

## Let Her Life – and Ours – Be Not in Vain

by Willie L. Hines, Jr.

We recently lost one of our most cherished treasures – those for whom we work to ensure a better life. We lost an innocent child, four-year-old Jasmine Owens. We lost Jasmine to a drive-by shooting. This despicable tragedy not only took Jasmine's short-lived life, but it also forced our city to reevaluate where we are and, more importantly, where we want to be. I have attempted to comprehend and properly place this ridiculous act. However, my befuddled pain restricts my ability to do so. I have therefore concluded that, rather than focus attention solely on the unconscionable incident, I will attempt to uplift the community by challenging us to return to our roots.

What is man? Man is physical, flesh, bones and body. Man is also spirit, heart, soul and mind. Daily, we feed our body – sometimes three meals a day – consuming both healthy and unhealthy items. The food we eat has a direct impact on the health, energy and wellbeing of physical man. Like the saying goes, “We are what we eat.”

While much attention is spent on our physical man, we must recognize that we also have a soul, and that soul needs daily feeding as well. We nourish our souls through family, reading, music, peers, prayer and other means that allow messages to enter our minds, thus satisfying our deepest needs. Unfortunately, we are overindulging and gluttonizing ourselves on spiritual junk food that is detrimental to our soul and state of being: “Garbage in, garbage out.”

Therefore, it is imperative that adequate attention and service, on a daily basis, be rendered to both the body and soul of every individual. We are not only what we eat; we are also what we think. Given the destruction that exists within the community, it is clearly evident that we are waging a war to save our spirit, mind, heart and soul. Despite a more egregious and intolerable time in history – despite slavery, physical bondage, chains and lynchings, at the hands of others – our African American ancestors still found the will and dignity to cherish and value their souls. They refused to allow their spirits to be broken.

Our ancestors also embraced family. At a time when families were torn apart and babies were ripped out of the arms of mothers, never to be seen again, a loving and supportive environment was there to protect and undergird the community. Given the circumstances, many of these families were by no means traditional, but they were communal, nonetheless. This is something we must return to; for we are indeed our brother's keepers.

There was also a time in which African Americans could not attain an education because it was against the law to do so. They were severely beaten and harshly punished if they were caught reading. Despite the risk, many African Americans valued and appreciated education and more importantly, they were willing to put their life on the line to learn.

The roots of the African-American community – the cultural cornerstones that have enabled us to overcome a myriad of obstacles and oppressions – were these: **faith, family and education**. Without these, we could not have survived and succeeded as we have. We could not have advanced at every turn and defeated those who sought to destroy us.

Unfortunately, we have turned our backs on anything resembling God or faith. We have little or no sense of family. And it seems that education is seldom cherished or valued. We have allowed both internal and external snares to devastate us. This is not the rich African-American heritage that I read about, neither is it the legacy that I want to leave.

Let us learn from our forefathers and those whose shoulders we now stand upon. We must embrace the pillars and principles that once elevated them from the despair, degradation and destruction that sought to destroy them. We are wandering aimlessly without a sense of direction. Now more than ever, we must return to our roots. We must relearn the value of **faith, family** and **education**. We must work in partnership with many in order to reestablish these values and take back our community. We all must do our individual parts to commit ourselves to activities and lifestyle practices that uplift and build up our community. This must be done in honor of Jasmine Owens. It must be done in honor of our own past, present and future.

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