

TEN

Anthony Carter

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Anthony Carter combines his love of theatre, writing, storytelling, and black queer feminist theory to create projects that inspire all to greatness. He was a semifinalist in New York City's Strawberry One Act Festival 2007 with his play *Breakfast for Dinner*. His book *Unfettered Mind: The Importance of Black Male Mental Health*, released in 2012, offers several winning strategies for remaining mentally healthy and emotionally resilient in a rapidly changing world. Mr. Carter's second book, *Strong Stuff: Tips on Surviving and Thriving Despite Unemployment*, offers insight on maintaining self-esteem and personal friendships while one searches for work. In 2016, he is publishing his first collection of Sci-Fi short stories entitled *Rules of Reality*. Visit him online at Anthony-Carter.com.

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Readers' Favorite Posts

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Section one

Justice

Trayvon Martin Should Still Be Alive

When I heard the news that another young black male had been gunned down, I was floored. When it was reported that there was some lag time to discuss what should be done, I became physically ill.

As an uncle, grandparent and teacher of young black males, I always pray that they (young black males) will make it to adulthood without being taken down by the myriad of landmines that one has to navigate in an effort to enter adulthood with somewhat of an intact mind.

Apparently, the white thug vigilante was beyond disturbed. Seeing a young black male set off all types of adrenaline-fueled fear and that immediately led to stupidity that is downright murder and pillage. At some point as a culture, we have to decide that not only is this unacceptable but anybody who dares to think and act otherwise will be dealt with swiftly and accordingly.

While the media does a great job of letting us know the dangers that lurk behind dark male skin, there is little attention paid to the individuals determined to not be a statistic. George Zimmerman made sure Trayvon Martin became a statistic. Neighbors complained about Zimmerman's violence

and odd behavior and yet nothing was done.

How do we protect young black men and keep them from being objects of suspicion and targets of racially oppressive thinking and in the case of Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman deadly assault? Should we lock them away before they are locked away via some other force?

Should we cling to the belief that people are good at heart and mistakes get made? Do we assume that if folks were gunning down young white males or females that this would be ended without so much as a discussion? Are we to assume that racism is here to stay and that no matter what we do or how high we rise it will never be enough to counter systematic and racist assaults?

None of these questions are sufficient and not one of them will bring back this young man or ease the pain I am certain his family and those that loved him are currently feeling.

My dream is that this will set off such an outrage that racism/classism/ageism and all of their disgusting effects will finally be addressed and handled in ways that are radical, revolutionary and usher in new and consistent change.

While advertisers and those that support Rush Limbaugh are now limping away from a very nasty, ridiculous and vile association, we have yet to see a national outcry leading to financial devastation to anyone remotely tied to this debacle. Worrying about our young people and praying that if they do the right thing (stay in the house/stay out of certain neighborhoods/stay with their own kind) that they will remain safe is stupid and highly myopic.

This is an opportunity to mobilize our collective pain and guilt and create some serious change.

By demanding and getting justice, we, as a culture, will be forced to enact new laws that hopefully will lead to some serious, much overdue behavioral changes. Behavioral changes and some changes in what is sanctioned, legally or not, will and must be changed as a part of this new regime.

On Facebook, I read a friend's suggestion that if you have children you should be outraged. I want to offer an addendum. We should all be outraged. Period.

What to Do When Black Leaders Won't Lead

When our leaders are slain or not given the spotlight or have it taken away, the black community is plunged into chaos and confusion. Because we have not been reared in the art of power sharing and have been taught to mistrust one another, we are often one charismatic leader away from being forced to restart any and all social progress should leadership change.

The AIDS crisis (which continues to rip through the black community at a startling rate), unemployment and mental health are just a few things that continue to menace us individually and thwart continuous movement for us collectively.

When Dr. King was assassinated, there was no one willing or able to continue with his dream. When Malcolm X was assassinated, there was no backup plan that included a polished and able young person to ensure that all the momentum gained was not immediately and irreparably lost. Once the death threats began early and often, there should have been an intense search and prompt training should the threats become reality.

As a culture, we are always hoping and praying as a strategy. While I believe in prayer's power, I am also a fervent believer in recognizing when change and catastrophe are circling above.

What is needed is a group of diverse black leaders who love blackness and are committed to the possibilities that lie undiscovered and getting our minds right (mental health). I did not say black folks (leaders) who sentimentalize the "black experience" and prattle on incessantly about yesteryear and the need for two parent heterosexual households.

There are three things that those of us who crave freedom and self actualization can do to ensure that our leadership is

accountable, powerful and vigilant in their own and black humanity's evolution. As a group, we have to do the work that is inclusive of all types of leaders no matter where they come from (socioeconomic backgrounds, different sexual and spiritual practices) or what they perceive to be leadership.

Often times, we police our own in ways that are downright pitiful. We assume that only the poor of us know suffering and the educated should speak once the media appears. When young people can only hear "hood speak" and become deaf to anything but this vernacular this is a problem. When the privileged among us decide that we can speak for the masses despite our limited and sheltered backgrounds, this is equally disturbing.

Can we not all speak? Should we all not be heard? Why is it that we refuse to combine insight gained from differences in an effort to progress?

Anybody who has grown up without (money, education, access to basic necessities) has learned a thing or two about surviving on meager resources. Those of us who have grown up without financial worries can also share our knowledge on how to save, manipulate finances and plan for the future.

Combining knowledge only works when individuals have not been completely terrorized by their circumstances and still have access to some clear thinking and have held on to their minds.

Sentimentalists marvel at poor people and want to hear of their struggles. They won't question why the struggle exists. Those who have been raised with much needn't feel guilty (another sentimentality trick). Instead, a concerted effort could be made to combine extremes and create a third approach to community and personal victory.

Part of accepting and fully integrating difference among all those who could most benefit it involves also looking at our LGBTQ comrades. As a community that is still discriminated by those that look like us, we have much to share re-

garding strategies for resisting domination.

We have some stellar leaders who are deftly schooled in the art of leadership. Does a differing sexuality only provoke fear and dismissal or should insight be welcomed regardless? We need to demand more of our leaders by demanding more of ourselves and those we know and love.

When a leader's vision is faulty or not well thought out, we need to challenge and question. We require people and leaders who are not afraid to speak truth, think and be unpopular. If our leadership(whether it is granted or seized) refuses to lead in ways that are inclusive, it should be tossed out.

Debate and dissent in the black community is not encouraged. Many times I have been in a discussion with an elder and have fought the impulse to be silent as a way of showing respect. This thinking helped no one and in some instances hurt an important relationship.

We prevent confusion and impediments to our collective growth when we determine that changes be made, power be shared and leadership skills be taught to all. This may not solve all problems but it will definitely invite change and offer fresh solutions.

Leaders exist in all arenas. We have been taught to look for certain ones in certain arenas and ignore those that do not fit our predetermined criterion. We must stop this short-sighted and discriminatory practice thereby inviting all of those who think and love well to a place at the table.

Section two

Self Esteem Challenges and Solutions

What One Year of Celibacy Taught Me

Celibacy forced me to look at why I had sex and with whom. Having survived the HIV infection dance via dating an individual who lied about his status for a year solid which immediately followed the most abusive and torturous three and a half years of my life, my decision to practice celibacy for one year to get my mind back and my head out of my ass was an intelligent choice.

Sex can be fun, exiting, pleasurable and just plain awe-inspiring. It can also be used to manipulate, coerce, dominate and confuse. When you have low or no self esteem, it is very easy to allow any and all type of treatment sexually and otherwise.

A sex free year takes care of that foolishness. A sex free year should be on everyone's "must do" lists. My year of being celibate taught me a whole lot about me and how I handle my business.

Sex affects the brain and not always in the most positive ways. If every interaction is filtered through whether or not we are going to do the deed, I am not really seeing the person in front of me. If every interaction is instead not clouded with indecision, disguised feeble attempts to nail me or I you, we now have the opportunity for some real clear interaction.

The year I chose celibacy was one of the most productive time periods in my life. My year of celibacy brought me to Iowa and a wonderful writer's workshop. I spent the entire week looking for Flannery O'Connor's chair (she had attended the same workshop several years later). With no sexual conquest or obsession on my mind, I was able to write and think unencumbered.

A year without arguments, miscommunications and hurt feelings allowed me to really have a serious look at my life and all of my relationship and sexual choices. More than once, I found myself wincing at not only my choices but my justifications of these fucked up decisions.

Without sexual distraction, I could legitimately understand why I had agreed to certain things. I began to forgive myself for being so desperate and pathetic.

It was clear that men and sex were welcome and convenient distractions that kept me in a constant state of denial and low grade relentless depression. This constant emotional angst was fed by sex which came about because of bone crushing loneliness.

Celibacy forced me to examine my behavior and what I really wanted to do with my life.

Why Barebacking Sex Will Never Go Away

When we are seeking love, most of us will risk becoming infected with HIV. While some will think this is a gross exaggeration, I can speak from personal experience.

Many times during my younger days, I traded safety and accountability for delusions and unearned trust. More than once, I opted to have unprotected sex because it would keep some dope happy and would not force me to deal with standing my ground and risk losing someone who I thought loved me or at the very least cared deeply.

In my late teens and early 20's, I was not running around having unprotected sex all day everyday with strangers. I only make this point because lately I have been hearing some very gruesome assumptions and flat out stupidity from folks who ought to know better.

December 1st, World AIDS Day, provided me with some interesting insights into the types of thinking that are being bandied about and the blatant unmitigated ignorance and stupidity regarding something that should have been eliminated at least twenty years ago. A physician and an intelligent friend implied that one becomes infected because they are dirty, common and will sleep with anything. It was shocking to hear these individuals speak with the same punishing, venomous tone that people spewed thirty years ago.

As an avid facebooker, I am amazed at the things that people highlight and find interesting. A fellow college classmate posted a very touching and poignant statement regarding her late brother. She reminded us that her brother succumbed to AIDS in 1996. According to her, he contracted it by doing something that every sexually active person has done at one time or another. Her brother and anyone who has ever been infected has had unprotected sex.

During the course of one of my initial gay male relationships, I spent absolutely no time discussing or negotiating sexual practices. I was told by my first long term partner that he was negative and being isolated and stupid, I didn't dare challenge him. To be 20 and so trusting. What we now refer to as barebacking had no name then. It was called blind trust, delusion and isolation.

My concern about this new phenomenon, "barebacking", which is anything but new, is that nobody is talking about the fact that it is still going on. Just because you or your friends are not admitting to it doesn't mean it isn't happening. I discussed the inordinately high infection rates among young black men in earlier posts but neglected to really dig in and tell personal experiences and the reasons that people will agree to this most deadly and life altering experience.

When I was very young and closeted, I was willing to do anything to be accepted, to not feel alone and most importantly to be loved. In my opinion, not much has changed within the gay community. So many of us not finding acceptance or support or dare I say love in our families of origin, enter adulthood without a clear definition of what love is and is not.

We, myself included, blame ourselves for our lack of love via our families and seek to replace and compensate for this deficiency by allowing sexual interaction to simply occur. There is not room or the right to demand and have honest conversations if it appears realistically or not that a conversation and honest communication might cause an argument, a debate regarding trust or the unthinkable, abandonment.

So much of our lives from the time we notice that we are different is steeped in isolation. We learn to isolate because of difference. When difference appears (in the form of a remotely attractive guy) we can falsely assume that we are no longer alone and should do absolutely anything to make sure that isolation never returns. My initial full fledged relationship oc-

curred when I was living six hundred miles away from everyone and everything that I had ever known.

It is difficult to take a stand for your life when you have spent damn near twenty years hiding, not wanting to be found out and knowing that if you are found out it would be better if you were dead. Somehow with this as your option, having unprotected sex with someone who says they care and whom you care for doesn't have the death knoll it might otherwise have.

In M.Scott Peck's *The Road Less Traveled*, he points out both our ways of establishing our value and the many ways that the disturbing but well meaning trolls that raise us manipulate us into certain behaviors that have nothing to do with being loving.

*"If you don't do exactly what I want
you to do I won't love you anymore
and you can figure out for yourself
what that may mean."* Peck p.28

As a result of this psychological abandonment and manipulation, we enter adulthood believing that being loved is a negotiable and earnable privilege.

Like myself at twenty, we delude ourselves with the welcoming distraction that is people pleasing at its best and deadly and stupid at its worse. For the sake of love, we offer ourselves on the sacrificial altar hoping that this person who says that they love me/us will not disappoint.

In my troubling case, it was keep my mouth closed and hope for the best or speak up and be ostracized and lose what little position I had in my family i.e., the world. This was not an acceptable risk to me. Having unprotected sex with someone who was psychologically disturbed seemed like a better use of my time. I never wanted to have unprotected sex. I never wanted to have bareback sex.

The message was clear and unrelenting: "If I speak up, I might be alone." Although I'd like to say that I was wiser then, I wasn't. Like so many people who place their trust in others because it seems like the right thing to do or it is just easier, I was love hungry and willing to do anything to feed that beast. If it meant death then so be it.

My actions screamed: Love me! If you love me all of these years of isolation will disappear.

Why Gay Men Don't Know How to Date

My first male to male relationship began at seventeen with a queen as confused as myself. My second and full on living together, constantly drama-filled torturous relationship began at 20 and ended at 23. Because I had no self esteem and had spent time being brutalized, my third shot at glory lasted a year.

Reviewing all of these abysmal interactions and the subsequent fall out (which generally meant me crying, not eating and wailing “why don't you love me?”) forces the realization that none of us knew how to date. We all knew how to create grief and enough drama to ensure a butt load of Emmys. What we didn't know was how to offer kindness, how to get to know each other outside of the bedroom and how to build a non-exploitative relationship.

Even when pop culture attempts to create gay male relationships there is rarely love-based discussions and grappling with choices that determine the fate of all involved parties. There is plenty of sex and upset but the complexity of what men being with men looks like often goes unseen and unexamined.

The one glimpse of men attempting to date (this occurred after having sex I believe) was the wonderful scene in *Six Feet Under* wherein the discussion (post breakup) reveals that although sex was frequent psychological visibility was not. David nor Keith had the tools to be “out” with one another and reveal what they loved and admired about one another.

This one scene sums up the reality of most gay male coupling: we understand the mechanics of sex and yet are all thumbs when it comes to psychological and emotional commitment and understanding.

As a group who still remains largely defined by what we

engage in sexually, it is difficult to resist the siren call of the mainstream and our subculture that says we don't require tools for building and maintaining relationships and our relationships lack complexity and therefore should not be taken seriously. In our community, we lack certain dating and relationship understanding because we have never seen it.

Growing up, I never saw two men date, be in love, build a relationship or a life. The relationships that most of us saw were heterosexual and severely lacking in complexity. If our role models and what is presented as possible is limited and tainted how can we expect to build anything of lasting value and worth?

My mother told me in a conversation once what she dreamed and or thought about when the subject of marriage came up: Nothing. She told me that she put no thought into what type of marriage she could have or the purpose of being in a relationship. My grandmother believed and still practices the time honored tradition of unrelenting self sacrifice and over concern for people far too old to need it.

This was my view of things growing up. Love meant constant and unquestioned sacrifice. One person constantly took while another (usually the female) constantly gave. I took this attitude into my adult life and allowed it to determine my dating patterns.

Like many gay men, I decided if the person was relationship material based on sexual chemistry or whether he was "good" and I was satisfied. Having a great roll in the hay tells you very little about the person. Ask anyone who has done the deed with any sociopath.

There have been sexual experiences I regretted not because of the mechanics but because the individual was unpar-donably stupid, racist, or just plain not very nice. These were not people I would befriend in any other circumstances nor would want friends and anybody that cared anything about me to ever meet.

There is nothing wrong with an occasional romp. But using sex or the promise of it to determine a date's "success" or whether this is someone that would make a great partner or friend isn't the best use of anyone's time.

When I challenged myself at 31 to get to know someone without a clue as to what he looked like and did not allow or encourage sexual nonsense to cloud my judgement, I produced some very different life altering results. While we did not remain a couple for life, the opportunity to build something of substance that lasted damn near a decade is still a proud memory for me.

So have you had any great dates lately?

Why I No Longer Need to Prove My “Worth”

Many of my artistic friends are brilliant, creative, hungry and driven. They are also broke as hell.

While I absolutely adore all my friends, I sometimes wonder what the hell they're thinking when they make certain decisions. All of my thirties and a great big chunk of my twenties was spent pursuing my “dream”. All in an effort to be discovered. To have someone bestow on me the gift that is the lust and hunger of every artist: fame and fortune and of course notoriety.

My dream at one time was that someone would pluck me from obscurity, notice my witty asides and infectious laughter from the other side of a semi-crowded coffee shop and demand that I do his play or movie and then everything would fall into place.

All of this fantasy living would be great if things were like they are in the movies. But they are not. I had to master a concept that Jeff Goins refers to as “picking myself”.

So many of us, artistically inclined or not, are doing a couple of interesting and pointlessly annoying things: Waiting for permission from someone to say it's ok to accomplish our dreams and relentlessly hopelessly trying to prove our worth. Instead of trying to prove my worth, my time is better spent living my possibilities.

My commitment to struggle and artistic development often left me physically hungry, resentful and somewhat unproductive. I somehow became very confused as to what the life of an artist required. I thought artistic development and output demanded scarcity, sacrifice, heartache and drama. The only thing this got me was more of the same.

In an effort to prove my worth and that I was worthy of the title “artist”, I bought into the beliefs that said years of

struggle and almost hitting the mark was my entry fee. I had yet to choose me.

While this is not new to me or unique to my situation, it is prevalent across many disciplines and most people in their respective careers and lives. Many of us waste an inordinate amount of time attempting to prove our worth to parents, friends, ourselves and a host of other people who couldn't care less and in some extreme cases are dead.

An interesting observation that I've made over the years is that anything that we dream up/create that comes from the needy-please-love-me standpoint always results in a colossal flop. Anything developed and dreamed up from the perspective of: I will live from my possibilities and my belief in my own resources and the ability to create additional resources always gets the utmost respect and proper attention.

When I began writing about the rash of gay youth teen suicide and offered insight and suggestions as to what could be done this strictly was coming from a place of possibilities. When I began creating from the standpoint of look at how clever and witty I am, things took a different turn.

Section three

Possibilities

Moving Beyond Fetish... The Opportunities For Growth and Joy Via Black and White Gay Male Relationships

I have spent half of my dating life with white men. As far as I can see, there is a great deal of confusion and mayhem regarding how these seemingly divergent groups get along, partner up and develop loving, committed non-exploitative relationships. What is this thing we call attraction? Is it learned? Can it be redeveloped?

I remember a friend of mine telling me that when he came out he already knew the type of guy he found appealing (he already had a type). I thought this was laughable because I was certainly not this astute. My attraction grew and changed as I did the same.

For a number of years, I was completely undeniably unattracted to white guys. This explains the hearty guffaws I would muster whenever a white guy either wanted me to see him as a sex partner or thought I should worship at the throne of whiteness simply because. After some years of failed relationships with my brothers, I had to take a serious look at both my actions and theirs.

I made the decision to be treated well and no longer gave a shit what package it came in. I opened myself to some other very different types of men. I was not sitting around longing for whiteness and yet I ended up dating a very sweet Greek guy who was not out to his family and friends. Spoiler alert: if you are out don't date someone who isn't.

We had several problems. Some of which were racially oriented. I learned a great deal about myself and the seduction that is white supremacy and internalized racism. I got to look at the many assumptions both groups make about the other.

Growing up, white folk only existed in our home via tv/movies. It was very easy to make the decision that all whites were happy, well adjusted, employed and wealthy. In the other bit of nonsense, it was assumed that I was from the ghetto, poor, lacking in both imagination and drive and of course loved whiteness and clung to the misguided belief that whiteness and not my own doing would be my salvation.

If you combine these very disturbing and familiar ways of thinking and try to construct a relationship with ignorance, assumptions, fears and titillation of being with the "other" you have a definite recipe for disaster. This initial foray into interracial dating provided a great deal of insight and allowed me to take this newly acquired information into the next relationship and then of course the one after that.

An element that consistently showed up that had to be constantly challenged is the very comfortable and familiar agreement that I (the black guy) would do all of the heavy emotional lifting and the white guy would take on the role of financial parent.

Given the current financial climate, many men of color (black men), myself included, are unemployed or severely underemployed. While the economy is not to blame, it is wise to consider that everyone does not have access to the same resources.

This does not excuse certain situations (not looking for

work, not developing new skills) but instead sheds light on the dynamic that has a great effect on the two men involved in an intimate relationship. If the black guy does not have full access to his emotional life and therefore is not the one who will “carry” the ball emotionally and or socially and the white guy is broke as hell, the old stereotypes won't work.

Like all relationships, we enter them with some understanding, no matter how misguided or false, that certain things will occur and certain needs will be met. If these things aren't hashed out early and often particularly when you throw race and class and same gender into the mix, it can lead to some nasty disappointments and very off-the-mark conclusions. Primarily, one of hurt feelings and grave miscommunication.

We, as men, particularly in the context of intimate relationships, are not taught to recognize emotional pain. In particular, we are not taught to recognize pain that is engendered from the standpoint of race and or class. In some of my more personal intimate relations, I often find it challenging (not impossible) to recognize and understand the pain that white males have. I have often decided and stated: “you're white and male and living in America, snap out of it.”

When two men get together the thing that attracts them, their maleness, is often their undoing. Regardless of our intent, we can very easily fall into predictable, unproductive and pointless patterns. How do we do the dance of intimacy that can be life sustaining and glorious?

For one thing, we can refuse to fall into the trap that I have heard many well meaning but misguided white guys fall prey to. We can stop with the “I don't see color” business. It is truly not a selling point and definitely does nothing to sweeten the pot. I am very brown so if you are looking at me and don't see it then our next course of action might involve having your eyes checked.

Let me explain that what needs to happen is not a lack of

seeing but instead the decision to see as Malcolm X would say with "new eyes." I encourage any one who dates outside their race to see not through the eyes of domination, imperialism and colonialism but to see via the heart and what my sweet bf refers to as a commitment to care for the "whole person."

Dating outside one's race doesn't automatically mean I have a healthy dollop of self hatred. In the same way that dating within my race doesn't mean I am free of self loathing. True love and care of another human being is challenging, difficult work.

If the only thing holding the relationship together is a hardy helping of the oppressor's fantasy fueled limited pornographic gaze, you are heading for trouble. Fantasies and limited views of people won't look so tasty when your man can't find a job or is struggling with an addiction.

The commitment to being enthralled with dark or white skin won't help when the flu takes all that yumminess then adds a fever, cranky disposition and the trots to the picture. Trust me, no matter how cute he is, nobody is appealing when they got things coming out of both ends...

So where do we begin in our efforts to love wholeheartedly someone who on the surface seems so different? For starters, we hold everyone to the same rigorous standards. We use our minds and not our dicks to determine when and if it makes sense to get and or stay involved with a particular individual. Certainly, I am not alone in recognizing that there have been times when the otherness that is green eyes or blondness or whatever it is that week, has distracted and confused me?

When I made decisions based on some guy's dreaminess, I always ended up in trouble (broke, resentful). When I made excuses for someone's behavior and still decided that this guy was the kitten's mittens once again there was trouble and upset.

A very common occurrence among men in general is the

belief that they have to save the world. There is a general assumption that we are saviors who will right the wrongs of society by helping those we love and care about. While this is not bad in and of itself, it will provide a basis for the belief and subsequent actions that won't allow for self actualization nor individual growth via goal setting and accomplishing.

In other words, men, myself included, often feel the need and are societally rewarded for swooping in with all of the answers and saving the day.

If you are required to perform unbelievable acts of heroics on a constant basis this makes it difficult to be human or see the humanity of others. Once again, it prevents you from being fully present and not performing and seeking accolades as such.

My Diabolical Plan to Defeat Ageism in the Gay Community

Having survived Reagan, both Bushes, drug addicted and abusive paramours, the scourge that is HIV/AIDS, unrelenting bullying and the need to beg folks to let me get married, it is time to start celebrating and telling my real age.

February 29th, marked my 44th year on this planet. While I don't mind getting older, I just have a problem admitting it. When someone starts guessing my age, I am thrilled until the moment comes when I actually have to tell the truth. At a birthday party recently, someone suggested that I was twenty eight.

Being complimented in this way was great since I usually start the bidding at around 35. This didn't last long before the love of my life shouted out, "whatever age he tells you add fifteen years." We left the party shortly thereafter.

What is this thing about age that myself and all the gay men I know seem to have? Perhaps we feel that our youth was ill spent. That our young days are sorely behind us with nothing to do now but wait for the gods to "come a calling" (thanks Eartha). Maybe, many of us, myself included, have spent untold hours and years trying to get men to love us and be kind and thoughtful when what we should have been doing is recognizing our own greatness and pressing aggressively onward.

It is very popular these days to root around in your past. While a trot down memory lane can be fun, entertaining and occasionally enlightening, these jaunts rarely lead to any significant change or resolve. Be Bold! That's it.

Boldness doesn't stop or run out as we age. Instead, I find that having survived and thrived amidst so much nonsense both self imposed and environmentally based until I decided that I'd had enough, has made me even bolder.

As an aging gay man of color, it is assumed that my day in the sun is over and that since I don't look like what is in popular magazines nor can offer porn god priceless (which I never did), I have nothing of value to add to the world.

Until I learned to say "fuck it" and truly mean it, nothing changed. A great deal of this has to do with the aging process and how I choose to handle it. At 44, no matter how much I want to believe in the power of exfoliants and miracle-in-a-jar moisturizers, I am no longer 25 or 30, or dare I say it, 35.

Oh, but my best years are ahead of me. Not having to seduce men and play all of the he loves me he loves me not games certainly frees up a great deal of time. Myself and so many of my friends have spent hours trying to put cases and clues together regarding what someone said or didn't say. All of our highly ineffective detective work attempting to figure out what someone "really meant" and never quite hitting the mark and yet we had time to create and live our lives.

I have not given up on love or its power. I have become clear and brutally honest with myself and others. I tell my real age. I wear it like a battle scar. I remind myself and others that there are many folks who began life's journey with me who decided to check out for whatever the reason some time ago.

As a black, gay artist and teacher, it is my duty to share my thriving mechanisms with whomever is open to hearing them. It is my duty to defeat ageism and the descent into "trollism" that many folks believe is my lot and those of others who have moved beyond the age of thirty and still want to take up space.

My Straight Dad is Coming to My Gay Wedding

My father is flying in from Detroit, Michigan to witness me marry a man. If we'd had a history of progressive thought and shared action based in liberation and freedom of thought this may not be so shocking.

We have not. As a young child and into adulthood, I performed a great deal of hiding and deflecting behaviors to make sure that my parents, and in particular my dad, never found out that I was gay and “secretly” desired men. Many times over the years, I have either introduced who I was currently seeing as a new “friend” or post coming out as a new partner.

With each introduction, delusion and denial became a well honed, highly favored and mutually agreed upon way of dealing with the very real and highly uncomfortable truth that my dad's only son, the heir to his throne, was gay.

Growing up in a homophobic home didn't leave much room for discussions of difference and its acceptance and negotiation. Very early, the message was clear: gay means wrong. As a result of this disturbed thinking, I learned to survive by not dreaming of a wonderful mate nor committing to him via a ceremony surrounded by friends and family.

When my very articulate and wise husband offered two very wonderful reasons (laden with sound logical examples) for our marriage, I had to rethink every assumption and muddled viewpoint that I'd created and nurtured for thirty years. Part of the rethinking involved “coming out” again to my parents. There will be many of my gay and lesbian allies who have to reemerge from the closet now that laws and social structures are changing at such a break neck speed.

Many folk have to be “reminded” of our gayness when we make a step to solidify or deepen an existing relationship. The

rational is based on the assumption that if you are not a part of a “legitimate” state-sanctioned union then you are not an adult and the only connection you are able to create is temporary sexual one.

My marriage says to my family: I am an adult who is in a serious relationship. Some of the folks I know are unable to handle this declaration and are finding themselves with an uninvite to the ceremony.

My straight dad is coming to my Wedding and it will be a beautiful thing. It means I held on to myself. I've won a major battle.

Why Black People Need Science Fiction

“As soon as a character of color is introduced in a story, imagination stops.” Toni Morrison

As a young boy, I loved *The Twilight Zone*, *The Planet of the Apes* and anything that provided insight into other worlds and possibilities. It is only as we age, that we learn dreaming and committing to difference, exploration and comfortability with difference can and often does make you an outsider.

A young black child who loves science fiction is asking for a heap of trouble and ridicule. Collectively, we (black folks) have been tortured and brutalized as a result of “difference” and should look to new worlds as places that not only allow dreaming but adamantly encourage it.

Black folks need all the thinking and devotion to self defining that sci-fi will allow. As a teacher to young Black and Hispanic teenagers in an alternative high school, I discovered what prevented several of my students from expecting and striving for excellence. None of them had ever seen anyone who looked like them leading a revolution, being self defining or self creating.

It is difficult to design a life of forward movement if there is no tangible example of what is possible. My baby sister is a lawyer. She has watched her mother and several family friends attend law school and obtain jobs in their chosen field. Dreaming of and then becoming an attorney was not an impossibility for her.

We all need vivid and tangible examples of accomplishments and what the price is for achieving our life's objectives. Science fiction lets our imaginations soar. We need creativity that reinvents us and what we can achieve.

At 27, I finally got around to reading Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*. In this wonderful book, the protagonist, a young black girl of fifteen invents a religion, leads a sojourn and makes herself the center of a movement based in love, communion with others, a sharing of resources and the questioning of God. Many black folks I know associate the sci-fi world with whiteness, green little men, silver suits and the questioning of the definition of God given to us by the Judeo Christian ethic we were all reared in.

I once had a very intense debate with my sister about the demons, witches, etc in the *Harry Potter* series. Apparently, magic, sorcery and all the rest of that "mess" was something that our young people shouldn't read. My argument was that as long as a child is reading does it matter what the material is if it opens his mind and leads to more reading and knowledge hunger.

When the adults around me lied, were irrational or flat out denied reality, it was this genre and all reading that provided solace and sanity. It was clear that there were other ways of living and being.

The Twilight Zone forced me to consider other worlds where the rules were different. This brilliant show also let me know about the human condition and that I could hope for and demand more in my life. This is sci-fi's greatest strength.

Like Shakespeare's work, it illuminates humanity and all its complicated and endlessly annoying traits and foibles. It allows us to examine our lives and our choices through the lenses of another time and space. We are encouraged to move beyond voyeuristic consumption of other worlds. It forces us to imagine our lives and whether we harm or help others when certain situations arise.

As a young kid unable to hide his homosexuality, I was bullied from childhood through college. I learned to thrive amidst a world and people bent on destroying me. As I began my teaching career, I noticed that this part of the educational

experience had not vanished or been dealt with constructively. To combat this horrid fact, I began to introduce my favorite science fiction Short Stories.

My personal favorite: *Those Who Walk Away From Omelas*, provided my young students with a case of the “willies” and always sparked a great deal of conversation regarding domination, bullying and fair treatment for all. So many of the themes and struggles are recognizable no matter the time period. We must take our place in worlds wherein animals and inanimate objects speak, reason and wage war.

Is it impossible to consider worlds where we matter? Is it impossible to imagine a world where diversity works and oppression is nonexistent? Visiting and dabbling in different worlds with different intelligences could provide a great deal of insight into modern day problems. We often are able to invent solutions when the results are not life threatening.

Pick up some Octavia Butler, Margaret Atwood, Ursula Le Guin and Daryl Sturgis' *Solstice*. These wonderful authors are effortlessly and poignantly (brilliantly) offering us characters and worlds that could be implemented in current society and beyond. Be fearless in your explorations and expectations.

Anthony Carter

TEN

In 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.

