



Reach One Teach One

According to the 2007 statistical data released by the Office of Juvenile and Delinquency Prevention, AA teenagers in the DC juvenile facility account for 72% of the population, in the Los Angeles juvenile facility AA teenagers account for 39% of the population, in the North Carolina juvenile facility AA teenagers account for 26% of the population and right here in the Georgia juvenile facility AA teenagers account for 35% of the population. The current drop-out rate among AA school age kids is about 12%. 56% of all AA children live with only one parent. In 1955, 14% of all births to females age 15-19 were to unmarried women. By 2005, this proportion had increased to 83%. To borrow a term made famous by the former president of the National Council of Negro Women, Ms. Dorothy Height:

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Clearly there is something wrong. Where are the mentors for this ever-increasing lost generation, specifically young black males? You are probably familiar with the age old adage, "it takes a village" but what does that mean to each of us individually and collectively? We watch the news, we read the paper, we see the You-Tube videos, and because of the nature of our work, we see a lot of this up close and personal. How do we respond? Do we chat amongst our family, friends, and peers about how awful the youth are, do we merely shrug our shoulders as we've become so desensitized or do we

COUGAR TALK

BY JIMMY FOX III

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actually reach one, or at least reach out to one? I'd venture to say that the majority of us do nothing. Why is this I ask? Perhaps we don't feel we can make a difference, we're too busy, too indifferent or could fear even factor in, real or imagined. Who is to blame? Segregation? Perhaps. Absentee Fathers, ill-prepared Mothers, perhaps? Lack of or substandard education? Absolutely. Let's say they all weigh in. Now what? How can this be corrected?

I whole-heartedly believe we need to start with some fundamental principles. When did we stop placing value on human-life? When did fatuous behavior become something to be glorified? Recalcitrant youth have no sense of repercussions. Historically, in our culture, we were concerned with the greater good (i.e. I AM my brother's keeper). There is a disconnect with our lost brethren.

I say to you today that our past obligates us to a higher endeavor for the future. In fact, Luke 12:48 states *To whom much is given much is required*. Because of all that our parents, grandparents and what our ancestors endured, including poverty and segregation, they understood that giving was a privilege, but also that privilege confers obligations. And so today, I would like to suggest to you three ways to ensure that we preserve the quality of life, specifically as it relates to African-Americans.

The first is mentoring. Mentoring has its genesis from the Greek word Mentor. Mentor dates back to the 16th century, which means a trusted counselor or guide. In Kenya and northern Tanzania, the Maasai tribe (Massai) are an indigenous African ethnic group of semi nomadic people. There, the tribal leaders recognized centuries ago the importance of mentoring. In fact, tribal leaders took it upon themselves to coach and tutor their young, to ensure that the tribe's future would be

grounded in morals and values. Today, Maasai's are some of the most educated people in that continent.

In 2005, the New York office where I work, we began participating in the New York Big Brother Big Sister program. We followed and mentored a group of inner-city kids starting from the 5th grade, and this past June we saw that same group of kids graduate from middle school, 8th grade. During our time with them we:

- Took them to restaurants. For many, this was their first time eating in a public place outside of their neighborhood.
- Reviewed writing assignments.
- Exposed them to cultural and community improvement activities.
- Shared with them the importance of good hygiene.
- Introduced them to our work environment and work ethics. Some of the participants had never seen their parent(s) leave home for work.

It DOES take a village and we are all part of that village. Now that you've given of your time, you must secondly be willing to make financial sacrifices. I am a product of the North Memphis Community Center. It was at this facility where I learned the power of a musical instrument. You see, there were people like George Cowarder and Charles Andrews who regularly donated money toward the purchase of musical instruments for the Club. It was because of that setting that I was able to obtain five full music scholarships to various colleges.

Since 1995, I have been afforded the opportunity to provide financial assistant to a boys club in the town where I attended college. By donating season football

passes several young boys are afforded an opportunity to attend college football games. It is my hope that this exposure will provide these young boys with a first-hand account of college life, ultimately propelling college as an educational choice. In addition, my wife and I annually make a financial donation toward the purchase of school supplies for kids in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Each of us can contribute; it is not HOW MUCH you give, but THAT you give.

Thirdly and finally, we must have an attitude for human progress. Did you know that attitude is the only word in the dictionary that equates to 100%? The promise of human progress is always carried forward by men and women who serve a cause greater than themselves. I know how hard it can be these days, when we see images of genocide in Darfur or violence in Iraq or the segregated school activities in Jena, LA. or destruction along our own Gulf coast. Sometimes its difficult to believe that such a thing of human progress is possible. History is full of much cruelty and suffering and darkness and it can be hard sometimes to believe that a brighter future is indeed dawning. But for all of our past failings, for all of our current problems, more people now enjoy lives of hope and opportunity than ever before in all of human history. This attitude for human progress has been the concerted effort not of cynics but of visionaries and optimists, like Maynard Jackson, Andrew Young, Dr. Martin Luther King, Dr. W. E. Dubois, Oprah Winfrey and Shirley Chisholm.

Recently, the world witnessed the introduction of our new president, President Barack Obama. BTW, his official inauguration date is January 20, 2009. We have not seen such a full-fledge, straight-out galvanization of human progress since the 1964 Civil Rights Movement, or the 1965 March from Selma to Montgomery, or even the 1968 Voter Rights Celebration. President Obama didn't obtain his education, morals and values by some cosmo-explosion. No he had mentors, people who made financial sacrifices and people who intentionally gave of their time and energy to ensure that President Obama humanely progressed. He himself mentored, made financial sacrifices and gave of his time, as evident during his practice as a civil rights professor and attorney. His autobiography, *Dreams From My Father* is full of examples.

In closing, let me leave you with something my

father repeated to us over and over and over: You have a natural charter by virtue of your existence, and that charter is to be of service to someone, somehow.

These are my personal thoughts and opinions. They do not represent Northside High School or those individuals associated with the planning and creation of the Alumni website. Nothing in the commentary was intended to embarrass or offend anyone.