

WORDS FOR MY 'PEEPS'

WANTED: AFRIKAN COMMUNITY WARRIORS FOR 2006!

So much is impacting the Afrikan community at this time. Events around the world affect us deeply from the continued war in Iraq, long-standing wars in Afrika, natural and man-made disasters like Katrina, the denial of reparations for Afrikans around the world, uprisings in France by racialized youth, the explosion of white supremacy and mass racism in Australia, the systemic destabilization of Haiti, the brutal cold-hearted lynching of Tookie Williams, the World Trade Organization talks that continue to bully and manipulate the livelihoods of developing nations in Hong Kong and so much more.

In our own backyard we are still in shock over the consistent rise of gun violence among youth especially youth of Afrikan descent and the horrific impact of the "Safe" Schools Act, which has resulted in 40,000 more suspensions the bulk of whom are children/youth from racialized communities, particularly Afrikans. This has significantly contributed to the epidemic levels of youth 'dropping out' of school as well as youth being 'pushed out' of the educational system. Just these two issues alone force us to contend with the emotional, spiritual and socio-economic impact not only on those directly involved but on our families and the larger community on a daily basis. This affects everything from racial profiling and growing poverty to gang recruitment, literacy and unemployment. Afrikan-Canadian communities will continue to face significant limitations as a whole when it comes to true and lasting success that permeates all areas of our lives.

Collectively, we are in a lot of pain. Many among us feel hopeless and depression is rampant. A growing number of Afrikans experience mental unwellness due to systemic denial, insensitivity, white privilege and lack of effective supports in the society that are specifically tailored to confront systemic barriers. More than ever before Afrikans are lying in hospital beds as a result of diabetes, high blood pressure, strokes, cancer and liver disease. Our health is failing as a direct result of systemic racism and other forms of oppression in the society as well as unhealthy diets, minds, families, communities and lifestyles.

Indeed there are some very disturbing global and local trends. While other communities are moving forward politically and economically, in some ways, the Afrikan-Canadian community seems to be moving backward. Over the years we have lost many vital cultural organizations, our representation in government continues to be marginal, at best, and the prison industrial complex is growing methodically. Also, more and more racialized workers are being 'pushed out' of stable jobs while social programs dwindle or have limited impact because of the problematic funding methods they are continually subjected to. Afrikan-Canadian organizations are continually under-funded such that they are unable to create jobs for graduates and well-qualified people who bring desperately needed analyses, sensitivity and lived experiences that can assist their communities. Instead our organizations are consistently forced to compete with each other to address the social inequities they face or are forced to redefine themselves to be eligible for certain kinds of funding. These are just some of the realities we face.

Nobody wants to talk only about the negatives. If you look at the SHARE Magazine and other Afrikan-Canadian local publications, you will always see the successes - youth and community members receiving awards, an endless line-up of exciting cultural events, new ideas being launched, leaders of all types making notable achievements in business, politics, art & culture, education and more. We are not failing even though many would have us believe we are. We must never forget that we, Afrikans, are not supposed to have survived the genocid and thus, our very presence is a testament to our longevity, self-determination and spirit. We have always been survivors even in the midst of violence and destruction and our Ancestors made us that way as the 1st peoples of the world. However, we must do FAR FAR more and FAR FAR better.

Growing numbers of us marvel at how different peoples lives are in Toronto in more and more disturbing ways. It was recently stated that Toronto currently enjoys more wealth than ever before. Interestingly, it was also recently reported that by the year 2017 the majority of Canadians in Toronto would be "people of color" who will make-up the bulk of the marginalized poor underclass. While some people, the privileged, are enjoying life to the fullest with abundant wealth, access and opportunities, more and more are struggling to survive on a daily basis. Many racialized Canadians are forced

to engage endless and unwanted 'battles' for our basic Human Rights. Ironically, while we recently celebrated International Human Rights Day as a global achievement, it is far from the realities of the world's racialized poor. Whenever we attempt to exercise those Rights we are systematically 'shut down', targeted, harassed and punished whether 'speaking out', campaigning, demonstrating or organizing. Our names, character and ideas are smeared, misrepresented and we are often labeled "trouble-makers", "difficult" and "angry". Just look at what happened yesterday at the close of the WTO talks. 30,000 police surrounded the building and over 900 demonstrators were arrested for standing up for ordinary people.

All too often racialized communities are forced to strive to be and become 'mainstream'. In becoming so, one is usually required to strive to 'fit in' to be accepted by the status quo. This often diametrically competes with that which causes us to be analytical and concerned about social inequity and injustice particularly as racialized beings and citizens. When you are concerned with and strive for justice and equity you do not celebrate those who succeed directly at the expense of the oppressed. You question the wealth they have and challenge how they acquired it. You question their middle class values and disconnection from their families and communities. You move beyond thinking about your personal needs and material acquisitions and commit yourself to a 'justice agenda'. Sadly, ignorance and 'turning a blind eye' is a major component of being 'mainstream'. Being mainstream means you are not concerned with the lives of the oppressed and often blame them for their condition while in denial of our own privilege, guilt and fear. You believe they are oppressed because of their own doing - lack of spirit, ethics and success-driven values and often think they should be more like you. We blame the disenfranchised for their circumstances - look at how we treat welfare recipients, youth involved with the justice system and the homeless.

In order to challenge these realities as Afrikans living in Canada we must be vigilant and continually seek to build capacity among us. We must thoughtfully and strategically strive to "pass the baton" to those coming behind us while developing leadership among us. We must regularly gather to assess and analyze our progress and create alternative ways of developing, educating and empowering ourselves and our children. We must share our skills and have workshops and training and development gatherings any and everywhere. We can engage programs like: ROC - Reclaiming Our Children, Kombat Oppression, Rites of Passage, Youth 'Mainstream' Survival Training, Unthinking Eurocentrism, Decolonizing the Mind, Body and Spirit, Loving Blackness as Political Resistance...all this and more exists for and in our community! let's help our youth develop critical thinking skills, open their 3rd Eye and more!

Think of the breakfast programs and schools that were started by the Black Panthers? When Black children were still barred from segregated schools we started informal schools in homes, churches and in the fields. When slaves wanted to learn they created opportunities everywhere they could and never waited on their oppressors. Just like in the plantations we must collapse all the barriers we allow 'massa' to put up especially across our sub-ethnic groups. We are all AFRIKANS and must work tirelessly to create harmony among us as Diasporans and Continentals. There is so much misunderstanding among and between us. We judge and condemn each other even as we claim to be Afrikans based on 'massa's' misinformation and misrepresentation of us. We celebrate Afrika seldom interact with continental Afrikans or Afrikans living in America. The myths and stereotypes abound and we must work to actively dispel them. WE ARE FAMILY!

Afrikan-Canadian youth are on the move and others are ready and willing to get involved and we must thoughtfully work to build effective leadership among them regardless of economic and academic status. Our time is running out!

Finally, is it not time we refrain from believing everyone has to be and think the same? We need radical voices among us just as we need negotiators, thinkers and mediators. All too often some Afrikan community warriors are 'shut down' and 'shot down' within their own groups, organizations and communities because they are "too radical" or "too outspoken". If we think of the leaders, the heroes and sheroes we love and celebrate today, they come from those spaces - Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, Steve Biko, Che Guevara, Kwame Toure, Angela Davis, Franz Fanon, Thomas Sankara and many more. So why today should we condemn those who dare to challenge and speak the truth without apology among us? We cannot allow this to continue. One of the reasons we have lost so much and gained so little is because of 'shutting down' our 'up and coming' leaders instead of standing up with them and for them. We celebrate those who 'stood up', 'walked out', 'talked back', 'took to the streets' in another time but are afraid to do those things for our children today because we are too refined, too successful, too accomplished and educated. We must be able to agree to disagree without totally disarming or discouraging one another particularly those who think it's time for more radical action.

Like Malcolm X said: in the old days the house-niggahs always tried to undermine the radical agenda of the field-niggahs cause life was far worse for them. But when the field niggahs fought back they did it for ALL the slaves, not just some. Recently I heard someone say "We must stop tolerating 'sell-outs' who strive for personal success at the direct expense of their community." This is food for thought over the holidays. We should challenge those who keep telling us to 'go along to get along' while we watch people and communities dying for the benefit of a select few whether its a building named in their honor, a book contract or a media campaign. Nobody wants to undermine anyone's hard-earned success but we must think about the 'deals' we get ourselves into and who they really benefit. We must learn to seek and respect the variety of opinions among us instead of insisting we believe the same things even when we see through different lenses and have different life experiences. If our modus operandi is that we seek to benefit more rather than less, then we'll be well on our way to practicing what our heroes and sheroes taught us and celebrating their legacies.

In closing, I encourage you to think about the following questions: what are you prepared to sacrifice for the upliftment and liberation of Afrikan people? How often do our youth and children see fearless Afrikan community warriors standing up for them without apology? How often have YOU been an Afrikan community warrior?

We should be inspired by recent events in Latin America. They are seriously organizing under a new kind of socialism. Look at the election results in Bolivia? Cuba and Venezuela are building their a strong base of allies and Afrikan leaders can learn from them too. Afrikan leaders also stood up and made some very daring statements at the WTO although their position weakened significantly because of fear, intimidation and concerns about funding cut to their development AID.

Being 'mainstream' is NOT an option for Afrikans who are committed to justice and equity for ALL. Collectively, our global condition, our spiritual survival, emotional recovery and our future REQUIRES that of us NOW! ARE YOU READY?

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©AfrikanStar

maatneter@msn.com [e@yahoo.com](mailto:maatneter@yahoo.com)

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"U are not Afrikan because you are born in Afrika. U are an Afrikan because Afrika is borne in you" 🧡

