

FATHERHOOD CONFERENCE

“And He Never Said a Mumbalin Word...”

Morehouse College

June, 2007

It is an honor and a pleasure for me to be with you today. I thank both Dr. Jeffrey Johnson and Mr. Alphonso Gibbs for their kind invitation. I welcome you to Morehouse College and to the Atlanta University Center. History has been made on the grounds of these interconnected campuses. Ideas have been planted, strategies germinated, and a world changed as a result of discussions, debates, problem solving and determined action. These campuses are filled with dreams, hopes, vision, and aspiration. Historically the African American community depended on the stimulus borne on these grounds (and on the grounds of other HBCU's) that have shaped our future as the result of one simple characteristic: COURAGE. This courage was born out of an analysis of the problems facing the community, the risks of actions, an assessment of the risks and dangers of inaction, and moral fortitude to speak truth to power and demand justice.

Somewhere along the way however, the light has dimmed, the vision faded, and the problem-solving frayed and fraught with perceptions of peril and danger. And while some prospered tremendously as a result of gains in education, employment, income, others were not so fortunate. And, different from the past, when some began to slip and fall HARD, with damage to mind, body and spirit, the community looked away, lost focus on the whole, went to sleep. And, while we were sleeping some dangerous social policies emerged that have effectively replaced the auction block of slavery with the cell block of the new democracy. Perhaps it was not within our means to sense that trouble was brewing but we perhaps too easily began to buy into a blame-game that believed 'if one man falls, one man falls' VERSUS 'if one man falls, I, too am diminished.'

I want to focus my remarks on the invisible man, the one that we have learned not to see. We have all too quickly forgotten that 'there but for the grace of God go I.' In May 2003 I had the good fortune to serve as guest editor for a special theme issue of the American Journal of Public Health on the health of poor men and men of color. In that document I wrote an editorial entitled 'Race, Poverty and the Invisible Man.' We sought to give a face to individuals who are standing in the shadows of life for no real reason of their own. In a second theme issue, after we began to reflect on what was insidiously happening to the black man in America, we focused on prisons and the effect of prisons on health. I had the honor of writing the Editor's Choice for that issue entitled "Standing in the Gap", as discussed by the prophet Ezekiel. But I come back to shadows...and then gaps!

The first shadow: The Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) (predecessor to the Mother's Pension Statutes) recognized a need to provide assistance to poor widowed mothers so

that they could stay at home and take care of their children. But as enrollment in ADC increased and the racial demographic changed from white widowed women to include more African-American women, states restricted eligibility principally through the 'man in the house' rule. If a man was found to be living in the home with a woman, the states denied any form of support to the children even though there was ample evidence that jobs were not available. Numerous children were left fatherless and many women separated from the father of their children. There is an old Negro spiritual that is sung at Easter titled "He Never Said a Mumbalin' Word that recounts "**they crucified** my Lord, they nailed him to the tree, they pierced him in the side, his blood came trickling down, and finally "He hung his Head and died..." and to each act the refrain in that spiritual is: 'And He never said a mumbalin' word.'...**And, we never said a mumbalin' word.** (Afro-American spiritual; adapted and arranged by William Farley Smith, 1986). (Webster defines 'mumble' as 'to utter words in a low confused indistinct manner.)

On the streets with no jobs, no home, no hope many strayed and began to populate the jails and prisons. And, the age of the prison industrial enterprise was borne. African Americans claim responsibility for the building of America during slavery with no benefit to themselves as a people. We might also claim responsibility now for the building of the prison industrial industry (through no intent of our own and to no benefit but with distinct and horrifying damage) and in stimulating economic development in rural America. We, you...as those in prison are mainly men are STILL building America by allowing unjust health care, educational, economic, health and criminal justice systems to 'have their way' with us. **And, we never said a mumbling word.** (A young man I interviewed awhile ago at the local Boys and Girls Club said: "I believe that Black people hate each other..." Sometimes I wonder... especially in view of the deafening silence.)

We saw another dangerous warning sign when the Medicare and Medicaid legislation was passed and regulations formulated. Medicare as originally designed was proposed for the entire nation. Southern senators were unwilling to fund care for Blacks. So, as a part of a compromise by the Congress to get the southern Congressmen to support the passage of Medicare, Medicaid developed. The compromise on women who were pregnant and their children said implicitly, the black man and his health is not important! The result of these programs remain with us today: Health status and services are not available at all to poor men, even if they are MORE destitute than the mother of their children. **And we never said a mumbling word.** The 'best' guarantee of health care for poor men is found in prison. What is happening to a proud race of African American and increasingly (rapidly increasing) number of Latino/Hispanic peoples to go to jail.

Today we have, here in the 'land of the brave and the home of the free' a criminal justice system with the highest incarceration rate in the world.

Incarcerated Adults

In 2005, there were over 2 million Americans incarcerated in the United States.

Incarceration rates for all African American males were 5 to 7 times greater than those for white males.

African American males ages 25 to 29 have the **highest** incarceration rate when compared to other racial and ethnic groups.

While African American men represent 14% of the population of young men in the U.S., they represent over 40% of the prison population.

In 2005, 1 out of 32 adults in the U.S. was on probation, in jail or prison, or on parole.

Are overrepresented by minority groups or other high-risk populations without access to oral health services.

At midyear 2005, nearly 4.7 % of African American males were in prison or jail between **ages 20-39** compared to 1.9 % of Hispanic males, and 0.7% of White males.

Among males in their late 20s, 12 % of African American males, compared to 3.9 % of Hispanic males and 1.7 % of White males, were incarcerated.

Criminal Justice: Georgia

Over 650,000 people are released nationally from state and federal prisons annually.

Even though Georgia is the 9th largest state, it has the 5th largest state prison population; the 4th largest jail population; 2nd highest incarceration rate; the 3rd highest school drop-out rate; and ranks 43rd in per capita in expenditures for mental health services (Georgia Reentry Brief. Data presented by Dr. GeGroot).

Many of these individuals encounter difficulty managing the most basic elements for a successful reintegration into society, such as reconnecting with jobs, housing, and their families, and accessing needed health care, mental health care, and substance abuse treatment.

Juvenile Justice

In 2003 nearly **2.2** million juveniles were arrested in the United States.

Minority and youth from low socio-economic backgrounds are overrepresented in the system.

Although Black youth represent 16 % of the overall juvenile population, they are disproportionately involved in juvenile arrests.

Of all juvenile arrests for violent crimes, 53% involved White youth and 45% involved Black youth, 1% involved Asian youth, and 1% involved American Indian youth

Of all juvenile arrests for violent crimes, 1 % involved Asian youth, and involved American Indian youth.

The Violent Crime Index arrest rate (i.e., arrests per 100,000 juveniles in the racial group) in 2003 for black juveniles was more than 4 times the rates for American Indian juveniles and white juveniles and more than 8 times the rate for Asian juveniles.

Mental Health and Me (and you).

The social context does not make many people able to function fully in the execution of their daily duties. But mental health is even more compromised when you are ‘different’ and issues are compounded when you are a male who is different, viz. Black, Latino, Native American and others of color. Layered on all of that is the stereotype of what it takes to be a man, to man up, if you will. Stigma, stereotypes, inability to take the risk of saying “I have a problem”. Mental Illness is defined as health conditions that are characterized by alterations in thinking, mood, or behavior (or some combination thereof) and associated with distress and/or impaired functioning. Mental health, on the other hand is successful performance and function that results in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people and the ability to adapt to change and to cope with adversity. Mental health is also a springboard of thinking and communication skills, learning, emotional growth, resilience, and self-esteem. We will KNOW that we are mentally ill when I no longer have to talk about the following: juvenile justice and prison.

Common Medical Conditions of Detained Youth in Georgia

Ranking of Top 5 Medical Conditions

Mental health/Substance Abuse (and Anger)

Dental

STD's

Trauma/Injuries

Asthma

The Health Status of Inmates and Collateral Damage

Those who are incarcerated suffer from a myriad of health care problems including: HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, Hepatitis B, and C, Hypertension, Diabetes, Asthma, Cancer, Alzheimer's, and mental illness, poor oral health which can complicate chronic conditions.

Once released, these individuals will return to their communities, children and families, many of which are overburdened and underserved, in poor health with limited or no access to health care resources.

“High rates of incarceration can have the unintended consequence of destabilizing communities and contributing to adverse health outcomes”

“We have seen rising rates of teen pregnancy in some communities and then declines when, in fact, declines in one racial or ethnic group have been replaced by growing rates in other communities. We have also seen deadly diseases reach epidemics (in communities and in prisons) that now threaten to devour the heart and soul of some communities.”

The Social Cost of Incarceration

Loss of individuals to their families, communities, and potential employers.

Decrease of young people and especially men in their communities.

Increase of chronic illnesses among prison populations from a lack of primary care and prevention and its impact on public health and safety.

Incarcerated Parents

There were 721,500 parents incarcerated in state and federal prisons in the 1999.

These men and women were parents to approximately 1.5 million minor children.

Most of these children (58 %) were less than 10 years old, with an average age of 8.

Of the 72 million children in the United States, these children represented 2 % of all the minor children who had an incarcerated parent and 7 % of all African American children.

The majority of incarcerated parents was male (93 %) and resided in state prisons (89 %) and were fathers to nearly 1.4 million children.

Children of Incarcerated Parents

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These children are severely damaged by the loss of their parents and virtually no attention is given to their needs. The criminal justice convicts and condemns the parent AND the child.

We are mentally ill, even lunatics if we continue to watch the people watch into the youth camps, jails and prisons and remain silent. “Who will speak when they come for you?”

Disenfranchisement

Approximately 5.3 million Americans have lost their voting rights as a result of a felony conviction.

Of those disenfranchised, 1.4 million (13 %) are African American men, which is seven times the national average.

48 states and the District of Columbia prohibit inmates from voting while incarcerated for a felony conviction.

36 do not allow felons to vote while on parole, and three states deny the right to vote to all ex-offenders who have completed their sentences.

Many ex-offenders do not have health insurance when they return to their families and are unable to receive Medicaid when they are incarcerated. (Slow restart of Medicaid when they return home.)

Welfare Assistance and Food Stamps

Anyone who is convicted of a federal or state felony that involved the possession, use, or sale of drugs is barred from receiving cash assistance and food stamps for life. However, States have the choice to modify, limit, or opt out of the lifetime ban provisions.

Fifteen states have adopted the ban in its entirety, 12 states and the District of Columbia opted out of the ban, and 23 states have modified it.

Housing

Federal legislation has restricted the access to public housing for many ex-offenders who are returning to their families and communities.

May deny public admission to or evict individuals who have engaged in criminal activity, especially drug-related criminal activity, on or off public housing premises, regardless of whether they were arrested or convicted for these activities.

Employment and Education

Many ex-offenders face barriers to employment due to employers unwilling to hire people with criminal records, legal restrictions on certain types of federal and state

employment for those with felony convictions, the inability to improve their labor skills for employment in the workforce, and lack of transportation.

Under the Higher Education Act of 1998, any individual who is convicted of a state or federal offense involving the sale or possession of drugs loses their eligibility for federal educational aid.

Other Consequences of Incarceration

While incarcerated, many fathers are unable to maintain ties with their children and families because of distance, restrictive visitation rules, and the high cost of telephone calls. Over 60 % of parents in state prison were held more than 100 miles from their last place of residence.

Characteristics of Black and White Suicide Decedents in Fulton County, GA 1988-2002

Black suicide decedents were more likely (87 %) than White suicide decedents (76 %) to be male.

Black suicide decedents were more likely to be younger 15-34 years (56 %) than White suicide decedents (33 %).

Black suicide decedents were less likely to report depression, to have a family history of suicide, or leave a suicide note.

Incarceration, Reentry and Child Support Issues

The Incarcerated Parents and Their Children Bureau of Justice Statistics report (2000) provided additional details about incarcerated parents:

Nearly half (48 %) of the parents in state prisons and 38 percent of parents in federal prison reported they had never married.

The median age of parents in state and federal prisons was 32 and 35 years old, respectively.

Forty percent of parents in state prisons and 28 percent in federal prisons had neither a high school diploma nor a GED, while less than a third of parents (31 % and 27 %, respectively) had earned a GED.

About 46 % of parents in state prisons reported living with their child(ren) before going to prison.

71 and 74 %, respectively, of parents in state and federal prisons reported they were employed in the month before their latest arrest.

More than half (59 % versus 63 %, respectively) were employed full time.

More than half (54 %) of state prisoners and close to half (47 %) of federal prisoners who were parents reported a personal income of under \$1,000 in the month before arrest.

Incarcerated parents with child support obligations tend to have debts and monthly support orders that far exceed what they can pay while serving their sentences and following their release.

Child Support Payments

Child support payment amounts are defined by each state.

For example, in Georgia the custodial parents due child support is calculated electronically – based on the combined adjusted gross income (CAGI) of the parent and number of children being supported. With a CAGI of \$800 the amount due is \$197 for 1 child and with a CAGI of \$30,000 the amount due for 1 child would be \$2,236.

Fathers too rarely establish LEGAL PATERNITY and as a result could be named as fathers for anyone placing their name on a form. Legal declarations are essential.

As an example, in Massachusetts, fathers in prison may find that they enter prison owing an average of \$10,543 in unpaid child support and if the orders remain at pre-incarceration levels, the father will accumulate another \$20,461 in debt over time, plus 12% interest and 6% in penalty charges. Non-payment upon exit can add another misdemeanor or state of federal felony conviction and more prison time. Family tensions build, of course. (Many enter earning \$1,000 per month and if they found the same job upon exit would not be able to support themselves and their child(ren). The systems forces men to work off the books or return to illegal activities to pay their obligations.

Demographic Characteristics of Custodial Parents by Award Status and Payments Received: 2003

Custodial fathers were less likely than custodial mothers to report they had never married (19.7 %), more likely to be divorced or separated (56.4 %), and as likely to be currently married (23.1 %).

Custodial fathers were more likely than custodial mothers to be non-Hispanic White (67.7 %) and less likely to be Black (18.8 %) or Hispanic (9.4 %).

While the poverty rate of custodial mothers (64 % of total) fell from 36.8 % in 1993 to 26.1 % in 2003, it remained higher than the poverty rate among custodial fathers, 13.4 %.

Custodial parents due child support receiving full amount by selected characteristics (2003)

At least college degree-56.2 %, 40 years or older-53.1 %, divorced-51.9 %, custodial fathers-46.2 %, custodial mothers- 45.2 %, below 2003 poverty level-35.2 %, never married-35.1 %, black-33.7 %, under 30 years old-30.4 %.

(Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 2004)

In the population of 15-17 year olds .3 % reported being married with a spouse present, .1 % married with a spouse absent, .1 % widowed, .4 % divorced, .4 % separated and 98.8 % never married.

In the population of 18 + year olds 54.2 % reported being married with a spouse present, 1.7 % married with a spouse absent, 6.3 % widowed, 10.4 % divorced, 2.2 % separated and 25.2 % never married.

In the population of 15-64 year olds 50.4 % reported being married with a spouse present, 1.6 % married with a spouse absent, 1.7 % widowed, 10 % divorced, 2.3 % separated and 34 % never married.

In the population of 65+ year olds 54.8 % reported being married with a spouse present, 1.9 % married with a spouse absent, 29.9 % widowed, 8.7 % divorced, 1.2 % separated and 3.6 % never married.

(Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2006 Annual Social and Economic Supplement. Internet Release Date: March 27, 2007

<http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2006/tabA1-all.xls>)

Provisional number of marriages for Georgia December 2004 and 2005

Provisional number of marriages in Georgia was 5,111 in 2004 and 5,265 in 2005.

Note: The completeness of marriage and divorce counts at any given time varies among states. Figures include all revisions received from the states and, therefore, may differ from those previously published; see “Technical Notes.”

(Source: National Vital Statistics Reports, Vol. 54, No. 20, July 21, 2006 Table 3.

Provisional number of marriages and divorces: Each state and Puerto Rico, December 2004 and 2005, and cumulative figures, 2003-05)

CDC National Survey of Family Growth

“Among non-Hispanic black fathers, 25 % fathered their first child before they were 20 years old; 19 percent of Hispanic fathers also became fathers as teenagers, and 11 percent of non-Hispanic white men became fathers while they were teens.”

“About one-half of the men without a high school education have fathered a child outside of marriage compared with about 6 % among college graduates.”

“Non-Hispanic black fathers were less likely to be married at the time their first child was born (37 %) compared with non-Hispanic white fathers (77 %) and Hispanic fathers (52 %).

(Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Overall Health

As a group of racial and ethnic minorities suffer from worse health compared to their white counterparts.

American Indians, African Americans, and Latinos are more likely to rate their primary health status as fair or poor in comparison to Whites and Asians.

In 2004, overall mortality was 29 % higher for African Americans than for White Americans.

Where are the people coming from who are populating the prisons? We have answered that question, but is there a driving force. Let’s look at the educational system and educational achievement.

Education

“Young African American men are more likely than Hispanics and American Indians to graduate from high school but are less likely to graduate than whites and Asians.”

“Less than 45 % of white, African American and Hispanic male high school graduates between the age of 16 and 24 are enrolled in college compared to 68 % of young Asian high school graduates.”

“Moreover, less than 8 % of young African American men have graduated from college compared to 17 % of whites and 35 % of Asians.”

“Ph.D’s awarded to African American women has increased by 27 % while among African American males it has decreased by 2 %.”

Education: Georgia

64,000 Georgia boys were part of the class of 2005 when high school began in 2001, Only 40,000 made it to their senior year, and some of them didn't last to graduation day.

No one in the state really knows what happened to those 24,000-plus boys (Maureen Downey for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 4/23/06).

Georgia graduates only 41 percent of its African-American males (51 percent of all boys graduate), compared to 60 percent of its white males.

And what are the likely impacts of the high incarceration rates on the ability to form a stable relationship

Marital Status of People 15 Years and Over, U.S., 2006

(Marital Status by Gender)

52.6 % of males were married and the spouse was present, 1.9 % males were married and the spouse was absent, 2.3 % of males were widowed, 8.6 % of males were divorced, 1.8 % of males were separated, and 32.8 % of males were never married.

59.6 % of females were married and the spouse was present, 1.4 % of females were married and the spouse was absent, 9.4 % of females were widowed, 10.9 % of females were divorced, 2.4 % of females were separated, and 26.2 % of females were never married.

(Marital Status by Race and Ethnicity, 2006)

Whites (55.3%), Asians (56.8%), and Hispanics (46.9%) were more likely to report being married than African Americans (30.5%).

African Americans were more likely to report being never married (45%) than any other race or ethnicity.

African Americans have the highest reported divorce rate (11.3%) compared to Whites (10.2%) and Hispanics (7.3%).

African Americans (4.9 %) and Hispanics (3.5 %) have the highest rate reported separation rate compared to Whites(1.5 %) and Asians (1.3 %).

Provisional number of marriages for Georgia December 2004 and 2005

From January 2004 to December 2005 Georgia had 5,111 marriages and in 5,265 marriages in 2005.

(Source: National Vital Statistics Report, Vol. 54, No. 20, Jul 21, 2006 Table 3.

Provisional number of marriages and divorces: Each state and Puerto Rico, December 2004 and 2005, and cumulative figures, 2003-08

Too few, far too few are mumbling the words “I DO!” and meaning what they say, walking the talk. So to whom do the children turn for role models when their families and social networks are crumbling all around them?

Lest I forget.. You need to know that doing time ain’t what it used to be. Hear this:

[Just in case you have not seen this.](#)

SOUTH CAROLINA: Considers Reduced Prison Time for Organ Donors

The South Carolina Senate Corrections and Penology Subcommittee is considering legislation that would create a program to allow state inmates to donate an organ in exchange for a shorter sentence, the [AP/South Florida Sun-Sentinel](#) reports. Under the legislation, prisoners would have the opportunity to donate organs or bone marrow in exchange for a 180-day reduction of their sentence. Money for the procedures and prison guard overtime salary would be provided by the organ recipient and charitable organizations. The state would decide which inmates would be suitable to donate organs (Adcox, *AP/South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, 3/9). State lawmakers said they will refrain from considering the legislation until it is determined whether the measure violates federal law, under which it is illegal to trade an organ for "valuable consideration." According to the [Los Angeles Times](#), the measure is "almost certain to prompt fierce opposition from legal experts and prisoner rights advocates about whether inmates are able to make such a decision freely." Lawrence Gostin, a professor of law at the [Georgetown University Law Center](#) and chair of the [Institute of Medicine's](#) committee on human subject research in prisons, said, "For a prisoner to actually have a benefit for giving up an organ violates every ethical value I'm aware of." He added, "Getting out of prison early is more valuable than money. That's your freedom." State Sen. Ralph Anderson (D), the main sponsor of the legislation, said, "We have a lot of people dying as they wait for organs, so I thought about the prison population. I believe we have to do something to motivate them. If they get some good time off, if they get out early, that's motivation." He added, "America has a major health care crisis. I believe this would save money, improve the quality of health care and save a whole bunch of lives" (Jarvie, *Los Angeles Times*, 3/9).

And don’t get me started on drug trials in prisons...I really can’t go there today, BUT YOU SHOULD THE MINUTE YOU GET HOME!!!! But let me say this: I checked with media and other key informants in South Carolina to see how the African American Community or even the community of the children of the Almighty responded. ..”He never said a mumbalin’ word.”

Having examined all of the above we are left with a worrisome challenge. How do we turn some of this around? Who do we look to for leadership out of this predicament of underachievement in school, difficulty in forming and maintaining relationships for companionship and parenting when children are present, and overrepresentation in the criminal justice system? There was a time in this nation when African Americans aspired to only three professions: teaching, preaching, providing health care, the only mainstream employment options open to them. Then, enter the age of athletics and the entry of African Americans in a big way into that industry with the attendant development of image icons. What are the problems with athletics for the developing African American boy or girl, young man or young woman, and for parents? Far too many of our athletes are letting us down. Athletes are supposed to be healthy of mind and body. Are they? I recall some time ago when the phenomenal basketball player Len Bias was recruited by a professional team and died that same night of an overdose on cocaine. I, the dutiful parent seizing on what I thought was a 'teachable (though tragic) moment' said to my sons 'See what can happen to you if you get involved with drugs?' My older son (in the tenth grade at that time shouted back: I do not need to see any more people like that. I need to see someone that I can admire and really respect.'

And our recent television spotlight, living our loud---life of the Atlanta quarterback Michael Vick: Really now: bottles with false bottoms that had possibly contained drugs; possible involvement in dogfighting? And let's not even address the Herpes incidents... My children are now adults. But if they were young I would not permit them to wear a shirt with Mr. Vick's name on it as to do so means that they are emulating an individual who if not guilty of anything is certainly guilty of raising suspicions and casting a shadow over all in athletics and the industry itself. My friend Jane Fonda has said: "When you live in the public life you have to behave yourself." We know that you need to behave yourself ANYWAY! But in the public view you are in the position of influencing individuals. Are we policing ourselves and giving our children the best that we can? Are we pointing them to a 'real' star? I think not. Michael Vick does give money to young men. But **they will live without his money; they may well NOT live if he by his every act and word does not instill in them honor, virtue and integrity.** I say all of this and I have season tickets to the Atlanta Falcons. I wonder if I will use them.... I'm sort of old fashioned and therefore I still believe in boycotts.

But, consider this: a publication by the Black Athlete Sports Network released on July 1st 2005 raised the question "Are Black Athlete Deaths Underreported?..." According to a nurse and clinical researcher, 'information on sudden deaths in African American athletes seemed incomplete. Since Blacks make up a disproportionate part of the American sporting world, one would expect to see the early demise of those athletes reported on a level in line with their participation. But, this is not necessarily the case. The deaths are from 'natural causes, viz. hypertrophic cardiomyopathy and other potentially-fatal cardiovascular conditions,' better screening, treatment and prevention would save more African American lives. The report concludes: "The future of countless young African American men and women could be at stake. Action must be taken to ensure that a better accounting and publicizing of Black athlete deaths is undertaken." To my knowledge, no

follow up accountability or accounting standard has been implemented and perhaps too many young men and women are falling silently, like trees in a forest.

A final note on athletics. Academics and athletics have not always shared the same dreams. “Wind them up and let them run..” is not coupled with “A Mind is a Terrible Thing to Waste.” Too many young men, particularly do not bother to achieve academically in high school as they think that athletics will see them through. And, the best interests of mind AND body do not fit into the sports equation often enough though there has been some improvement. I need say no more. You get the drift. Are we monitoring achievement even on our own campuses? I do not have the answer to that question but I SHOULD have it because we should be the role models for the nation. But, we may not be policing ourselves any better than others.

We are all painfully aware of hip hop, the imagery, the influence. All rappers are not guilty, and perhaps none are. They are following the money. But our community has witnessed all of this **and never said a mumbalin’ word.**

BUT, all is NOT LOST! We are here together today. You have come from many points in the nation to listen, contribute, learn. Your/OUR opportunity is to leave this place better than we were when we came. To leave here with more vision, with more empathy, with greater commitment to others that is seen by the powers that be, and, with an action plan. And yes, there must be a group plan, but you also need your own, individualized, pocketsized playbook. Will you commit yourself to speaking truth to power? Will you choose two of the things that I have just spoken to you about: and I hope that at least 50% of you will commit yourself to speaking out about jails and prisons and the death of the African American community, go home, organize, and get moving. For those who think that I am being a bit paranoid about all of this remember: “Just because you think they are out to get you, it does not mean that they are not.” MORE importantly, “Failure to Act IS an Act.” You are either with your community, or you are with those forces that are running amuck, without check, and tearing at the very fabric of what has brought you here to these halls today. We stand on the shoulders of GIANTS!

Women must also step up to the plate on this one and stay there until the game is won! If we do not value and honor the young men in our lives (including our sons, fathers, uncles, brothers and so forth), why should others do so. Andrea King Collier and Willarda Edwards in their wonderful document “The Black Woman’s Guide to Black Men’s Health” state: “We have the strength, creativity, and power to touch the lives of many black men who need our nurturing and care – whether they realize it yet or not. We like to call it the true power of one..one woman, one church, one family of strong black women, and one community with one goal – to get our black men back on track with their health. We all know the power of one person, but can only dream of the possibilities for our people if we join forces.” In sum, Black Women – JUST START SOMETHING!

Some would say that the job is too big, the problem has gone on too long, there is nothing that can be done. At those moments, I think of Wilbur and Orville Wright, the Fathers of Modern Aviation. People all over the world were trying to build a plane that would stay up there, ...fly. But Wilbur and Orville succeeded because they believed not only that they could fly, they believed that they SHOULD fly. Success is borne in arming your self with the facts, the skills and then in tenacity, stubbornness, love and passion. Nothing else...

“And He Never Said a Mumbalin’ Word...” BUT,

What did SHE say in his defense?”

Our future is in our own hands at this moment until we become drum majors for justice!

I cannot leave without sharing with you two quotes that inspire and keep me going. The first was spoken by the Noble Laureate Elie Wiesel, a survivor of the German holocaust (and some say that there is a holocaust going on in the United States in our jails and prisons). Mr. Wiesel reflected on how the loss of lives occurred when all the world AND MANY IN Germany were aware on some level of the slaughter of the Jewish community and ‘professed’ horror and lack of support for what Adolf Hitler was doing, but stood silently by and did nothing. Mr. Wiesel’s cautionary and haunting reflection that is so meaningful to me is: “The opposite of love is not hate. It is INDIFFERENCE!” Was that young boy I mentioned to you right? Do we hate each other, or is it just that we are indifferent? I believe that indifference is the biggest killer in our nation today!

Finally: My Own National Anthem...

I am only One.
But I Am One.
I Cannot do All Things.
But I Could do Some things.
Of the Things that I Could Do..
Some of them I SHOULD Do.
And of the Things that I Should Do...
By the Grace of God, I WILL DO!

Speak Up, Speak Out!!! SAY IT LOUD!!!!

Peace and love to each of you.

Thank you so very much for permitting me to be with you today!

(www.communityvoices.org)