and women who reached across boundaries to help strangers or worked within their communities to deepen bonds. From Logan, Utah...to Judge Jimmie Edwards of St. Louis who started a school for wayward teens,

the 2011 winners never let daunting odds stand in their way," said Managing Editor Larry Hackett.

In 2009, after watching a string of teen offenders come through his courtroom, Judge Edwards took action. Along with 45 community partners, he took over an abandoned school and opened the Innovative Concept Academy. Providing strict discipline, counseling and programs like chess, music and creative writing, the center has changed the lives of many young people, giving them the opportunity to graduate from high school and lead successful lives.

The six winners will each receive

\$10,000 to use for their causes. The Academy will use the money for a new arts and drama program at the school.

"I am thrilled that our school has received this recognition but also amazed at the other individuals across America profiled by the magazine," said Judge Edwards. "Tom Timken helped lift a burning car to save a stranger's life in Utah. Lisa Nigro is feeding and educating

Chicago's homeless and Superintendent C.J. Huff had the massive task of reopening Joplin schools after this year's catastrophic tornado. This is the kind of extraordinary work being done by ordinary

people every day in our country."

While the editors of PEOPLE selected five 'heroes,' the sixth was chosen by readers' votes and that honor goes to 21-year-old Gabriel Whaley, a University of North Carolina senior offering free soccer lessons in exchange for donations to needy families in his community.

St. Louis Circuit Court would like to thank PEOPLE magazine and their sponsor, Jeep, and reporter Jeff Truesdell for profiling the students and staff of the Innovative Concept Academy and for this very generous (and much-needed) donation.



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November Events

11/13 Pastor Silas & Sis Loretta A. Johnson's - 27th Anniversary

11/17 Planning Meeting at 6:30pm - 8:30pm

11/19 Seminar at 9am -11am - How to Run an Effective Meeting & One on One Training

December Events

12/17 Calvary's Christmas Party @ 6:30pm

12/18 Calvary's Christmas Play @ 8:45am

12/25 Christmas Morning Service

Nehemiah Day Care



Nehemiah Day Care

Hours: 6:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Vickie Lee, Director

Nicky Buckley, Assistant Director

Phone (217) 544-2243

Phone (217) 544-2245

• *Waiting List Available*



EDITORIAL

Black America is Imploding

by James Clingman

It is quite evident that Black folks in the U.S. are at the bottom of every good category and at the top of every bad one. You know the stats; they are released every month or so and paint a dreary picture of our status when it comes to incarceration, education, health, employment, net worth, income, life expectancy, and overall political and economic empowerment. With all of this going for us, you would think we'd be spending a great deal of time on initiatives and strategies, both individual and collective, to improve our bleak situation.

Instead of circling our wagons we seem to have formed a circular firing squad, and some of us are firing away. We are killing one another with barbs and insults, which allows the real enemy to sit back and ignore us when it comes to reciprocity in political circles and in the marketplace.

Let's take a look at our inappropriate behavior. We have Cornel West and Tavis Smiley kicking Barack Obama in the behind, Al Sharpton, Melissa Harris-Perry, and Steve Harvey returning the flak to West and Smiley. President Obama socked it to the Congressional Black Caucus with his "stop complaining..." comments which, as Smiley and others noted, were not said to the Jewish, Hispanic, and Gay groups. Brother Sharpton scolded the Ohio Legislative Black Caucus, telling them they, "got too comfortable" and "too low down to stand up for (themselves)." And Black critics of Sharpton are saying he is more symbolism than substance.

Then there are the so-called Black conservatives. I cannot name them all so I'll characterize their group with the likes of Clarence Thomas, Allen West, and Michael Steele (But who knows what he is these days, since his Repub buddies took his job?) These guys and a few gals are incessantly lobbing

grenades at Obama and other Black folks with whom they disagree. They even lambast Blacks who, through no fault of their own, find themselves at the very bottom of our society.

Clarence Thomas is quieter than usual these days; I guess he's busy trying figure out why he didn't know about that \$700,000 his wife was paid by the Heritage Foundation. Allen West said Obama is "the dumbest person walking around in America right now"; he also said the President "should put himself in harm's way" when he goes to war zones.

To top it all off, we have Herman Cain, the Great Black Hope for the Republicans. He is putting in his time as the current "front-runner" for the presidential nomination in 2012. Of the many times I have seen him on TV, and even recently in my hometown, Cincinnati, Ohio, I have never seen another Black person around him, at least not in camera-shot. Nonetheless, Herman is holding his own as he drops H-bombs on Obama, grinning all the way to the bank.

In the last Republican candidates debate, Herman took a lickin' and kept on tickin'. His famous "Nine, Nine, Nine" Plan was trashed not only by his colleagues, as he called them, but it has been highly criticized by many others as a plan that will not work and will not be passed if he becomes President. I guess a lot of his critics are German because they are saying, "Nein, Nein, Nein" to Herman's plan.

Reminiscent of Booker T. and W.E.B. and later Garvey and W.E.B., along with T. Thomas Fortune and Monroe Trotter, to the more recent sibling rivalry skirmishes between Sharpton and Eddie Long over George W. Bush's invitations to the White House, the Urban League and the NAACP over Bush attending the former's convention and ignoring the latter's, Black folks are again taking sides. We are divid-

ing ourselves into hostile camps, firing at one another and taking ourselves out, which is surely a prescription for continued failure.

I am not suggesting that we should all think alike and act alike; I am not saying that we should not criticize our Black President; I am not saying that individual opinions don't count; but I am saying that there has to be someone among us who is intelligent enough and has enough collective influence on Black people to stop our suicide mission. But I could be wrong.

Our choices as regards our current economic and political activism in this country – and in the world – will lead us to one of two broad outcomes: Complete assimilation or

collective empowerment. As my first book was titled, Economic Empowerment or Economic Enslavement – We have a choice, it is up to us, brothers and sisters. We can determine our fate or we can choose to acquiesce to a system in which we, as the number three group in this country, got very little when we were number two.

From my vantage point, both historically and on a contemporary basis, we are imploding. So much so that outsiders have no need to concede to any of our demands for parity. Societies fall from internal strife, and if our current actions continue, Black folks in America will succumb to the same fate.

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