



# **Kiss Me Kill Me**

**Trayvon Martin,  
Black Male  
Bodies & White  
Supremacy**

**Anthony Carter**



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# Contents

Trayvon Martin, Black Male Bodies & White Supremacy	3
The Good/Bad Black Male Hoax	6
Why Cops and Black Men Choose Fear Over Love	8
Warning: We Are All Trained to Accept Violence	10
How Black Men Can Be Seen Without Being Punished	12
How Black and White Folks Can Listen to Each Other	14
Black Men & Cops May Have the Same Definition of Power	16
13 Things Men Can Do to Transform the Culture...	18
How to Change Male Culture...	21
Why Black Men Live With the 9/11 Threat Daily	23
How Acceptance of Violence Accommodates Police Brutality	24
How to Use Assaults On Black Male Bodies...	26
Why Changing Our Hearts Is More Important...	28
Why Changing Our Hearts Is More Important... Part 2	30
20 Dead... Gone But Not Forgotten	32
Richard Pryor, Murdered Black Men and Police Brutality	33
A Letter to Mike Brown's Parents	35
Developing a Spiritual Practice...	36
What White Folks Can Do to End Brutality...	39
Why Visionaries and Truth-tellers Will Provide Tools...	41
The Ultimate Guide to Saving Black Men...	43
The Ultimate Guide to Saving Black Men... Part 2	45
Why Radical Feminism Will Save Black Men...	47
How We All Benefit From Privilege	49
Three Things Black Folks Can Do to Improve Our Lives	52
Three Things Black Folks Can Do to Improve Our Lives Part 2	54
Three Things Black Folks Can Do to Improve Our Lives Part 3	55
Warning! The Boogey Man is Real and Dangerous	57
10 Warriors Who Gave Their Lives For Justice	59



# Kiss Me, Kill Me: Trayvon Martin, Black Male Bodies & White Supremacy

When I started my stand up comedy career over a decade ago, I often highlighted police brutality and the way things were mishandled during the Amadou Diallo murder case.

While I was a good story teller, highlighting the Diallo case created a couple of very predictable responses: groans (which basically meant don't bring this up!), nervous, tempered giggles (should this be funny and is it ok to laugh?) or audible gasps (did he really say that?).

My intention when I began stand up like all of my creative endeavors has been simple. Challenge and change. White Supremacy and its offshoots (domination, racism, violence and oppression) want us to believe that people are unable to change their hearts and subsequently their minds.

Trayvon Martin was murdered over a year ago and with one jury decision and some very deliberate media coverage we are lead to believe that he earned this death. The good black folks who go to college, pay bills, work and attend church weekly get to smugly hide behind the fact that as a “thug” with drugs in his system, he probably was up to no good or has been up to no good at one point or another.

Another group of blacks get to feel that the deck is always stacked against them so keep “hustlin’”. Both of these groups (like the white folks who would never state it publicly) are thrilled that it wasn't them.

Our seduction is constructed on the belief that if you are black it could have been you but wasn't (safety) and if you're white you are falsely lead to the conclusion that you are a bit safer because a “dangerous” black man has been taken down. White Supremacy at its finest lulls us into an us vs. them schematic and we gleefully fall into the always welcoming trap every time.

A large part of this very intricate web of lies and deception centers on the troubling way black male bodies are seen and represented. Many black men, myself included, have been the object of sexualized and violent stereotypes designed to eliminate our humanity and squelch our power. Often seen as angry and volatile fuckbeasts, is it any wonder that when one of us gets put down there is no outrage and downright revolution.

Many of us wrap out identities in these limiting and vile straightjackets and remain confused about why we feel powerless. Many of us wonder what can be done to reclaim power that has been stolen or seductively bargained away in exchange for “coolness”, “swag” and any other adjective that reduces us to arbiters of style with no substance to take seriously.

In the Kiss Me/Kill Me way black male bodies are seen, it is important to remember that so much of the way black (male)culture is constructed and then consumed is based on the understanding (commonly held beliefs) that we are physically out of control and that our bodies are not our own. If this disturbing trend is what drives people to not only murder our young black people but then construct a jury of peers that feels (the next time it could be and I don't want to be attacked), we are in serious trouble.

It would be very easy and convenient to assign Zimmerman and Floridian residents the label of racists. This incident could force Americans to have a very serious conversation about black males, racism, White Supremacy that engenders murder, and the prejudice and fear that governs interracial interactions. We are being tasked to have some hardcore discussions about fear and privilege.

Brene Brown states: “We can't have a discussion about racism without discussing privilege and we can't discuss privilege without discussing shame”.

It is time for all of us to have an investigation into the amount of shame we have around race, men, masculinity, power, and heterosexist assimilation. Most importantly, we must not shut down emotionally because the slaughter of black bodies doesn't affect us.

Part of what makes Zimmerman's behavior so upsetting is

that at one time he witnessed some type of injustice and mistreatment of a fellow human being that was racially and youth-based and decided to do nothing.

Witnessing an injustice and doing nothing alters our thinking and behavior. Instead of speaking up our thinking becomes: this is not my business or this person's mistreatment is none of my business.

When this type of thinking commences, White Supremacy has already begun its seductive call. We resist the call by having conversations and demanding change.

When is the last time you've had an uncomfortable talk about race, privilege, fear and domination?

# The Good/Bad Black Male Hoax

When I hear the nonsense of racism regarding scary black men and then get immediately assured that I am not one of “them”, I often wonder: When is my time coming?

We have been hoodwinked into believing that some of us deserve life (educated, churchgoing, those on their way to college) while others (drug users, those grappling with mental health issues, low self esteem, and identify as gay/bi/questioning) do not. Part of our socialization tells us this is cruel, not nice and certainly not true.

Those of us who consider ourselves “different” are slower to question the brutality that is targeted at those who look like us and in some instances make different life choices. As I leave my home daily to go to work, I often assume that my tie and a smart pair of glasses will shield me from abuse and homicide.

Having worked with young people who many of us would term hoodrats, I understand that while our speech and dress may be opposite, those with badges who have not done the work of eliminating internalized racism may see us as identical. Does this mean that I am never safe? Our culture loves the good/bad dichotomy and ways to quantify/box in and define.

When we are confused about where to place another, our racism instructs us to decide whether the individual in front of us is a good or bad man. By supporting this flawed logic, we sign many death warrants.

We breathe a little easier when it is discovered that a slaughtered black man had a record, a history of drug use (no matter how benign or severe) or any type of police record. As a community member, I am falsely seduced into thinking that a college degree and well read mind will escape bullets that take down men who at some point have been up to “no good”.

I spoke of delusion in an earlier post and understand how comforting this state can be and what it can offer those who seek safety.

I am now challenging myself and those who have had the benefit of a middle class upbringing to examine the falsehood

that is safety and the reality that no one ever asks to see a college diploma or a resume before they pull the trigger or strike a blow.

# Why Cops and Black Men Choose Fear Over Love

**T**wenty plus years ago Marianne Williamson's brilliant *Return to Love* rocked my world. In this mind blowing book, she addressed the concept that everything we do in life moves us closer to fear or love.

Brene Brown states that culturally our daily questions consists of: who are we supposed to be afraid of and who is to blame? We have assigned black men as the ones to be afraid of and yet no one will take responsibility (not blame) for creating this big bad that haunts and terrifies us all.

We jokingly point out the inability to catch cabs, the uncomfortability of sharing elevator space and the belief that we are all rappers, athletes or thugs. What would happen if we trained cops and society to look at black men with love? What if cops publicly shared the real reasons for the unmitigated brutality they often direct towards black men. What if police officers in mass shared that they are afraid.

Fearful that a wrong decision could end their lives or make them a scapegoat amongst peers, much of their behavior is hinged on being seen as unafraid, daring, willing to risk it all and not being perceived as weak.

I have a brilliant retired cop friend who now teaches workshops on fear, bigotry and ways to uproot its tentacles in our daily lives. Sergeant Levy shares the belief that those who face the possibility of death on a daily basis often have one goal: ending the day alive in an effort to get home to their family.

When he shared this rational desire, it was clear to me that there was a great deal of work that could be completed here with all citizens. Our work could center on our collective need to return to the ones we love. Black men also seek to return to the hearts and physical space of those who love us.

We often choose fear (masked as bravado and aloofness) to avoid the pain that occurs as a result of frustration and failed, unrealized dreams. It is easier to be upset than hurt. We choose fear, rename it (anger) and limit our choices and ability to re-

spond to social injustice with well thought out, rational and passionate action plans.

We hurt and silently die when we are either not seen or seen in limited and vile ways. What if for one day we all gave up the concept that what we needed was more sentimentality (which is its own type of violence) and replaced it with the desire to understand and actually see and hear the black male voice.

Society is notorious for creating an us versus them dichotomy as a way to stay safe and unchallenged. We all feel better when our relationships are predictable and peopled with folks that look and think like us. It is easy to declare love when you are never challenged.

We all fear change. How we negotiate and respond to change is the most powerful and positive response when things and people begin shifting identities. We must learn to welcome the new and not offer parental like punishments to anyone who has the balls to dig deep and demand more from themselves and the world.

## Warning: We Are All Trained to Accept Violence

Several years ago, I read an essay about the ways that we respond to violence. It was pointed out that we typically will have one reaction if we are assaulted in the world by someone we don't know or have never seen. We respond differently when it is someone we know intimately.

Many times during the day we have options to be courageous or silently agree to not cause problems. No where is this more common and more prevalent than in our daily discussions and energy around race and racism.

I am highly disturbed about the way racism here in California goes unaddressed. Living in California for six years now, I have had the opportunity to meet several people and a number of black folks who behave in some truly bizarre ways. bell hooks has spoken of the “worship of whiteness” as a strategy for cultural assimilation. Until moving to California, I can't say that I'd ever seen this phenomenon in my day to day existence.

Moving from the east coast (NYC), I had become accustomed to and taken for granted that people of color (mainly black folks) were able and expected to take on positions of leadership. My understanding of creating a platform based on one's thinking and then inviting others to join was granted (bestowed upon) to anyone brave and ballsy enough to claim it.

When I think of my initial introduction to straight shooting talk that NYC is famous for, I recall a conversation between myself and a friend that I still have today (19 years later). My first friend that I made in NYC was an Italian who explained to me that looking for an apartment in a Greek section of Queens would be pointless because they don't rent to black people I accepted and felt no need to change this particular form of violence.

When your experience has been where black folks and gays have been the ones in power and dictating the course of action for large groups, it is strange to see people ask for permission to do things.

I have a friend who is Mexican American who plans to co-dominate the world with me at some point. We are working on a film that is full of racial/sexual and economic stereotypes. During one meeting, we discussed the stereotypes that people feel free to share when they are among their “own”.

It is not uncommon for people to share racially charged thinking and humor when a person of the targeted group is not within earshot. It is equally troubling when “jokes” and amusing “anecdotes” are served up with the punchline being someone's racial makeup or social condition and the target (of what is supposed to be funny) is in the room and a part of the conversation.

How do these poisons enter our personal space? These things occur because we allow them. These things occur because many of us lack the courage and conviction to speak up and out and demand that it stop.

It is difficult to say to anyone: This type of behavior is unacceptable in my presence and in particular in my home. Home is a place to retreat to and then emerge from ready to battle anything that tries to prevent us from being healthy and whole. You can't do this if your home is fed a steady diet of racist barbs passing as jokes. When the crap looks as if it is even making an attempt at entering your home, you must remove the welcome mat that is silent complicity and replace it with a dollop of courage.

Dr. Maya Angelou reminds us that courage is acquired gradually. She tells us that we build large bastions of courage by first cultivating and inviting in small amounts of it into our lives. A small step there. A slight reprimand here.

People are taught that this (violence in all its intricate manifestations) is the way you behave and interact. Things that are taught can be taught in new ways.

Brene Brown has instituted a “no name calling” policy in her home. I now have one in my home. All of my charges know that they will never hear myself or my husband call each other anything that is so vile it can never be taken back.

# How Black Men Can Be Seen Without Being Punished

I often find myself telling friends and anyone who can hear that while I am often derided and or ridiculed for being weird, outspoken and too truthful, people often rely on my insight to assist them with inviting and managing change. The one fear that consistently rears its head is that I will be rendered invisible. As a young child, the misguided and miserable adults often vacillated between invisibility and ridicule and domination.

Many of us who get punished for truth telling and my favorite youth time activity (pointing out inconsistencies shared by adults), learn early that invisibility can both hurt and provide a place of safety and refuge. Many of us bargain how much visibility is allowed based on where we are and the likelihood of being emotionally damaged. Those of us who have been attacked because our insight and brilliant questioning minds bring attention have learned the consequences of visibility.

My family members and other unenlightened folks have spent many years reminding me that my “intelligence” will cause problems. There has rarely been a focus on the world's inability to invite critical thought which invites change. Minorities and those on the “outside” are very aware that when you can be seen you can be hurt.

We often struggle with the possibilities that can be created. We ask: is it worth it? What will my family say? How will I survive? Will this cause alienation from all that is familiar and communal?

Those of us who have fought hard to be ourselves and spent any amount of relevant time developing inner resources (strategies of resistance) understand the consequences involved with fighting to be seen and hold onto ourselves at the same time. It is time for all of us to change how and why we see black men.

Being afraid of being seen invites shame and at some point an outburst designed to eliminate shaming and create a space

to be seen as human. We often don't recognize this concoction until someone has been killed. We wait and hope that things will work themselves out knowing that there must be something we can do and yet the thought of greater visibility which might make "me" the next victim silences our angst.

As a culture it is time that we encourage all of our citizens to be seen and then collectively wrestle with images that we don't understand, are threatened by or want to eliminate. Only with honestly sharing our collective blindness will we then be able to disengage it.

# How Black and White Folks Can Listen to Each Other Even When We're Afraid

**I**n the brilliant and paradigm shifting masterpiece, *Where We Stand*, bell hooks takes on the subject of class in America and Americans refusal to discuss it. Classism, bigotry and racism affect us all and lead us all to make some dumb ass assumptions and then commit to some even dumber behaviors.

When we view history in terms of the fights that took place to end racism and white supremacy in this country, we are encouraged to overlook the whites that placed their lives on the line. When Black folks are seemingly angry and aggressive for “no apparent reason”, we are instructed to simply chalk it up to being angry non thinking beast who need constant and forceful control. We are systematically inducted to ignore the pain and emotional reality of the other.

I have denied the pain of white comrades and suggested that they walk it off and have no right to bitch about anything ever. Folks have interpreted my anger in ways that were dismissive and demeaning. If I can't or won't recognize your pain, I probably am not dealing with my own.

By keeping us blind to the ways that we inflict pain and cause psychological pain, racism and its offshoots go unchecked. As I deny the pain or upsetting reality that an individual finds himself navigating, I am allowed the freedom to not self reflect nor take any responsibility in how I treat another person.

If we refuse to speak of certain things and steer others towards doing the same, we create an environment that is devoted to not speaking up when we should, things getting misheard and feelings getting hurt.

A better solution would be to discuss the pain and work together to develop kick butt strategies to usher in new ways of interacting. This requires another item: Black and White folks trusting one another.

I have often feared whether I can trust the white person who calls himself my friend? If it gets ugly will you (white ally) go down with me or deny our association? If there is a racist joke told in your presence will you speak up? Walk away? Tell the person to shut their gravy hole?

If I hear an off color remark about a Jew, Italian, Irish person, will I speak up and out or mentally state: It wasn't a black joke; the group that's a target runs the world so it doesn't really mean that much.

As a member of several subcultures, I get chances almost hourly to determine how I will deflect and respond to foolishness. When I have tried to explain this battle to white friends, I am often met with blank stares regarding why certain things happen and how I should feel about them. Mistrust and the inability to hear and share in another's pain makes it highly improbable that a real loving, compassion based relationship can or will be formed.

We spit in the face of domination and oppression by sharing our pain and learning to hear that of another. We challenge and subvert our well honed culture of domination when we fight like hell to see one another as individuals and treat each interaction and exchange as unique. We face our fear of being "tricked" and unseen by willingly going into battle and knowing that the shit might get ugly and real. It is easier to stay mired in familiar and uncomfortable pain and relentless unmet desire for closeness.

To produce loving, trust-filled interactions with white friends and lovers, it is imperative that I pinpoint and eliminate trust issues that have nothing to do with the person in front of me and support the individual that I care for and about to do the same.

Mistrust and the refusal to listen are learned behaviors. We all are born with the desire and need to find persons and create communities of ride and die peeps.

## Black Men & Cops May Have the Same Definition of Power

**P**ower and who gets to have and wield it often get a bad rap. In our culture, we equate power with the ability to dominate, brutalize and incite fear. With this as our only definition is it any wonder that we allow the brutalization of our young men?

To be male in this culture is to not be “weak”. What constitutes weak constantly changes and if you don't want to get lumped in that category you better know what it is from moment to moment and adjust accordingly. It is time we redesigned the concept of power and what it can do to improve all of our lives.

All great movements that brought incredible, positive change did not use domination and violence in efforts to uplift and change the status quo. It is now time for an examination of a new type of power. It is time for a type of power that some have termed “soft power”.

My soft power approach to leadership often makes people uncomfortable and doubt my abilities and commitment to instituting change. What seems to really get folks in a snit is when I honestly and shamelessly admit that there is something I don't know or will need some additional thinking to create a productive solution. Apparently, the worse thing can say beyond the age of six is: I don't know.

American culture believes the loudest, best looking, flashiest is there to pay attention to, worship and fawn over. Power and its distribution are often decided by people who have the most to gain by wielding it sparingly to those who need it the most and would use it most radically.

Gays, minorities, women, sexual outlaws are all groups who would benefit most from the redistribution of power and its significant and uplifting possibilities. These same groups would also be wise to unlearn colonized ways of thinking and organizing.

When I have “dared” to write and speak about black male

mental health, I have been interrogated by black men who insist that I share my “credentials” and then speak.

When I say: “I’m black, gay, HIV negative, been dealing with intimate terrorists since I was 17, homophobic parents, racism, artist oppression and a world that hates direct questions and pure curiosity,” this fails to suffice. When I mention that older white men with Ph.Ds are quoting me on their sites and journals without recognition, the assumption is that I must have something of value to offer the world.

Being questioned about my right to “speak” and share an opinion is all about the policing of my voice and power. To combat this there must be honesty and discussions around who has power (ability to incite change and gather attention in large amounts). Another tool to examine and collectively reassign power is the belief that we all have power and to wait for an outside force to grant us access to this power is doing a disservice to the world.

I recently launched a class to teach people about their true power (the ability to make choices) but disguised it as a class on surviving unemployment. Everyone that I assembled for the class knew a great deal more than me. I knew very little and was willing to learn as the class progressed.

This is how true power is shared with others and utilized to create serious social change regardless of the context and outside forces interfering. Black men and Cops what are your definitions of power?

# 13 Things Men Can Do to Transform the Culture of Male Violence

**W**e can either continue watching our young men get murdered and wait for the next tragedy or we can commit and take some action.

It is time that we quit accommodating foolishness that masquerades as bravado and machismo and costs our community lives. It is time to transform our culture, our relationship to men and our collective support and fascination with male violence. It is time we take on Thirteen things that will transform our culture of male violence.

1. Listen to and love women. Women can support us all in growing, learning to truly listen and trust one another and provided that they have done a significant amount of healing, school us in the fine art of power sharing.

2. Seek professional help in dealing with any and all childhood trauma. So much of what we carry around and allow to go unresolved is emotional trauma from our youth. While many in our community don't view therapy as sexy or needed, it is time to change our relationship with mental health by addressing our most pressing emotional needs and begin demanding emotional well being.

3. Delve into a spiritual practice or create one of your own. When is the last time you've seen the inside of a church, mosque, temple? Anyplace that puts you in touch with the divine, the part of you that connects with the universe and allows love, vulnerability and a genuine concern for others will do.

4. Develop relationships with young children. Keep in mind that many people have been taught that men being around children and having love for these powerful little spirits is creepy and suspect.

As someone who has taught four year olds and high school students and everyone in between, I am aware of people's misunderstanding around men's significance when it comes to

being in a child's life. Our young ones need us to guide, protect and nurture them.

5. Redefine your personal worth on your own terms. Are you able to provide others with a gentle spirit? Do folks seek you out when they need clear insight regarding life struggles and personal integrity? Is your community better off because you're around? Make sure that everyone knows that things will work out splendidly for everyone if you are part of the solution.

6. Give up the belief that your only contribution is a physical one. Invest in brain teasing, synapse changing activities and interaction. Although I never win and suck at scrabble, I am mentally challenged and have never left a game not having learned something. Maybe chess or checkers would be more to your liking. Anything that moves our minds and gets them to stretch and move beyond what is comfortable and familiar is a great thing.

7. Seek out people who are willing to die for our young men if this is what it takes.

8. Stop lying about your feelings, accomplishments, disappointments, height, weight, penis size and sexual prowess. Tell the truth about your fears and how you handle them. Discuss your unrealized dreams and how you created new ones.

9. Develop friendships and relationships with people who are different and navigate the planet differently because of race, sexual orientation, religion or age.

10. Make the elders in your community show up and participate. Elders can provide great listening avenues for young people provided that everyone agrees to listen and not "fix". If a young person solicits advice, it is up to us to allow our young people to use their own inner resources and offer suggestions once they have either exhausted all resources or are barreling towards physical danger.

11. Understand the political process. Vote. Understand that politicians and those in power have much to gain when people are confused, angry and disorganized. It is a simple process to manipulate and unleash us on us when we are not clear where responsibility lies. Understanding the real deal behind elections, zoning laws and the pipeline to prisons that many of our

schools have become will help us understand where true power lies and formulate a plan to redirect it.

12. Understand and know your history. Fannie Lou Hamer, King, Malcolm X, Ella Baker and Bayard Rustin all understood the power of organizing and motivating small pockets of people then moving on to larger ones. They also understood the power of momentum and they all created incredible changes without social media.

13. Follow the lead of the thirteen in Ferguson, Mo. Without an outside force deciding what needed to be done, these brave soldiers convened with the intent of doing something. Unlike many of us older folks, they started before they were ready and without much of a plan besides saving lives, gaining respect and mobilizing their community. Do we really need anymore than that? They are no longer willing to adopt a “wait and see” approach. They are clear that this approach doesn't provide much change and saves no lives.

# How to Change Male Culture by Changing Our Representation of Men

Whether its film, television or any form of mass media we all get the same messages about men: men are emotionally lacking and one dimensional. This thinking prevents anyone committed to male growth and love the opportunity to support or further develop healthy relationships with anyone of the male gender.

We have been conditioned to believe that if we assign a group of characteristics to one segment of our population and then punish them when they dare to change the game everyone will feel better. No one will suffer. If you are a boy who does not fit into a neatly and constraining view of masculinity then what? I wrote about this topic years ago in a solo play:

*Secret keeping is for boys who want manhood.  
Secrets are what many sons do...*

*So many sons are good sons. A good son does what he is told. A good son gets married. A good son spends holidays with his family.*

*A good son is violent. A good son likes to drink. A good son watches sports. A good son denies having problems. A good son doesn't cry until he can't speak.*

*A good son does not have addictions. A good son is not in Times Square at three in the morning hoping for sex and a violent end to his misery. A good son does not have sex with several men in one day. A good son knows when to stop.*

*Now my version of a good son is my own: I will not lie. I will not hide. I will not suck it up. I laugh uproariously. I dance. All the time. I am a good son. Some sons are hated not because of what they are but because of what they are not.*

If you are a boy who protests the societal punishment for not holding up his end of the bargain what's next? There really is no place in this society for men who resist patriarchy's call. There is no place where men's vulnerability is expected or celebrated. As a young boy and now fully grown male, I have often caused a stir when I've admitted I was unsure about a fact, popular opinion or widely held belief. The real crime has been when expressing a divergent viewpoint and not immediately having something to fill that void. Sitting in the place of confusion, doubt and struggle upsets anyone who derives their power from the compliance with society's rules about men.

I have experienced many lovers and a few male friends who become visibly and audibly upset when I voice confusion or an oppositional view point and have nothing (to shove into the void that I have now created). Once (after suggesting that my partner stop interacting with an ex and inviting this person into our home and life) I was told that what I felt was ridiculous and that I needed to provide examples of why this had been or would be a problem.

When I deigned to leave my hometown of Detroit to move to NYC and live out my dream of being a successful performance artist, I was grilled on how I would do this with my favorite phrase: what was my plan? When my answers didn't suffice because not only did I not have a plan but nobody I'd known had purposely and unabashedly ever gone after a dream so powerfully, I was called a dreamer and told to wake up and get my head out of the clouds.

I was not holding up my end of and promise to be a man: I lacked answers and a concrete step by step plan that could be easily understood and explained. Men in movies always have answers and a plan at the ready no matter who it affects or how. Men on television always have more wisdom than any one person can possibly obtain in several lifetimes.

It is time that we show men growing in knowledge and doing the slow, methodical work of becoming brilliant. How about a group of scientists or social justice seekers who don't have all the answers and once they've admitted as much, move forward with a group plan gained by consensus.

# Why Black Men Live with the 9/11 Threat Daily

**T**hirteen years ago, I received a phone call and saw an image that changed the way I saw my country. Thirteen years ago, I was heading to my old job that was located five blocks away from the Twin Towers.

While I understand the disbelief and the sheer surrealism this event caused all Americans, I have trouble understanding a culture that fails to have the same depth of upset when it comes to our young black males. We are in a similar situation (terrorism that may strike at any moment for any reason) when we look at the lives of Mike Brown, the residents of Ferguson and of course, Trayvon Martin. Where is our shock and outrage in reference to these snuffed out lives?

It is always interesting to hear white friends and colleagues go on about not feeling safe (post 911). I resist the urge to launch into a Richard Pryor rant about “now you know what it feels like being black in this country”.

I have grown up knowing that I could be gunned down for any reason at any time. Young black males have never been safe in this country. A black male who is brilliant, talented or gay is even more of a target.

What kind of world do we live in when we are only given the choice to mourn one sect of our population? Where are the telethons, star studded media events that say: this (murdering our young people) has to stop.

Where are the A-List celebrities offering large sums of money for legal fees, grief counseling and support of neighborhood watches? How many more have to be slaughtered before we take collective action and demand change ?

I mourned the senseless murders on 9/11. I also mourned Trayvon, Mike Brown and Amadou Diallo.

# How Acceptance of Violence Accommodates Police Brutality

*He is crying. He is in pain. He is confused. He thought they would be nice to each other. He thought this thing can't be happening.*

*He is confused. He is crying. He hurts. His special parts, the ones no has ever touched are in pain. He is crying. Didn't he say no? That it hurt. That he wanted to stop.*

*He remembers the light blue boxers being torn off he thinks they were torn. He remembers the chill because the air conditioning was up too high. It was August. It was a hotel room. He had always loved hotels. He will never visit Chattanooga again.*

*He can tell no one. This is what they do, people will say. He will block it out. Never replay it in his mind. He will convince himself that this never happened. He tells himself the screams, the pain, the tears, the cold air never, ever happened.*

This performance piece was written by me ten years ago in a show dedicated to surviving disappointment. While it upset many people for its raw and honest portrayal of brutal and violent relationships, its depiction was one of hope for the masses and the belief that we all make bad choices until we don't.

There is a great deal of focus on black men as the targets of police brutality. There is little to no focus on the brutality many black men have suffered at the hands of people who look like us. Shame and the belief that “manning up” will keep us safe and allow us to “get over it” has kept us screwed up for a long time.

While I have been questioned by police more than once, I have only felt sheer terror when dealing with black men who were intent on staying emotionally stunted and destroying me in the process. My goal is to remind us of the awful things that we do to each other and reprimand those of us who insist on

“white justice” yet ignore brutality and murder if the perpetrator is of the same race.

I am down for discussing and eliminating the treatment that many young black males receive at the hands of police. I am even more down for discussing the ways we brutalize and lash out at each other.

Being labelled a fag and sissy came from the homophobic mouths of black men. Being spit on and physically assaulted happened at the hands of black men. It is difficult to understand the demand that other people treat us better than we are willing to treat those in our own community. This is why there has been no major change in the way society views and then treats us.

If our silent agreement is you're not shit and neither am I, why shouldn't the larger society interact the same way? It is imperative that we clean our own homes first and then demand change.

# How to Use Assaults on Black Male Bodies As a Vehicle for Social Change

**S**ocial movements don't work when people feel left out, forgotten about, let down or simply overlooked. Many times movements like the civil rights one and others that immediately followed it, provided benefits for the group at large but left the individual distrustful and disappointed.

Leading a group of individuals interested in restructuring a social machine without eliminating its personnel (gatekeepers and those who have the most to gain by maintaining the status quo) is pointless. To approach a group that has experienced a severe lack of governmental support (slavery ended in 1865 and it took another 100 years before we could vote) and has thrived despite systematic discrimination and oppression with the idea that approaching and challenging this same system to see the errors in its thinking and simply step aside is dumb and short sighted.

To gain the trust and respect of those you want to influence and ultimately lead, it is wise to start with the question: What's in it for them?

What type of change would benefit the most oppressed group? What the media gives us is a group of whining individuals going on about "being safe" and the ever growing need for more prisons. There is never an attempt to link their fear with a larger social movement which includes sharing of resources and a return to compassion that would allow for serious community transformation. As a result of this lack of planning and interaction with a group that still experiences targeted racist attacks, our big movement will flop.

A better way to regroup and create a continued and ballsy, unrelenting attack is to align this dream with several others. Why not also fight for healthcare that is not determined by marital status?

Why not fight for school systems who base their curriculum

on love and self esteem building as opposed to test scores? Why not demand that drug companies, mental health officials and sex workers create honest sex discussions whose purpose is HIV prevention? Why not look at the number of runaways, foster kids and trans youth who are severely lacking in resources which lead to risky unprotected sex as their only means to self support.

Fighting for black male lives needn't be done in a vacuum, it should be included with all of the other issues facing our community.

# Why Changing Our Hearts is More Important than Changing Laws

**W**hen I taught high school English classes, I reminded my students that while change is often challenging, it can and is incorporated on a daily basis. To illustrate this point, I discussed life before the internet or cell waiting and being able to see the person you are speaking with on a hand held device was considered Science Fiction.

As a country steeped in shame and disconnection, we are lonely and require constant interaction. It is this reality that drove us to create social media and then laws to govern its usage.

We changed our heart's desires and then the world around us changed. It is time that we asked ourselves why sacrificing humans is an alright idea. The desire to protect one segment of our community while destroying another must be questioned and eliminated.

Silence will not protect us either. Many believe that if they remain silent that things will work themselves out. Things never work themselves out. A small group gets their hearts touched and then takes action. In the words of Sir Richard Branson: they start before they feel ready.

Changing laws and restructuring legislation occurs after people demand it. People demand changed laws when their hearts have been moved. How do we move another's heart? We challenge ourselves to understand our behavior and look at places (in our hearts) that make us cringe.

Do we view injustices and silently rejoice that it's "them and not us"? Do we hear of an arrest and say: "He may not be guilty of what he was arrested for but I'm sure he's done something that he hasn't gotten caught for".

Once we are clear about our embarrassing racism, class issues and irrational fears, we can decide to speak up and out. Rather than wait for a legal change that may or may not affect you, make the decision that all life is valid and precious and allowing its destruction is evil and cowardly.

Gather in homes and discuss the painful reality that none of us have done enough. Take action outside the home by taking on projects (beautification of an abandoned lot, creation of a large community garden, adding a street light or stop sign at a dangerous corner).

Creating small and pivotal agreed upon goals makes the heart feel better and larger which leads to the belief that anything is possible.

# Why Changing Our Hearts is More Important than Changing Laws Part 2

**M**y mother used to manipulate and mock me with taps on the lips admonishing me that: I must learn to listen. I always found this humiliating and could never quite put together why I should listen to anybody who was inconsistent with their information sharing or in some cases flat out lied and changed facts and stories at will. Why listen if the story will get rewritten without my knowledge or consent and then shoved in my face later as fact?

One of the most disturbing and predictable ways fear infiltrates our beings is through sullied hearing. Despite what most relationship and business gurus proclaim, most people don't listen for understanding which could build enormous empathy. Most folks listen for lies, inconsistencies and any opportunity to poke holes in a persons' theories.

If I am planning a snappy retort or simply waiting for you to shut your pie hole so I can jump in with a solution, I am not really listening. I'm in my head figuring out how to make you wrong and myself right.

It's odd that we listen wholeheartedly and with much attention when we meet someone new. Whether our interest is romantically based or platonic, the "new" demands and gets our attention.

Once routines take the place of genuine sharing and building, we often decide that true listening is no longer required. We no longer listen to deepen or enrich our experience of one another.

To truly listen, we must accept the fact that a) I might be wrong about something, b) it's okay to be wrong, c) it might be scary and uncomfortable to not go into problem solving mode to ease our own discomfort, d) if the relationship is really important we must accept the aforementioned happening and show up to really listen anyway. When we invite heart listen-

ing, it is a supremely unfamiliar and satisfying experience.

During the last decade, I have witnessed people carrying on at least two conversations at once and not really hearing either of them. Many of my female colleagues and coworkers love to point out that men are not great at multitasking and that we don't listen. Heart to heart listening involves giving the person your listening to undivided focus and attention.

I can always tell when I am fiercely engaged as a listener. When wholeheartedly engaged, I will be moved by something. Something will be heard that will require me to change or alter my mood or thinking.

Another tired trick that myself and many educators use is the standard and always productive: tell me what I just said. Anybody can parrot back what they just heard and this is also a kinder, gentler version of not listening.

Be willing to be scared, wrong, judgmental or just plain stupid in an effort to do this listening thing differently. You might pick up some new ways of thinking or gain a better, richer understanding of a person you've known for years. Anybody I know who listens in an effort to deepen connection always fairs better than the one listening for the sole purpose of being right.

Being right is fun. Is it worth it? Being right means somebody has got to be wrong. What's most important to you, being heard or being right at all costs?

## 20 Dead... Gone but Not Forgotten

**W**e have become too desensitized to the deaths of those in our community. Here is a list so that we never forget and continue to fight:

Kimani Grey  
Kendrec McDade  
Timothy Russell  
Ervin Jefferson  
Amadou Diallo  
Patrick Dorismond  
Ousmane Zongo  
Timothy Stansbury Jr.  
Sean Bell  
Orlando Barlow  
Aaron Campbell  
Victor Steen  
Steven Eugene Washington  
Alonzo Ashley  
Wendell Allen  
Ronald Madison and James Brissette  
Tavares McGill  
Ramarley Graham  
Oscar Grant  
Manuel Loggins Jr.

# Richard Pryor, Murdered Black Men and Police Brutality

**W**hen I began doing stand up comedy in 1999, I aspired to be as brilliant as Richard Pryor. Great comedy slams ideas together, questions the ridiculousness of humor behavior, stares at what terrifies and points out how truly stupid and amazing human beings can be.

Great artists force us to self reflect and offer us an opportunity to restructure our lives, seek amends for awful decisions and examine new solutions that require bravery and incredible vulnerability.

Blacks are being assaulted and murdered at an alarming rate. We could use Mr. Pryor's insight and incredible storytelling abilities to illustrate what needs to be done and the type of courage that true change requires.

Years ago, I saw a bit he performed where he talked about rape in a comedic light before switching to its after effect (stealing another's humanity). We are in need of someone with his stones and a commitment to pointing out that (the slaughter of black bodies) is beyond horrendous.

Where are all the black or white allies in the comedy field who could highlight this current tragic state? We don't need more artists talking. We need more artists with something to say. We need artists who are willing to piss people off immediately after making them laugh. We need less gratitude and more revolution.

Mr. Pryor could discuss his drug use, fascination with death and his own destruction and make you think that anything was possible and our ability to share our humanity was our greatest strength. I can picture Richard performing at a policemen's banquet before heading to the ghetto to perform the same set.

Wouldn't it be incredible to then bring the groups together for a yuck fest and then a heartfelt discussion about our assumptions, fascination with violence, fear, hatred and distrust of the "other"?

Richard I know you are watching these shenanigans and

getting a whole lot of great material. Do us all a favor and send us a proxy with your love for humanity and ability to tell the truth.

## A Letter to Mike Brown's Parents

**D**ear Mr. and Mrs. Brown, please forgive us for not standing up for your son. Please forgive us for not adopting him early and often in ways that would have made his death preventable. Forgive me for not understanding and refusing to believe that there are forces out there bent on destroying young, brilliant, beautiful black men.

As a grandfather to a pair of sweet young black boys, I am now aware of the possibility for violence that may be directed at them. What are your suggestions that will allow for communal change and not exploit your child in the process?

It is time we collectively grieved with you and for him. Use this time to care for yourselves and get clear about what it is you will demand from the citizens of your town and the police force. Many people will fear your anger. Great, they should.

Anybody who has ever created anything of value post brutalization was initially motivated by anger. Understand its presence and power while allowing to create change.

Many folks will suggest you live in gratitude. May I suggest you live in and for revolution. May I suggest that you lead us all in a collective movement to understand and annihilate hatred, bigotry and mistreatment of all people.

You and your son are in my thoughts,

Anthony Carter

# Developing a Spiritual Practice as a Way to Change Men and the World

**A**t a recent gathering, I heard a man say the following: “We are concerned with what type of world we are leaving our children; We should also ask what type of children are we leaving for the world”.

As a practising Buddhist for over ten years, my belief system is simple, effective and always provides me with opportunities to grow and evolve. There are not many institutions that allow individuals to constantly strive to better themselves and as a result, the world. Twice a day, I set aside time to face my shit.

Most religions and spiritual practices encourage a great deal of conformity and very little self reflection that can, if we allow it, lead to some serious transformation. I know of no one outside of my practice who is committed to self transformation to the extent that we (practitioners of my particular sect of Buddhism) pride ourselves on being.

It has always struck me as odd when people say they have no spiritual practice and believe in nothing but themselves. One of the greatest aspects of a spiritual practice is that it allows humans to be with other humans.

We learn and grow from human interaction particularly if what we are doing is focusing on personal transformation that engenders global transformation. While openly admitting to having a spiritual practice is often frowned upon, it is imperative that they exist and people look at all the ways they practice spirituality without labelling it as such.

Anybody who fights for human rights, ending violence in all its forms and eliminating domination and unfair treatment of others and oppression is doing spiritual work and has a commitment to a spiritual practice. bell hooks refers to those who do the work of ending domination as doing the work of love.

Men who want to transform themselves would be wise to heed these words. As men, we must not be afraid to humble ourselves to the parts of ourselves that cry out and demand ser-

ious, real connection, change and uplift. The most powerful men I have met have a spiritual core and devotion to spirituality that is awe inspiring. We can let go of domination and “king of the hill” shenanigans that mask fears of the other and an unwillingness to be vulnerable.

With spirituality there is a wonder (a not knowing) that most men are uncomfortable with and yet this is what is needed if men wish to allow the best, most loving and thoughtful part of themselves to prosper.

Men have been taught that to wonder and not know is dumb, weak, unforgivable and can only lead to trouble for all involved. When man can retire the cape, get off the white horse and admit: I don't know; the world and themselves can change and true transformation can occur.

We should allow ourselves permission to “not know”, to dwell in the spiritual. This must be allowed without interference, judgement or punishment. We can not demand that men evolve when the essential component of spirituality is missing.

Men who care for children, support the elderly by driving them to agreed upon destinations and who listen to women and anyone who might know more about a subject than they do are practising a sacred spirituality. Invite the men in your life to a temple, a mosque, Sunday service. Remember no revolution or inner transformation can survive without a devotion to the spirit.

When I pointed out this reality, some folks didn't agree and doubted that the core of any revolution and social change was based in a devotion to spirit. Any time there is a break away from commonly held beliefs regardless of their effectiveness or sincerity, you are asking for and ushering in a revolution.

We are asking men to change and show us their best selves which is revolutionary and can only be carried out when radical spirituality is at the center. Men are smart enough to figure this out and there should still exist space for us all to question, debate and sample all manner of spiritual commitment.

Maybe you were brought up in the Judeo Christian construct( and if you were raised in America, you were) and have a difficult time breaking away from what is familiar and moving

into and towards the unknown. It is important that we open our hearts and minds to what other folks believe and the ways individuals structure their lives according to what they find important.

If any institution, no matter how well meaning, suggests that you be less human or give up big chunks of yourself under the auspice that you will win later, run. Anything that demands more of our humanity and not less is what we should focus on.

# What White Folks Can Do to End Brutality Against Black Men

**G**etting caught up on the week's most important stories left me with much confusion and head scratching. There was no mention of Mike Brown.

Dogs struck by cars and wandering mountain lions were deemed more important. Shocking news is not new and for the liberal and concerned white folks who seek justice and an improved society, I offer three helpful tips.

Tip 1: Stop thinking that animals and their treatment is on par with saving(human) lives and preventing (human) deaths. While there was no coverage of Mike Brown(during this Friday night newscast), I witnessed several minutes devoted to raising funds for a dog struck by a car.

As if this wasn't enough, there was a group of young children and weepy adults moved to demand laws and space be created and designated for mountain lions who've had their natural habitats invaded and their homes disturbed. I am currently waiting for the celebrity weigh in and concern for these "poor" animals.

Nature has its own system of dealing with sickness and death. We should stay out of it. A bigger concern would be how we treat one another and the laws and thinking that govern our behavior.

Tip 2: Stop waiting to speak up and take action. Review the lives and powerful decisions made by the bold and brave whites who risked their lives during the Civil Rights Movement to bring about a change in all our lives.

Mistakes will get made. So what? If I have to choose between a mistake and the death of a young person, I say bring on the errors.

Tip 3: Challenge the behavior of your friends who have meaningless lives to look beyond the obvious. When a group is gathered and the discussion leads to the new iPhone, which highway has the least amount of traffic or the market that has the best selection and pricing of produce interrupt that bullshit

with some real talk about elected officials, where your tax dollars are being spent and the privileges you indulge daily that are part of the problem in our communities.

# Why Visionaries and Truth-tellers Will Provide Tools For Changes in Our Community

I have personally witnessed changes (the election of a black President) that I thought would never happen in my lifetime. While I often envision a different planet and ways that humans can interact, I am blown away when we make large and unprecedented leaps in our development as humans.

What this culture needs is Visionaries who can articulate where we can go and our endless possibilities. We need visionaries who are willing to tell the truth. As a culture, we often dislike and attempt to silence visionaries and those of us who are committed to telling the truth.

I recently read a great article about a group of individuals who are determined to turn around my hometown of Detroit. This progressive group has designed a project that will move the culture forward: a steady diet of artistic creation, affordable housing, and time to think/plan and dream.

While this is a great example of what can be done, will this be enough? It can be enough if we designate “changed thinking” as part of the new world order. Artists, creatives and anyone who has made mental health a priority need time to not only create product for consumption, we also need to incorporate new thinking and challenge ourselves to fearlessly and deliberately let go of limited thinking.

Focusing on new changes must also include vigilance in not just allowing those “in charge” to make all of the changes. Decisions can be forced on us that can have major effects good and bad on the community as well as in our personal lives. We all need and should welcome change.

My devotion is to the power that comes from visionary thinking and truth telling. We need both of these concepts and must be clear about the ways they confuse or liberate even those with the best of intentions.

I am never without visions /dreams/possibilities. When you

are full of dreams and a ton of possibilities, it is very easy to become overwhelmed and make the grand decision to do nothing. To refuse to act.

Truth telling keeps our desires within reach by pointing out when we have allowed ourselves to be seductively distracted. Truth telling reminds us that while we can accomplish many things, we don't have unlimited amounts of time to get things done. Truth telling points out in rather crass terms: you will die at some point. Truth telling is also a major component of building and maintaining high levels of self esteem.

We are told that we are too young for certain things and too old for other things. When we dare to move beyond the cliché of speaking our truth to actually living it, we are often deemed crazy, selfish or my personal favorite: “all over the place”.

Our cultural fascination with lies and limits is something we can all fight against by fighting “for” the possibilities generated by our brilliant minds and gigantic hearts. We could start small and pointedly with our children by encouraging them to be honest with what they feel is possible and assisting them with going after it (whatever it is they want).

We could also assist our young ones by giving them honest assessments regarding what accomplishing certain dreams will require of them. One of the greatest gifts we can give to young people and anyone in particular is the understanding that things can be accomplished when self assessment is exercised.

I am sure that this is the point of entry that I use in my relationships and when I have been granted the honor of teaching. I always begin a new class with a focus on what we've created in our lives. I allow people to speak their improved lives into existence and lovingly guide them into telling the truth about what they've done to prevent or deny themselves their self created visions.

The 21st century and beyond is the universe of creativity. This movement is all about combining what we “see” with what we “know”. It is the experience that also requires that we consistently move into greater spheres of truth and knowledge.

# The Ultimate Guide to Saving Black Men Using the Ways of the Amish

**M**ichael Jordan, Jay Z, Beyonce and a host of other black celebrities have blood on their hands. Black multimillionaires have used the black community to make piles of money and yet when one of our young people is murdered they remain silent.

It is great to make money. It is greater to speak up about something other than the latest product you want our youthful community members to consume. Why are we not demanding that the attention these folks generate be used for something other than getting more attention?

Ghettos are full of young people and their parents lusting for items they can't afford created by people that don't care about them. We can adopt an Amish way of handling our finances and boycott things that don't support us or uplift our young people.

In the great book, *Money Secrets of the Amish*, there are several strategies that this debt free and self governing community uses to maintain its power and commitment to clear thinking and communal growth. What this group has mastered is the power to say no to things that don't matter and yes to things that do.

Why spend \$300 on sneakers when my child does not have a safe place to play or the books he needs in his classrooms? Amish persons would save this small fortune and invest in something that would pay off in the future. By delaying gratification, they are able to wield an incredible amount of power speaking the language that all Americans understand: money.

We can adopt the same belief system, change our thinking about money and design a system that demands the end to black men as targets. Where is our collective refusal to be pimped?

Where can we say no to bullshit that doesn't matter? Start with this quote from *Money Secrets of the Amish*:

*The Amish say no to themselves on a regular basis. If they wore T-shirts with words no them, they could proudly wear "Don't Eat the Marshmallow" emblazoned over their thrifty hearts. They focus instead on the big picture, and the result is loads of unfrittered money in the bank. (p.45)*

Once we understood the real influence we wield financially, we could direct it towards progressive thinkers and media outlets. We could demand that the folks who get rich of us either turn the spotlight on issues that concern us or we will no longer support them by buying their records and clothing.

What could millions of dollars do to eliminate Black Male assassinations?

# The Ultimate Guide to Saving Black Men Using the Ways of the Amish

## Part 2

**I**n the previous post, I pointed out that racism has invented itself as police brutality. A radical redistribution of wealth would force a new way of thinking and behavior modification.

A movement needs all types of people doing all types of things. Revolutionaries who need time to think, organize and upset the masses need funding for housing, food and life's basic necessities. All leaders need financial support to ensure that day jobs don't derail their first and most pressing commitment (fighting for change).

Reading about the earnings of Jay Z for the first six months of the year (\$60 million dollars) has given me many ideas for social movements that could occur if a small portion of his fortune were redirected "Amish" style.

Here is my personal plan (Amish influenced) for a Spending Plan that would yield impressive results. Using five percent of Jay Z's six month gross (three million dollars) would look like this:

Three lawyers earning \$50,000 each for two years. This group would focus on ways to legislate change. Total = \$300,000.

Purchasing buildings to provide free housing and critical thinking space for a group of 100 individuals who are already working for change. Twenty groups of five living communally and being able to create solutions without worrying about a job or paying rent along with free utilities and food. Detroit and cities struggling to attract residents could be examples of purchasing homes and using them for social change. Twenty homes at \$30,000 each plus food and utilities (\$5,000 a year for two years). Total = \$610,000.

Coding, Spanish and Everyday Math courses and materials for our young people in an effort to understand and link our struggles with those who have fought and won similar battles.

Teachers, materials and computer supplies including: six teachers being paid Fifty grand each, free housing and medical benefits with an option to renew their contracts every two years. Total = \$400,000.

Round the Clock Mental Health Resources: I have no idea how this would work and believe that \$400,000 would cover the costs. Total = \$400,000.

Opening a small bank that would provide interest free loans for any person involved in changing the community. Total = \$1.3 million dollars.

# Why Radical Feminism Will Save Black Men and Those Who Brutalize Them

**M**any smart, well meaning people are terribly confused about feminism and its power. Many folks assign those committed to feminist based struggle and societal reordering as: banner wavers, complainers, angry dykes (men in drag upset because certain resources are unavailable).

My understanding of Radical Feminism's power is based on how my life has been affected and continues to evolve as a result of living a feminist based life. As a young black male and now middle aged black gay male, my feminist leanings have allowed me an incredibly inquisitive mind and stellar critical thinking and problem solving abilities.

Whether creating innovative ways to live with family and friends or taking on the forces of psychosis (sexual and drug addiction) that sought to dictate the world I could design, radical feminism taught me to love and live well. It has taught me to deeply love and challenge (the racism of) white friends and lovers. It has taught me to deeply love and challenge (the machismo and classism) of black friends and lovers.

True radical, well thought out and constantly changing feminist principles allow everyone to create lives of their own without the constant checking in that oppression and domination require. Radical Feminism insists on access to resources, thinking and ways of being that allow everyone opportunities that encourage compassion, concern for self and others and most importantly a redistribution of wealth and access.

Media has created a focus on what feminism means to a few select members of society while ignoring the overall affects it can and does have for the masses. When properly applied, it forces us all to take very disturbing looks at what we do daily and the many ways that a less than full commitment to society's emancipation becomes commonplace and acceptable to so many of us.

While many of us unwittingly partake of dominator ways of interacting, it is not the nature of humans to want other humans to hurt and suffer. Watching young children grow and mature has taught me that all types of manipulation, hurt, domination are not natural and in fact are taught. Our systems that allow goodies for a select few (Radical Feminism's opposite), rely on not only a scarcity model but that we will also teach this way of existing to our young.

My youngest sister and my very young granddaughters ingest what is permissible for young women and either alter or disrupt the dreams they have for their lives. By introducing them all along with the young boys in my tutelage to the work of bell hooks, Essex Hemphill and Tim Wise, I offer them glorious chances to dig deeper and challenge a society that believes it has no interest or use for any brilliance that comes wrapped in a darker package.

Using feminism as our beginning point, I often stress that our job is to restructure our society by becoming powerful, thoughtful, creative citizens whose behavior is not rooted in domination, belittling others or selfishly hoarding goods from those that could most use them. While the conversations are often awkward and in pieces, they are necessary and can be seen when my young folks incorporate this thinking and learn to practice patience, understanding and respect for themselves and others.

# How We All Benefit From Privilege

**W**hite male privilege is a term that gets thrown around a lot these days. Whenever any bit of injustice show up, we get the opportunity to trot out the tried and true WMP. While it is fun and convenient to push every slight into this category, we all choose to overlook ways that people who are not white or male benefit from all sorts of opportunities.

White Male Privilege is very real. What no one will willingly take a look at is all of the other privileges that get created and are intertwined with WMP. The machine that is patriarchy and white supremacy offer us opportunities to control and lord power over others.

Whatever group you belong to and the fact that you are human provides the impetus for dominating. While I don't believe that is natural for folks to dominate one another, there is a tendency to lean in this direction as a result of all the gifts that are offered. The machine must be fed and we are all invited to partake of the system that offers fake promises and severely limiting rewards.

I am a black gay man and am afforded privilege in each identity depending on who I'm with and the context of all of my relationships. Regardless of what any one will say there are certain privileges that are assigned to me simply because of the darkness of my skin.

Music, culture, fashion sense and the ability to thrive on scraps and look good while doing it all part of gay, black male privilege. Gay privilege affords me the luxury of not having to consider reproducing.

Gay privilege affords me the option of not having to think long term about much of anything. It also allows me to indulge in a certain type of social isolation and a big "fuck you" to society if that is what I desire.

There are many gays and lesbians I know who have no interest in mainstream anything and yet are looked to when it is time to shake things up and make things interesting or cutting edge. While these are exaggerations the point is that no one is

exempt from gaining certain rewards when and if they suit them.

Much like the privileges that get bestowed upon blacks and gays, being male is another opportunity to examine what goodies get offered to us and when. People grow to know and accept you as gay.

Nobody needs adjusting and reschooling in terms of what being male means. Upon the birth of a male child, everyone immediately begins to decide that all of the world's resources and treasures are his to indulge and command. No one ever thinks: I hope my son is kind, gentle and compassionate towards others. Instead, we immediately begin contemplating and thinking of all the ways he will "rule" the world.

There is no thought given to the problematic stance that because of this person's gender there might be wishes offered and granted simply because of his maleness. When we examine all the ways that people have access to resources, it is clear that we are all very unclear as to how privilege works, how it gets assigned and what it does to all of us on a cellular and spiritually stunted level.

I like to take the definition of Tim Wise when examining the seductive and radical thinking reduction that this most dangerous process continues to engender. According to Tim Wise, Privilege in its most basic form allows us the luxury of not having to think about certain things.

When we are allowed the freedom (or so we think) of not having to think about certain things we are then allowed the freedom(or so we think) to not have to change our behavior or invest in any real hard core action. We can allow things to happen to "those people". We can allow brutalization to occur because folks don't look like or think like or act like us. It is very easy to dismiss a group if including them would require a clear and radical self analysis.

When 911 occurred, we as a country were provided a clear picture of what the world thought of us and our relentless commitment to staying asleep and pursuing our interests no matter the consequences. Being able to selfishly pursue everything we desire without any thought to whether others are safe, nur-

tured and have access to resources make us vile and clueless in ways that have devastating effects on the planet and our communities.

We can turn this around by questioning why certain individuals are granted certain access and demand that those in power cast a wider net when the focus is on who gets what and why.

# Three Things Black Folks Can Do to Improve Our Lives

So many young people and those who did not witness black folks being water hosed and attacked by bigots and their dogs, mistakenly assume that racism and its many incarnations and offshoots are a thing of the past. I often fantasize that King, Malcolm, Hamer, Rustin and the like are looking at all of the shenanigans that pass for entertainment and daily life and feel yes: my life was worth this.

I firmly believe that the aforementioned cultural and political icons would be pleased with the political progress we've made (President Barack Obama) and marvel at the strides in social change and entertainment masquerading as such (Oprah Winfrey and her empire). I also believe they would be sickened and visibly upset when viewing the things that we've allowed to continue and encourage our young people to engage in by either silent resignation or outright aping the mores and social standings that go unquestioned and unchallenged.

With a clear cut objective that involves becoming and staying emotionally healthy and making sure everyone in our community has the same goal despite limited and or outdated resources, we can collectively move forward while simultaneously demanding that those with power share it. In order to take on this daunting and most worthwhile task, I suggest we look at three things that hold us back and keep us mired in pathologies, blaming and shaming and prayer as our only strategy for change.

Stop worrying about what white folks think or feel about you. So much of our collective suffering and inability to re-think solutions and possible outcomes have their root in the seduction and performance that is whiteness. Far too many of us believe that we can appease the "theys" in our worlds if we constantly and stupidly concern ourselves with what is thought or said about us by people that in many instances don't like us very much.

With the advent of White Supremacy and the unrelenting

innovation of seduction that targets our self esteem and body images, our behavior is pretty predictable. Whites have their own pain and discomfort as a direct result of White Supremacy.

## Three Things Black Folks Can Do to Improve Our Lives Part 2

While I am thrilled with all of the technological advances we've made in the last twenty years, we must consider what has happened to our young people. Part 2 in this series is all about young people and the media.

Black folks please stop allowing the media and pop culture to raise our children and teach them anything other than how to entertain. Everyday, I am bombarded with images and lingo that teach our children nothing.

While it is not the responsibility of creatives and artists to censor and limit their work and vision, it is our responsibility to teach critical thought and action. By teaching critical thought we do not limit nor eliminate certain types of artistry, we expand thinking and usher in greater creativity.

Pink, in her great song, *Stupid Girls* asks what happened to the dream of a girl president. She's dancing in a video next to 50 Cent. When young girls only see women as props, shaking their money makers and concerned with getting and keeping male attention, we invite an entire generation to focus on the physical aesthetic and ignore the struggle and joy that occurs when inner resources are discovered and used to incite victorious lives.

Young males do not escape the cultural brainwashing that says young males are aggressive, not to be trusted and only take up space when they are thugs. When young boys are provided with physical touch that is not sexual or aggressive they learn to navigate their bodies in ways that have nothing to do with domination as the only representation of maleness.

Turn off the television and pick up a book. Have a discussion. Attend a community meeting where differences of opinion are loud, passionate and divergent. Allow young people to see discord and confusion that gets settled without physicality, shaming or belittling.

## Three Things Black Folks Can Do to Improve Our Lives Part 3

**A**long with the commitment to mental health, we must also take charge of our physical well being. Diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, stress (the body's reaction to carrying more than it should, thanks bell hooks) and cancer are just a few of the things that seem to attack us and take us out in grave numbers.

Black and male does not have to equal unhealthy and walking health risk. Making our health a priority will be against much of what society says we ought to be doing. I wrote about my hatred of and being terrorized by a doctor in my post *Why HIV Infection Rates are Up for Young Black Men*.

We allow ourselves to be bullied and silenced by things that matter. Like a whole lot of black folks I know, I only make trips to the doctor when I'm in pain or something bothers me. As a race, we have been socialized into believing that health concerns and any sign of physical need is sign of weakness.

Coupled with the racism that many doctors have not unlearned and you have a context in which care is unimportant and to request it makes you less than. We must realize that it is our right to live and feel well.

At 45, I know many people ten years by junior and ten years my senior who are on a host of meds. My mother was recently diagnosed with high blood pressure by a doctor who wanted to put her on meds. My mother refused and instead countered with a response about whether or not there was an alternative.

She and the doctor designed a program that included exercise and slight dietary modifications (my mother is a strict vegan and only eats what she grows or trades with others). Weeks later, the tests proved that the new program worked and there was no need for medication.

We are not obliged to a life of labored living and struggle simply because of our skin color. Whenever I meet or talk to someone about health issues, there is always a correlation between either something they're doing or something they should

stop doing.

I learned a great deal about diabetes from my cousin and very close family friends. I was unaware that this disease can be managed by eating healthier (processed foods being the biggest issue here) and consistent exercise. I thought it meant a life with no desserts.

High Blood Pressure? I didn't know that laying off the junk food and salt along with moderate exercise once again would do the trick.

We also underestimate the stress brought on by our jobs, day to day life and of course our families. Preparing for my recent wedding brought this little gem front and center. Speaking with various family members (who all had opinions of what I should be doing or should have done) taught me some serious lessons in how to remove stress from my life, be clear about my expectations and not take care of grown ass people's feelings and thoughts.

I took care of myself in familiar ways that I know work. I did more walking during this time. I talked with supportive friends. I took more baths and prayed more. To combat the inevitable weight gain (my response to stress), I stopped going on about not getting to hot yoga and instead starting walking on the track at my new job.

Based on American standards of what healthy looks like, few of us fit the bill. As we make our physical and mental health a priority, there is nothing that can't be accomplished. More than unemployment, lack of education, racism and housing issues, being physically healthy with strong adept minds will allow us all to take on forces that threaten our well being and support others in doing the same.

# Warning! The Boogey Man Is Real and Dangerous

**W**hen you have invested your heart into something working out a certain way, there is always the possibility that things will not work out or worse yet they will change without your knowledge or consent. This type of fear is rational and should not cause us to behave in ways that are less than sparkling.

People get very confused when it comes to fear and what needs to be done when we are blindsided by it. Most of us stop thinking and revert to reptilian responses that include but are not limited to : running away, avoiding the thing that has scared us, making another person wrong (assigning blame), bulldozing over people or in the most extreme cases, immobilizing ourselves (hoping that in freeze mode know one will see us or expect any action).

There are as many ways to deal with fear as there are people in the world. What if we encouraged people to be afraid and plow into what scares them the most? What if we raised our children with this balls-out approach to dealing with what they feel menaces them the most? We could have a very different world.

Persons who move from this way of being live very full lives. I am striving to be one of those people. It is my goal to find what scares me and take it to the mat. Fear is an indicator that change is inevitable and typically forthcoming.

Sometimes when I am feeling bored (which is rare), I know instinctively that I am not challenging myself. When I am in resistance to taking action, it is usually regarding the fear that I could fail, screw some shit up.

Once I determine the fear is that a) I don't know what I'm doing and b) I might fail, my next step is usually to metaphorically leap into the pool with arms a flailing. Most of us do the opposite. Our stomachs turn so we stop.

We opt for a brownie, a nap, anything at all to prevent moving forward and taking on the beast that stands before us

mockingly beckoning us to our undiscovered genius and greatness via the uncomfortability that fear creates. When I'm comfortable, I'm not moving or growing. We either progress or regress.

It has taken me several years to figure out which type of fear is begging for attention and just as many years to decide how I would offer attention. As I whip through my 40s and barrel towards my 50s, I fight daily to make sure that I do not back down and figure out ways to answer my own call to greatness.

I often write about death from the perspective that people aren't afraid of death (it's inevitable so why worry) that folks are really afraid to live. If you had six months to live would you waste time being afraid?

# 10 Warriors Who Gave Their Lives For Justice

**I** probably shouldn't tell you this... Today is the 30th post and the end of my focus for now on black men, police brutality and the fight for justice that will continue albeit in another form. For now, I want to leave you with a list of ten brave soldiers who lost their lives in the battle to create change:

Jimmie Lee Jackson  
Clyde Kennard  
Juliette Hampton Morgan  
Reverend James Reeb  
Jonathan Myrick Daniels  
Viola Gregg Liuzzo  
Vernon Dahmer  
Oneal Moore  
Reverend George Lee  
Harry and Harriett Moore

Keep fighting injustice and demand change.





## Anthony Carter

**I**n 2010, I entered the world of blogging. What began as an opportunity to share my thoughts on our fascinating and disturbing world quickly became an obsession and full time gig.

This collection represents essays that resonated with more than 10,000 people. Hopefully, you find as much joy and challenge in reading them as I did in creating, editing and sharing them.

