

**The  
BLACK  
C o M M e n t a t o r**  
Commentary, analysis and investigations  
on issues affecting African Americans  
www.blackcommentator.com

*Issue 156 – October 27 2005*

*Think Piece  
Seeing Ourselves  
Through Our Own Black Eyes  
by Darice Jones*

(Use the back button on your browser to return to the previous page)

Printer Friendly Version



Copyright © 2002 - 2005  
www.BlackCommentator.com  
All Rights Reserved

Africans have been held underwater again by the big hand of US hypocrisy that has no love in reserve for us and never has – but that has love unlimited for those considered family.

But we Africans do not drown under water, we transform into sea creatures – we breathe anyway – and we swim into the arms of our common bond. In the aftermath of the storm and the government/media crimes committed against black people in and around New Orleans, the necessary next step is to transform our excruciating sadness and our fierce rage into collective action. In addition to the common color hatred we face, we descendants of Africans enslaved in the Americas share a common history of very real power. This power is manifest through our ability to step over, to dig under, to somehow make our way around the physical obstacles of oppression placed in our path every day since the Maafa. We are more than survivors of these institutionalized forms of racism, we have managed to thrive in the face of them.

You understand this only if you have broken bonds with the rhetoric of the self– proclaimed power brokers of this country. Coalitions between white supremacists, government, corporations, media, and religious institutions are nothing new – although many of us continue to believe that if we gain acceptance within them, we will be safe and comfortable, and able to help our people.

The problem with this approach is that ascension within the current power structure requires you to leave any analysis of history, any understanding of oppression, and any allegiance to the black mass behind you. To do this, you must view yourself and your fellow Africans through the eyes of the elite. That view says that there are worthy blacks (i.e. those able to garner wealth and leave their communities – or – “make it out of the hood”). It also says there are worthless blacks: those who are not wealthy, who are wrapped up in the criminal “justice” system, those who are not Christian, not straight, those with disabilities, and those who do not identify with the claimed white majority.

We are living with the results of these views. People who could easily be any one of our grandfathers, grandmothers, our parents, our siblings, our good friends, our children have been killed in the streets – not by

## The Black Commentator – Think Piece: Seeing Ourselves Through Our Own Black Eyes

the storm but by the “authorities.” It is our folks who laws are designed to capture. The laws are designed so that affluent white corporatists cannot be punished for the same acts. The media, including print news, television, film and advertising, participates by using words and images to associate crime with black people. It’s a successful campaign, considering that many of us can barely say hello to each other on the street – either afraid or ashamed to see ourselves reflected.

Despite this, we Africans are powerful. It is because of this power, our folks are being forcibly separated and dispersed. If the people of those New Orleans communities had been able to stay together, they might have broken ranks with the socialization that told them to submit to “authority.” The outcry may not have been segregated voices from around the country or sympathy from those in the mainstream media whose humanity was dug up by the widespread death and suffering. It might have been the undeniable collective outrage of a black people who had been publicly maimed and murdered by the government under which they lived. The voice that has gone up so many times before in the history of this country.

But now, communities have been separated. Children from parents, parents from grandparents and so forth. And every one of us black folks knows, that could have been us, and was in fact our family. Present within this insane situation is an opportunity for African Americans to re-see each other and ourselves, to remove the lens presented to us by those who uphold our systems of oppression.

There are many steps we as individuals and small chocolate communities around the country can take. Step one is to really begin to reunite with our collective African power by understanding ourselves not just as survivors, but as innovators, creators, artists, storytellers, healers, and educators. We have roots steeped in overcoming obstacles, but also of determining what is needed, and creating sustainable options to answer those needs.

Harriet Tubman was not just a survivor, she was a risk-taker, innovator, and problem solver. It was a completely illegal act for her to run away from her enslaver and to help others run away from theirs. Nowadays, the news would tell us she had “looted” the plantations and the treatment that led her and others to “loot” would be completely irrelevant – as it is today. But we should look to this ancestor with pride and understanding – as we should look at ourselves today. She was not beholden to laws that would prevent her from living a full life – and neither should we be. This nation has never been cleansed of its racism – although the civil rights era certainly forced people to change the rhetoric around race. Despite those changes, the institutions which were built upon race hate have not been analyzed and re-constituted to expunge them of racism. Most importantly, the criminal justice system, the same one that made it illegal for enslaved Africans to run, has never been cleansed. If anything, more race-based statutes and practices have been incorporated over time. And there is no mechanism to keep the system in check.

So as we take the step of re-seeing ourselves, we should stop separating ourselves with distinctions between those of us who have spent time in jail/prison and those who have not. Many of our great leaders became such by breaking unjust laws.

A second step we can take is to become better risk-takers by realizing ourselves as one big family. The same way we wouldn’t leave our little sons and daughters in the hands of foster care or the youth authorities, we must start pulling our extended family out of these systems and into our homes. This, whether we know the children or not. There is such a wealth of information in the black community about good practices around raising a family. From the college educated, to the self educated we have folks around us who know how to create healthy homes. Now, we need more volunteers among us to take our children in and raise them well.

A final step we can take is to become reacquainted with our history – before and after the enslavement – and combine those values which we bring forward with those which we have innovated for today. We must read

## The Black Commentator – Think Piece: Seeing Ourselves Through Our Own Black Eyes

those researchers and historians from within the black diaspora, whose views reflect a deep love of black people. Then we must continue to translate what we have read into other, accessible, storytelling forms like poetry, film, plays, dance, and song. As we honor and understand the legacy we have been given, it will be easier for us to work as a collective despite our differences. It will be easier for us to build with and for each other. It will be easier for us to live together, with no longing to live apart or to join some other community to feel important.

When you walk down the street in West Oakland or whatever chocolate city you live in or near, remember that whatever you see in the eyes of the black people you pass is a reflection of you. So love what you see my people, and turn that love into real, sustained, healthy action.

*Darice Jones is a West Oakland artist/storyteller with a journalism background. She can be contacted at [daricemjones@yahoo.com](mailto:daricemjones@yahoo.com).*