

BLACK FREIGHTER PRODUCTIONS
PRESENTS
PRACTICAL PROMULGATION

ISSN: 1940-5707

HIV AND BLACK ID

DECEMBER 2007/JANUARY 2008 VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

WHY HIV AND BLACK ID? BECAUSE...



Too many Blacks are dead already and too many more are fighting for their lives. As the years go by, HIV and AIDS draws closer and closer to our inner circles. Years ago it was some unknown person states away, then it was a friend from back in the day; now, it's at our doorsteps.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said that there comes a time when "silence is betrayal." In this case, being silent is a refusal to hold our families together.

When will we begin to take an honest look at how our actions affect what we become, and determine whether or not our children are orphans?

Blacks and HIV—what is the connection? Is there one? Evidently, something has to be there because people of African descent, throughout the Diaspora, are suffering from HIV and dying of AIDS at rates faster than any other community in the world. What questions do we need to ask, which answers do we need to accept before this stops? What will it take?

If the deaths of our friends, family, and loved ones have no effect on our sexual behavior—will it only be when we develop lesions of our own that we change our unsafe sexual practices?

The Following is a truth-story titled "In All Creation" and a compilation of information lovingly penned to change your mind, your body, and your soul. In hopes that you will:

Consider your health: Every sexual experience, every day of your life.

In Support of Safe and Smart Black on Black Love,

Solomohn "Piebald" Ennis

Author of *There is Always One: 1, A collection of truth-stories* scheduled for release in June 2008 (YA Fic/Lit)

TRUTH-STORY: IN ALL CREATION BY SOLOMOHN "PIEBALD" ENNIS

She's the type of girl who listens to Soul music. Quietly humming "I'm every woman" as Chaka Khan hollers and declares it.

Brown hands soft with cocoa butter and neat from a manicure sling a small, fatty roast into a pre-heated oven.

She checks her watch. *I wonder where he is?*, she thinks, double-checking the time against the clock on the wall.

He knows we're supposed to cook together tonight.

Standing with her back to the stove she feels the heat from the oven warm her behind, one small hand on her hip, the other against her thigh—fingers tapping away the time.

Continued

HIV FACTS:

- HIV is the acronym for the Human Immunodeficiency Virus.
- HIV is transmitted via blood, breast milk, seminal fluid, and vaginal secretions.
- You can be infected with the virus by having unprotected sex and by sharing needles.
- Most HIV infections are due to people having unprotected anal or vaginal sex with an infected partner.
- Condoms are 98% effective (when used correctly) in preventing the spread of HIV.
- Heterosexual and homosexual people can acquire and transmit the virus.
- Free condoms are available at many clinics and public health facilities.
- Uncircumcised men have a greater risk of becoming infected.
- Intravenous drug users and people who take medication intravenously should not share needles with anyone.
- Pregnant women can pass the virus to their unborn children.
- Razorblades and toothbrushes exposed to HIV infected blood can spread the virus.
- A new latex condom should be used for oral sex and intercourse.

The disc changes. Beyoncé begins her song.

“Me, myself, and I” she says without singing. Eyes red, face hot. Her hand smoothes over her hair. Fragments of honey blonde strands stick to her palm. *Maybe it needs some oil*, she thinks.

Looking in the bathroom mirror she notices her dark skin is shiny, her thick brown lips are dry, and the hairs on her head have split; some just once, others twice, a few even three and four times. She fingers the dry, dyed hair and thinks, *He’s probably with somebody else right now, “someone without as many problems” so he says*. She ponders his words and a chronic pain stirs, anger close as a friend sleepily awakes and heartache grumbles and stretches as memories of late arrivals, cold dinners, missed breakfasts, ridiculous lies, and phony apologies rise up like zombies and encircle her in a rush of scheduled disappointments, pursued loneliness, sought-after despair, and hand-me-down hopelessness. A desperate defeated feeling runs down over her, covering every component of who she is in a thick coat of insults and self-depreciating thoughts. She says aloud, “No wonder he’s just not that into me, look at me, I’m a terrible mess.” Looking deep into her image her shiny dark skin looks pale, her brown lips swollen and dry, and two, three, then four split hairs fall into the sink.

Her fist crashes down, knocking over the toothbrushes, spinning the toothpaste around. “After all I’ve done for him,” she yells. “Everything! I’ve cooked, cleaned, waxed, coifed! There was nothing! Nothing!, I didn’t do for that man!”

The shower rings pop in succession as she snatches the curtain away from the rod. A pink bath towel slides beneath her feet and crumples against the wall. Her silver towel bar glistens under a steady stream of pouring baby oil. “I hate him, I hate him, I hate him,” she yells. She twists and yanks the curtain in her hands, her rage pushing and pulling it back and forth. Bare pumiced heels come into contact with the slick oil and down she goes. The vanity’s sharp metal edge snatches soft skin from her chin and cheek. She hits the floor with a loud thud, her hot skin stings against the cold tile.

From the tiny, thin-walled apartment on the second-floor, the sprightly, sixty-five-year old Mrs. Thornton hears the thumps of her mild-mannered, upstairs neighbor. *I wonder what that child’s doing?* she thinks, as she places a picture of her deceased husband, Lewis, in the top drawer of her chifferobe. *I hope she ain’t got herself into another tussle with that slick-talking boy?*

Blood, baby oil, and tears soak into her as yells and cries seep out. “*Everything!*” she screams, over and over again, kicking the tub hard with each enunciation.

“Ok, that’s it,” Mrs. Thornton says. “Let me get my clothes on, baby, and if that good for nothing boyfriend of yours think he gon’ run me off this time, he’s got another thing coming.”

Her feet, red and achy, kick the tub that has become her boyfriend. “Ev-ry-thing!,” she screams. Blood, red and fragrant, trails down her cheek, past her lobe and drips onto the floor. The sound and smell of the blood, the whiteness of the tub and the burning in her feet as it becomes numbness, isolate her in the moment, a memory of her mother breaks through. Mother: dressed in white, uniform clean, hat starched, afro gleaming and perfect, “Honey, you have to control yourself,” she says as she places a wide tan bandage over a sanitized and ruddy wound. “Yes, mama,” she says. Then, with waning strength, she grabs hold of the toilet, steadies herself, and rises up.

Brown hands damp with perspiration, stained with blood open the medicine cabinet. She scans the various items in search of alcohol pads, gauze and tape, but the slew of Cover Up Gurl cosmetics, the box of hair relaxer, tubes of bleaching crème, and false eyelashes divert her attention. *All I’ve done*, she thinks. The blood splashes as she remembers the medical kit sitting on the top shelf. Moving and thinking quickly, she grabs it. The glass slab it sat on rocks and tilts, before she can situate herself, it unhinges and falls, releasing everything: the cosmetics, relaxer, an unopened box of condoms, a perfectly sealed container of birth control pills, and a scream, “I even did that!”

Down, her fist comes again. The glass shelf breaks and scatters, pills pop and bounce, cosmetics rise swiftly, eyelashes flutter, blood spurts, the roast smokes and the fire alarm howls its siren.

Mrs. Thornton charges up the stairs with her emergency key in-hand. “I’m coming, baby, just hold on!”

Smoke greets her. Mrs. Thornton grabs a broom and silences the alarm with one upward thrust. “What’s going on in here?! Where you at, chile?!” An eerie stillness follows. “Baby girl, where are you?” she yells, “chile, you alright?” She drops the broom, cautiously walks to the edge of the kitchen, looks down the hall——wild hair, even wilder eyes, and a bloody face and hands meet her. “O’ dear chile, what’s done happened to you?”

“I...am...”, she says just before falling facedown at the old woman’s feet.

The ambulance runs through red lights and cuts corners short. Mrs. Thornton tells the driver, “Mister, I appreciate you going fast, but please don’t kill us on the way to the hospital!”

Doctors do their work. Several hours pass. Mrs. Thornton waits dutifully and patiently. The attending physician strides from behind the double doors, walks directly to Mrs. Thornton and says, "I'm sorry it took me so long to get back to you but we had to stabilize your..."

"My granddaughter," Mrs. Thornton says while simultaneously silently apologizing to the Lord.

"Yes, we have her stabilized, all stitched up, and she should be fine in a few days. However, we need to keep her for observation."

"That's fine," Mrs. Thornton says and notices that the doctor seems disturbed. "Is there anything else, doctor, is everything ok?"

"Funny, you should ask," the doctor says, "there is one more thing," the physician shuffles her feet a little, "Ma'am, forgive me if I'm crossing the line, but she was in and out of consciousness and a few times I heard her mumbling some pretty personal things about a male friend. Does the name Kabeyaman mean anything to you?"

"Yes, yes, it does. She's been dating him for a while."

The physician nods, mentally slices and stitches phrases, then abandons formalities and speaks from the heart, "Well, being a mother, I understand how these things go sometimes and I was wondering if you would like us to run any tests?"

Wise eyes turn and look in acknowledgment of the white doctor and know that she is considering this situation as she would her own. "Yes, Dr. Kara," Mrs. Thornton says, "please run whatever tests you deem necessary."

Dr. Kara smiles. "Great. We'll run the tests and if you'll come back the day after tomorrow, around this time, we will have the results, and your granddaughter ready for you."

The first day of autumn is picturesque and ideal. Mrs. Thornton's buttercup yellow sundress dances gaily in the light cool breeze. "You are a ray of brilliant black sunshine," a strange man says to her as she walks into the hospital. "Thank you, sir, and so are you," her voice winks back at him.

Mrs. Thornton ushers into the single-occupancy room, singing the words, "Hello, my dear. How are you on this fine day?"

Puffy eyes and down-turned lips gray the sunshine, snuff the singing.

"Da'lin', what's wrong?" Mrs. Thornton asks as she sits down on her bedside. "What is it, chile?"

Tears choke and muffle her words. Mrs. Thornton waits.

"Hon, if you bear it, you share it, whatever it is, I won't let you carry it alone."

She starts, chokes, then attempts to begin again.

"Baby, listen, just take your time and say it."

The words are trapped.

"Baby, just say it."

"I'm pregnant. I'm nineteen. And, I'm positive. H.I.V. positive."

Mrs. Thornton hasn't felt a sadness so empty and deep since her husband died. *O' Lewis, what should I do?*, she thinks.

Sing my song, Ella, she hears his voice say. His warmth and strength surround her, *Sing it with love, Ella*, he urges.

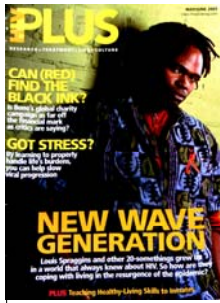
— "What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer. O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear."

Peace for pain, she thinks and screams. "Why'd I do it?! What have I done?"

Mrs. Thornton clears her throat, holds her tighter, and says, "I know, honey, I know. Pecola, chile, one of the hardest lessons we women learn in this life is that we cannot breed love."

ENDNOTES:

All of the characters in this story are fictional, however, two names were inspired: Mrs. Thornton is named in honor and recognition of Rae Lewis Thornton, a Black woman who has contributed greatly to the fight against HIV/AIDS since 1986. My character, Pecola, her name is inspired by Toni Morrison's character, Pecola Breedlove, from Morrison's definitive work, *The Bluest Eye*, a book that, unlike any other, describes the meanings behind the racial, relational struggles and inner wars of some (in my opinion, many) Black women and girls. As for Pecola's boyfriend, Kabeyaman. His name is pronounced: kuh-be-yuh-man (could be your man.) Yeah, it's corny but you'll remember it. Kara means "pure joy" which is obtained through the fulfillment of spiritual laws. Regarding the music: Chaka Khan's "I'm Every Woman" is there to remind and inform us that my Pecola is, or could be, any of us. And, Beyonce's hit song "Me, Myself, and I" is essential because in it Beyonce finds that she alone is responsible for herself (for her health.) That discovery, painful as it is at times, more often than not, should be our bottom line when it comes to making romantic decisions. Last, but not least, the conversation between Mrs. Thornton and Dr. Kara is a lesson in the fulfillment of the law: "Love thy neighbour as thyself" (KJV: Galatians 5:14.) And, "bear and share" is from (KJV: Galatians 6:2). Now, of course, there's more to this story, but isn't it nice to have something to work for/toward?



Louis Spraggins's story was published in the May/June 2007 issue of HIV Plus magazine

Like Pecola, each one of us has a story.

We have unprotected sex for love, have it because of “heat of the moment” lust, we’re prompted to do it for joy, pain, and any other emotional, psychological, and sociological reasons you can think of. However, when we have unprotected sex, regardless of the reason, we risk our lives.

Women are at risk, men are at risk—we’re all in this together. However, the statistics show some of us are at greater risk than others. The African American community and people of African descent are becoming infected with HIV and dying from AIDS at rates higher than any other community—in the United States—in the world. Why is that? What is it about us? Does it have something to do with who we are, how we think, our behavior, our skin? HIV—does it somehow intertwine differently around and through those with Black identity than it does with people from other communities?

The CDC states: *Race and ethnicity, by themselves, are not risk factors for HIV infection. However, because of a complex set of historical, structural, environmental, and cultural factors—including racism and discrimination, poverty, denial, stigma, homophobia, and limited access to health care—African Americans are more vulnerable to HIV infection.*

Racism, homophobia, incarceration, and stigma associated with being HIV infected are all factors that make it hard to stop the HIV/AIDS epidemic in African American communities. †

OK, that’s what’s obvious, right? But truth be told, we’re no more “vulnerable to HIV infection” than any other community if and when we protect ourselves. So beneath the obvious is this question: How does Black identity affect our sexual behaviors and practices?

First of all, the practice of approaching the consequence as the cause is one of our primary problems. For instance, many are under the presumption that HIV is the problem. HIV is not the problem; it is the result of the problem, just as any other sexually transmitted disease. So, from that perspective, improvements in funding, research, programs, and affordable medications are not answers. Therefore, not having “stuff” is not the problem, because if we were protecting ourselves regardless of whether the funding, research, programs, medications were there or not, it wouldn’t matter because neither would be necessary.

Does the Black experience affect our sexual practices and behaviors? After all before there is HIV there is sex, and before there is sex there are actions, and before actions, thoughts. Which brings us to this: Does how Black people feel and think about each other affect how Black people behave sexually?

This is about the cause, not the result.

Author and philosopher, Charles R. Johnson, states that before a problem can be solved it must have a definition and systematic clarification.

That means “Black/Blackness/African/African American/and the Black experience” need definitions that we can all agree upon; which requires us to take into consideration all of the possibilities and then identify and prove the constants, form and examine the findings, compile the results, then determine which of those best represent the whole. From there, we’ll have to create a universal and understandable language; then, put our best creative minds together to develop inclusive, clear, concise, accurate, and most importantly agreeable definitions.

Thus, bringing systematic clarification to “Black and Blackness” is a monumental task. Further complicating the matter is the prodigious undertaking of explaining and describing the reasons behind unprotected, thus dangerous, Black sex.

(In the vein of clarification, let me state, I’m using “Black” for all my people—known and unknown—from all over the world, from Jean Toomer to Yaphet Kotto, from Mariah Carey to Esther Rolle—and all who are in between or beyond.)

To help me with this attempt to define Black/Blackness, I’ll base my understanding upon Dr. Robert L. Williams’s African/Black Personality theory, which states: *Blackness is a natural and collective genetic, cultural, psychological, and spiritual distinctiveness based on melanin, socialization, Black awareness and consciousness, and a special quality of feeling of unity and oneness. †*

To cover all bases: For those of us who are a little light on the melanin, you too are included because if you can pull off the oneness, awareness, consciousness, and genetics, as far as I’m concerned, you still have a black hand side.

Angela Y. Davis further adds: *“You take some color, a dash or a big dollop, it don’t matter, and you blend it with an assortment of physical features that reflect every face you might possibly encounter on this great earth, mix that up with a culture that just loves to improvise, signify, re-class, renew, ...and you’ve got it!—the recipe for Black folk.” †*

(How’s that for systematic clarification?)

As for the Black experience, what can I say? I took mama out for sushi, took papa to the opera, my uncle keeps a glass of moonshine on his nightstand, and my cousin’s on her way to Harvard—we Black therefore Black is—wherever we live is a Black neighborhood, whatever we say (esoteric or street slang) is Black language—we are Black therefore Black is.... *“Dig yourself.” †*

HIV IS NOT THE PROBLEM, IT IS A RESULT OF THE PROBLEM.



READ FOR A CURE.

What we talk about when we talk about Blacks and HIV, once we're past the biological, pharmacological, sociological and psychological components, is the distribution and allocation of money and resources. When we talk about money and resources, we talk about race and when we talk about race, we talk about Black folks, and when we talk about Black folks, we talk about racism.

Regarding racism, the focus of this discussion is the development of an astute observation made by, Louis Spraggins, a young, politically aware, American Black male who has been living with HIV since 2001. He said: *"I took risks because I wanted to feel. I was looking for love. I think HIV is very much a symptom of the lack of love that we have in society."* †

Now, that's a thought worth pondering because if anybody knows about the lack of love in society, it's Black folk; dare I say, even the souls of Black folk have a "broad-minded" and "generous" understanding of what it means to be without love and the ensuing mental sickness, emotional diseases, longing, and destructive behavior that being without it entails. †

How did this come to be? W.E.B. Du Bois stated, *"the Negro is ... in...a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only...double-consciousness—this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes... of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity."* †

Based on Du Bois's theory, the lack of love Spraggins and other Blacks feel is there because we are in a world (*a ruling society*) that necessitates and supports systems that create Black misfortune to validate pity, and has devised Black disdain to substantiate contempt. †

Race expert and sociologist, Dr. Audrey Smedley, explains our society's race construct this way: *"Race is an ideology that says that all human populations are divided into exclusive and distinct groups; that all human populations are ranked, they are not equal. Inequality is absolutely essential to the idea of race. The other part is that the behavior of people is very much part of their biology."*

And then the idea that all of this is inherited. People don't only inherit their biological features, but they also inherit their moral and temperamental and intellectual features. Not only are all of these features inherited, but they are not transcendable. You can't change. Racial populations, individual races, and individual people cannot change their race. So there's no way in which you can transcend this identity. Once you are identified as a socially low-status race, you remain so forever." †

Forever.

That's a lot of pressure. The idea of something negative and stifling lasting forever. If that's how we feel, of course we're going to throw caution into the wind; what do we have to lose? For the rest of our lives, regardless of what we achieve or become, we'll still be "low-status." That in itself creates anxiety. And people who are in a state of dogged resistance will wield whatever they have as a sword and thrust through the blackness of their oppression in search of satisfaction—freedom.

However, instead of freedom we've found HIV. And, although it's killing us, and although we have the power to stop this, we can't collectively bring ourselves to it because as Nobel Prize-winner and author, Octavio Paz has put it: *"[Oppressed] socially independent beings...violate the conventions and rules that restrict them. Their love [sex] is an exercise in freedom, a transgression, a defiance of society."* †

We have sex and we do it whenever, wherever, however, and regardless of whatever because it's one of the few things we can control. And, frankly, a condom, although it can save our lives, ends up feeling like just another "ruling class" regulation.

So, how do we get out of this state of illogical, independent, every-immune system-for-itself defiance, and into a collective, safe, truthful, caring, I'm my people's keeper, healthy dependence?

By defining what oppresses us.

**WHITE SUPREMACY:
THE GREAT WHITE HOAX**

Racism against any people isn't about that people's physical, genetic, cultural, or intellectual inferiority, it's actually about the inability (which is a disability) to evolve beyond the *herd instinct*. † And because the ruling class is educated beyond their intelligence, immoral beyond reason, and have the stolen means to execute their deeds, they subject less resourceful Black people to their asinine authority through forced poverty, systematic brutality, and governmentally mandated inequality. Thus, making us without means appear inferior and, in turn feel incapable, undeserved, and in the most secret chambers of our hearts—unloved.

My criticism may seem a little harsh but even ants know the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and for a class of people who are wealthy beyond their lifetimes and have more resources than they have family—for them to be niggardly with the things that are essential to life, for them to use their greatest minds and efforts to create obstructions and inaccessibilities of all kinds when people are killing themselves in an effort to be free—what else can it be? They've put men on the moon, have people living in submarines under water, but can't quite reason a solution that will provide the most basic of needs for poor people, nor can they understand the plight that not only affects their target group, but in the end all human beings.

Gloria Steinem explains it this way: *"...[R]ace because [it is an] easy and visible difference [has] been the primary way of organizing human beings into superior and inferior groups and into the cheap labour in which this system still depends. We are talking about a society in which there will be no roles other than those chosen or those earned. We are really talking about humanism."* †

You see, the divide and conquer strategy makes all of us victims, and although the ruling class's smarts are impressive, the world's still going to bed at night without...and feeling unloved and, this fate includes them; that is why white supremacy is a hoax. If it were not, wouldn't they at least save their own?



University of Chicago
2006 Medical School
Commencement.

BEING
PRO-BLACK
DOES NOT
MEAN BEING
ANTI-WHITE.



READ FOR A
CURE.



Marlon T. Riggs's
Black Is...
Black Ain't
www.newsreel.org

What do we do to get ourselves out of this mess?

We set the record straight.

Covering the basics: Racism exists in just about every facet of society, always adding, exponentially, to any problem we have. We're all affected by it, it has retarded us, hindered our progress, and has occupied gross amounts of our time and talents—rendering us, all of us, less than 100 percent sufficient. And, although, one particular group is primarily to blame for this, the fact remains—we've all contributed to the problem by participating in the illusion.

But, let's try looking at this from a ruling-class point of view. Popular belief dictates that if you're not number one—you're nothing. Grant it, from their perspective, there are entire races of people who embody nothingness. Everyday they see the alternative to not being in power; moreover, they'd rather kill than live a life of deprivation. This forces them to always stay one step ahead—by any means necessary—forces them to wear the mask of success, no matter how false. When inside they're tormented because all of their seeming good fortune “supremacy” completely relies on the forced inferiority of others.

Dr. Kobi Kambon explains our shared plight, *“From an African-centered perspective, the term ‘anti-African/anti-Black’ best captures the manifestation of white-Eurasian supremacy ... rather than such terms as ‘(white) racism’ or ‘white supremacy.’ Evidence suggests that there is a genetic aspect to the white supremacy domination trait in the European-Eurasian collective such that it follows a genetic inheritance pattern (i.e., has an early evolutionary foundation and is inter-generationally transmitted).”*†

O, the terrible pressure they must be under being forced to maintain expectations that are the results of crimes committed against humanity.

Keep in mind: this isn't about denouncing them because at the end of the day, the only “us” that exists is **humankind**. However, to properly respond to this race situation we need to understand what they're not so we can be clear about who we are. So the next time, Sir Tom and Madam Jemima Black, you even consider Whites being superior—in any fashion—resist the temptation. And, know that your malperception is based on the race construct that Psychology professor, Kevin Cokley believes, is *“useful in understanding a particular group's social standing [but is harmful because it] centers one in a reactionary metaphysics that does little to elucidate the group's ethos or character. A racial worldview [is] based on the belief that one's outer characteristics represent some inner temperamental, moral, behavioral, and ideological essence.”*†

Understanding that, if what has been said is true, that underneath the skin we're all 99.98 percent the same with exactly the same amount of potential, then that means that Blacks are no more inferior than Whites are superior.

THE BLACK COMMUNITY SEARCHES FOR THE APPRECIATIVE EYE

At this point, we've garnered some clarity about our affliction, so how do we heal ourselves? What problem do we address first? Toni Morrison gives us some insight: *“The damaging internalization of assumptions of immutable inferiority originating in an outside gaze” results in “racial inferiority.” The Black community is in need of “the reclamation of racial beauty” [however this is the elusive bluest eye because racial beauty is dependent upon appreciation from] “within the community” [and more importantly because we are social beings is greatly dependent upon] “wide public articulation.”*†

Wide public articulation? How is that achieved when in our own communities we can't seem to begin to transcend the opinion, as Spraggins puts it, that *“Society hates us”*?

Acclaimed director and producer of *Black Is...Black Ain't*, Marlon T. Riggs, explored Black identity and the collective Black conscience through his award-winning documentaries. Riggs, an openly homosexual man, who died from AIDS related complications in 1994, at the age of thirty-seven, a year before *Black Is...Black Ain't* was completed, suffers through the final stages of the disease while taping. Riggs literally stumbles on film and while we watch, he gives us his T-cell countdown.

In the final days of his life, this Magna Cum Laude Harvard graduate, professor, and scholar left us this simple and plain assessment about HIV/AIDS: *“AIDS forces you—because of the likelihood that you can die at this moment—AIDS forces you to deal with that; and, to look around you and say, hey I'm wasting my time if I'm not devoting every moment to thinking about: How can I communicate to Black people so that we start to look at each other, we start to see each other?”*†

And that's how we do it—how we achieve wide public articulation of Black is beautiful and Blacks are worthy of love—by seeing each other.

Riggs's words brought me to this easy revelation: We create the love we need by looking deep within, looking at each other, and acknowledging our similarities; by developing the familiarity and kinship needed to make room and concessions for our differences; by forming mutual understanding and respect. Learning to embrace each other will inevitably lead us to moving on up a little higher, to a place where we can constructively use the energy of our anger and disappointment to appreciate the fullness and variance of our lives.

So, for now, and from now on, let's not grieve each other anymore. We'll start small—each of us making a personal commitment to be a member of a new public—a public that articulates its love and appreciation of Black life and Black culture.

The indelible James Brown said, *“Say it loud, I'm Black and I'm proud.”* I say, let's go a little further than that, let's believe it, because Spraggins's simple and profound observation is true—we're dying in search of love.

I CANNOT
ACCEPT THE TERM
NOR THE NOTION
OF WHITE
SUPREMACY OR
ANY SUPREME
HUMANBEING FOR
THAT MATTER
BECAUSE IT MEANS
ONE IS SUPREME—
I'LL ALLOW NO
MAN THAT
POWER—NOT
BECAUSE I AM
WITHHOLDING IT
OR BEING
CONTRARY, IT IS
SIMPLY BECAUSE IT
LACKS TRUTH.



HEALING GOD'S CHILLUN'S BROKEN WINGS

How do we love? Just give it—give your patience, your kindness, your support, your voice.

If we don't, the statistics will get higher and the T-cell counts will get lower—more people will die from AIDS, and even more from broken hearts. This fate is inevitable—for if we have not love, we have nothing.

Apostle Paul, in his first epistle to the Corinthian Christians, admonished his “beloved children” to be messengers of The Greatest Love of All, and to let the people know that love bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things without failing. He exhorted them to give love and speak love.†

Riggs said, “There’s a cure for what ails us as a people, and that is talking to each other. [We need to confront] each other across [the] chasm of silence.”†

We need to confront each other with love, insist on being patient and supportive, and never cease to be kind. And, once we’ve achieved it within, we have to move, because HIV/AIDS has made it clear that the great race war is our petty hang-up and it will not be taking any prisoners. So, people, we need to be of one body—all of us, Black, White, and everyone in between and beyond.

Mary Fisher, a stalwart, HIV positive, AIDS Activist, warned us fifteen years ago that the disease, unlike America, has no color line, and that our small-mindedness, orneriness, and refusal to love would make HIV/AIDS the problem of the twenty-first century. Fisher said, “We have killed each other with our ignorance, our prejudice, and our silence. We may take refuge in our stereotypes, but we cannot hide there long, because HIV asks only one thing of those it attacks. Are you human?”†

Yes. Yes, we are humans.

A TO YOUR HEALTH

TO-DO LIST:

- Visit the CDC’s National HIV Testing Resources website: www.hivtest.org. There you can learn more about HIV and AIDS and the online database will provide you with the names and contact information of organizations in your community that offer testing and counseling.
- Get tested. Many clinics and public health locations offer free and confidential HIV testing.
- Get the results. If you can’t stand to wait, ask for the Oraquick test. It is 99.6% accurate, and is a simple oral swab test that is effective in detecting HIV-1/2 antibodies in twenty minutes.
- Get Counseling. Most HIV test sites have counselors you can talk to about sex, HIV, and AIDS. Knowledge is power.
- Get a Plan. If you have been engaging in risky sexual activities that have the potential to harm your good health, talk about it with the counselor. He/she can help you devise a risk-reduction plan that, if followed, can save your life and give you a brighter future.
- Follow through. It’s never too late to start doing the right thing. Protect yourself, the people you love and those who love you by being safe and smart.

Works Cited:

CDC Quote: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). A Heightened National Response to the HIV/AIDS Crisis Among African Americans. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; March 2007:p.2. Also available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/aa/resources/reports/heightendresponse.html>

Robert L. Williams Quote: Kambon, Kobi K. K. 1998. *African/Black Psychology in the American Context an African-centered Approach*. Tallahassee, FL.: Nubian Nation Publications.

Angela Y. Davis Quote: Riggs, Marlon T., Nicole Atkinson, and Christiane Badgley. 1995. *Black is...Black Ain't: A Personal Journey Through Black Identity*. San Francisco, CA: California Newsreel.

“Dig yourself” (understand yourself, acknowledge yourself, your actions) Quote by Stokely Carmichael: 1966 “Black Power” Speech: American Rhetoric, Top 100 Speeches: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/stokelycarmichaelblackpower.html> (Speech No. 65.)

W.E.B. Du Bois Quote: Du Bois, W. E. B. 1989. *The Souls of Black Folk*. “Our Spiritual Strivings” New York: Bantam Books.

“The Ruling Class” term c/o Marxism: The rich, powerful, and influential members of the society, capable of determining and enforcing political and social climates. (I prefer the ruling class term because the rich and powerful are not always white people.)

Audrey Smedley Quote: Pounder, C. C. H., Larry Adelman, Tracy Heather Strain, Paul Finkelman, Robin D. G. Kelley, James Oliver Horton, Ira Berlin, et al. 2003. *Race the Power of An Illusion. Episode two, The Story We Tell*. [San Francisco, Calif.]: California Newsreel.

Octavio Paz Quote: Paz, Octavio. 1995. *The Double Flame: Love and Eroticism*. New York: Harcourt Brace.

Gloria Steinem Quote: http://www.wisdomquotes.com/cat_racism.html

Kobi Kambon Quote: on, Kobi K. K. 1998. *African/Black Psychology in the American Context an African-centered Approach*. Tallahassee, FL.: Nubian Nation Publications.

Kevin Cokley Quote: Birt, Robert E. 2002. *The Quest for Community and Identity: Critical Essays in Africana Social Philosophy*. New critical theory. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. Essay: “To Be or Not to Be Black: Problematics of Racial Identity”

Toni Morrison Quote: Morrison, Toni. 1994. *The Bluest Eye*. “Afterword”. New York: Plume.

Marlon T. Riggs Quotes: Riggs, Marlon T., Nicole Atkinson, and Christiane Badgley. 1995. *Black Is...Black Ain't: A Personal Journey Through Black Identity*. San Francisco, CA: California Newsreel.

Apostle Paul Quote: KJV 1 Corinthians 3:15, and 1 Corinthians 13:7.

Mary Fisher Quote: 1992 Speech: “A Whisper of AIDS”. American Rhetoric Top 100 Speeches. <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/maryfisher1992nc.html> (Speech No. 52)



BLACK FREIGHTER
P R O D U C T I O N S

BLACK FREIGHTER PRODUCTIONS

P.O. BOX 374
BLUE ISLAND, ILLINOIS 60406

E-MAIL: HIV@BLKFR8R.COM

WE'RE ON THE INTERNET
WWW.BLKFR8R/HIV.COM

PLEASE DELIVER THIS PUBLICATION TO:

AIDS Alliance for Children Youth and Families
Website: www.aids-alliance.org

Black AIDS Institute
Website: www.blackaids.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
Website: www.cdc.gov/hiv

Dr. Rachael L. Ross, M.D., Ph.D. (Dr. Rachael)
Website: www.drrachael.com

Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC)
Website: www.gmhc.org

The Henry J. Kaiser Foundation (KFF)
Website: www.kff.org/hiv aids

National Association of People with AIDS (NAPWA)
Website: www.napwa.org

National HIV Testing Resources
Website: www.hivtest.org

