

CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY MONTH
FESTIVAL BY EXAMINING SLAVERY & BEYOND
(1800 to 2005): LESSONS FROM THE GREEN
PASTURE BAPTIST CHURCH IN
MILLEDGEVILLE, GEORGIA; & AN ANALYTIC
APPROACH TO ZIMBABWE'S COLONIAL ERA
(1800 to 1980): April 2005

Mercy Tsiwo-Chigubu, PhD.
Alumni of Michigan State University &
Assistant Professor of Early Childhood & Middle Grades at
Georgia College & State University

Abstract

All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality. It gives the segregator a false sense of superiority, and the segregated a false sense of inferiority.

Martin Luther King Jr. (1963)

This article provides an extremely influential account of how the Black church has played a significant role as a social agent of change amongst the Blacks in the USA from the days of slavery to date. Dating back from the 1800s, Blacks in the USA could be hanged by the slave masters – Whites, if they were caught reading or attempting to learn how to read (C-Span Book TV-2 USA, February, 2005). However, it is common knowledge that most African Americans found solace in the Black church which at times could be held in buildings or by the river banks, a practice that is still found in isolated parts of Zimbabwe today, where some indigenous groups that are called the: “Mapositori” in the Shona vernacular language whose literal translation would be “The Apostles”. During the slave era in the USA, a place of worship was not only utilized as a venue to fellowship in the name of the Lord God through Jesus Christ, but it was also used as a convenient comfort zone to discuss politics and thereby share coping strategies needed for survival amidst the prevailing social injustices and hurdles that they found themselves in on a daily basis.

A significant number of Black church ministers play a very leading role in sowing the seeds of harmony, morality, conflict resolution, respect, tolerance, acceptance, forgiveness, diversity, character building, peace in the Black communities, a contention that is supported by reference to the principle of “love your neighbor” a principle that Martin Luther King, Jr., one of the most renowned US Black leaders of the civil rights movement in the USA, believed to be strongly opposed to violence. While the church ministers of the 1800s could have had the responsibility of teaching fellow Blacks in the USA how to read and write, today we still find that the Black church leaders in the USA are faced with the onus to talk about issues surrounding large numbers of Blacks, especially males locked in prisons today. In the USA, Blacks make up about 21% of the total population, and nonetheless, we find that 75% of the prison inmates in the USA comprise Blacks, especially males. Further, when a random survey was carried out regarding the impact of the current war in Iraq on Black families in the USA when asked, 64% of congregants in one particular Black church indicated that they had a relative(s) or child(ren) fighting in Iraq (West, C. 2005 on C-SPAN TV- 2, 2005 Black History Month Episodes). We should bear in mind that the problems that are at the core of the Black families in the USA include among many; poverty, racial profiling, single parenting, drug abuse, teen parenting, unemployment, dwindling numbers of especially males in colleges and universities, especially masters and doctoral programs, and others.

This article highlights an encounter of how a Black church in Milledgeville Georgia, plays a significant role in educating Blacks in the USA about the cultural nuances of the past, present, and future using the single group studies approach, which in this case occurred in February 2005 during the Black History Month celebrations. I witnessed first hand, the impact of the “tourist approach” that was knowledge-based, and whose artistry emanated from both the congregants and their pastor Reverend James Harris Jr. Why call it “tourist approach?” According to scholars interested in multicultural issues like York (1992), celebrating Hawaii Week, Mexico Week, and Black History Month is a method called “tourist approach” because it is like taking a short trip for a brief period of time. Before I ever experienced the style in which Black History month was celebrated at this particular church in question, I used to have concerns regarding the “tourist approach”. However, I now would beg to differ from York. I would categorically state that attending that particular service, where the pastor and others actually role played the scenes of the 1800s or early 1900s on slave plantations in the USA. I learned extremely important information that no book be it in Zimbabwe, England, nor USA had ever taught me. I received a heavy dose of compressed information that was powerful enough to boost my morale into writing this article. It really was a defining moment for me, and it sparked off the memories of the late African American mother and poet Andre Geraldine Lorde (1934 – 1992) who summed up her philosophy in her best-known book, *The Black Unicorn* (1978) as follows:

“...when we are silent/ we are still afraid.
/So it is better to speak/ remembering
/ we were never meant to survive.”

(Gikow. L. & McGowan, S. 2002, p.55).

Lorde's philosophy also triggered various questions about some of the program contents of that particular evening's celebration, for example the brief overview of the 1905 Niagara Movement and its relationship to the 2005 Black History Month celebration. Typically, as many unanswered questions filtered in and out of my mind, I remembered the works of George Bernard Shaw who stated:

You see things; and you say, "Why?"
 But I dream things that never were;
 And I say, "Why not?"
 -George Bernard Shaw

The Niagara Movement of 1905

The scope that Reverend James Harris, Jr., Pastor and the Green Pasture Baptist Church (GPBC) adopted in celebrating the Black History month on this particular Friday of the 25th February, 2005; was based on the international theme of "The Niagara Movement" which began in February 1905 and would be the forerunner to the NAACP. According to the GPBC, the Niagara Movement renounced Booker T. Washington's accommodations policies set forth in his famed "Atlanta Compromise". The main purpose of the Niagara Movement was to request full manhood suffrage, giving Black men the right to vote and be treated equally as men. Founded in 1905, the Niagara Movement (organization) lasted until 1909 when White liberals joined with the nucleus of the scattered Niagara militants and founded the NAACP headed by W. E. B. Dubois (GPBC Annual Black History Program 2005).

Celebrating the Black History Month (2005) in Milledgeville, Georgia: Deep South

On this particular Friday, families came to church beginning at 7 pm, and the purpose was to celebrate Black History month. Some people were dressed in costumes that connected them in one way or the other to the continent of Africa, others wore the overalls and dress attire that used to be worn by Black slaves during the era of slavery in the USA. This was a moment that would educate the old and the young, the history of Blacks in the USA, and their rich heritage. The introduction to the program for the night included the call to worship, where the following exchanges took place:

Minister: "I was glad when they said unto me; Let us go into the house of the Lord".

Congregation: "Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem".

Minister: "For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere".

Congregation: "I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness".

Church ministers, whose role as teachers and reflective practitioners perform several important functions, including leading and researchers like Katz (1987) highlight their roles as caretaking, providing emotional support and guidance, instructing, and facilitating. Ministering demands thoughtfulness in teaching and leading. There is no

way to become an outstanding minister through adherence to routine, formula, habit, convention, or standardized ways of speaking and acting. Thoughtfulness calls for wide-awakeness – a willingness to look at the conditions of people’s lives, to consider alternatives and different possibilities, to challenge received wisdom and the taken-for-granted, and to link the congregation’s conduct with everyone’s consciousness. According to Ayers (1995, p. 60) it requires strength and courage – the strength to think in a time of thoughtlessness, and the courage to care in a culture of carelessness, and forgetfulness. I would tend to agree with Ayers because it was through the wonderful capacity of the minister James Harris, Jr., Pastor and the Green Pasture Baptist Church that I discovered the fact that about 100 to 200 years ago during the slave era, African American slaves had their own national anthem. This antidote made me think of Robert White (1968, 1976) who states that people have a continuing drive toward competence, which is a powerful motivating agent in their lives.

He defined competence as “effectiveness in dealing with the environment”, and in this case “slavery” was the hostile environment. Further, Mercy Chigubu (2000) in her study on the impact of HIV/AIDS on orphans’ self-esteem indicated that the ultimate goal should be the internalization of esteem so that the individual will not remain permanently dependent on others to supply one’s feelings of self-worth. Family scholars interested in human development also advocate that the most effective answer to achieve competence is to instill internal feelings of self-worth. They go on to state that this knowledge of capability makes adults (and children, too, for that matter) feel good about themselves, feel that they are worth something – and in that knowledge lies the foundation of inner self-esteem (Greenberg, Pysozynski, & Solomon, 1995). By attending this particular Black History Month celebration in Georgia, I gained a very powerful opportunity to become competent in writing this article with a reasonable portion of confidence in myself that would not require the plaudits of others to sustain it. Truly, I gained a sense of efficacy interpreted by lessons learned that night.

Lesson of a Lifetime:

I never knew that African American slaves, 100 years ago, had their own “Negro National Anthem”. This information came to my knowledge on 25 February 2005 from the Green Pasture Baptist Church, as it was part of the celebration program. The Negro National Anthem is called “Lift Every Voice And Sing” and reads as follows:

Lift Every Voice And Sing “THE NEGRO NATIONAL ANTHEM”

Lyrics: James Weldon Johnson
Music: R. Rosamond Johnson

Lift every voice and sing, till earth and heaven ring
Ring with the harmonies of liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise, high as the listening skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,

Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on, till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod, bitter the chastening rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady past beat, have not our weary feet,
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past, till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who hast by thy might, led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the paths, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,
Lest our hearts, drunk with wine of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand, may we forever stand?
True to God, true to our native land.

Moment of Prayer at the Milledgeville Gathering

Following the Negro National Anthem, was a moment of prayer which was led by the pastor. We all understand that prayer is petition directed at a supernatural being or power, and in this case, to God Almighty. I felt great honor to be part of this particular celebrations activity which accommodated prayer as the cornerstone of the celebrations, and to be part of the service led by a church minister who reminded the congregants of the works of Martin Luther King, Jr., a 1964 Nobel Peace Prize winner and a Baptist church minister who became one of the most important leaders of civil rights movement in the United States. While incarcerated, he wrote the following from his Birmingham City Prison cell:

“There was a time when the church was very powerful. It was during that period when early Christians rejoiced when they were deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed.....Wherever the early Christians entered a town, the power structure got disturbed and immediately sought to convict them for being ‘disturbers of the peace’ and ‘outsider agitators’.....They were too God-intoxicated to be ‘astronomically intimidated’. Things are different now. The contemporary church is often a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. It is so often the arch supporter of the status quo.”

(Luther King Jr., 1963).

The Milledgeville prayer session was soon followed by a Scripture reading from the Holy Bible, and preaching. The program involved various activities that also conveyed the

ministry through “dance” that was performed during the era of slavery. In memory of the girl-child-slave of the 1800s and the 1900s, young girls were given stage and opportunity to dance in the fashion that a girl-child-slave would have danced in the absence of the slave-owner’s attention. According to Dodge, Colker, & Heroman (2002), dance is art of using one’s body to express ideas, to respond to music, and to convey feelings. There is no doubt that when the slaves wanted to reduce stress tensions from the tribulations of oppression and slavery, and consequently, they could have resorted to dancing in bondage if time and space permitted. Research shows that dancing can be the freest and most joyful of all large motor activities (Hendrick, 2001). As part of the celebration, a team of young adolescents danced displaying how slaves expressed ideas and conveyed feelings of joy, trauma, grief, violence, suicide, terror, loss, control and mastery, environmental safety, coping with an overwhelming event or stimuli, re-association of dissociated parts, re-establishment of secure connections and the list goes on! The dance session was portrayed with a mood of joy and sorrow, and yet deceiving with the attire that spelled the prowess of the roots of Africa. Indeed, the attire was eye-catching.

Attire for the Celebrations of the Annual Black History Month: February 2005

The celebrations called for all sorts of different attire that would highlight the meaning of the event. I remember that I wore one of my African attire which originally came from West Africa through a Zimbabwean friend who had friends in the USA that came from Ghana. My family and I arrived at the Green Pastures Baptist Church when the service had already started. In no time, we found ourselves joining in singing the melodious Negro National Anthem. This was the first time I had ever heard of the “Negro National Anthem”. After a while, the pastor began preaching by reminding the congregation about the humiliation, the suffering, and the demeaning roles that were played in the USA by African American slaves of 100 – 200 years ago. He mentioned that despite all the odds, when the people of God had nowhere else to turn to in the era of slavery, they turned to prayer. He reminded all that during the slavery era, Blacks were judged by the color of their skin, and not by the content of their knowledge. He stressed that it was an era where it was an abomination to be “Black”, and an era where the slave master could even kill the slave if caught reading the Bible, or learning to read. According to Harris (2005); “The slave had no right to land, no right to vote, no right to question authority, no right to run away from the plantation, and no right to have a family and nor to keep his own children”. He stated that the slaves found themselves limited in finding ways for survival, and out of desperation and hope, prayer became their ultimate answer. However, if the slave master caught the slave praying, that slave could be punished by whipping, or even death. Therefore, the slave found ways to communicate with fellow slaves, and one of the modes of secret communication was by mere “singing”.

Music

According to Snyder (p. 165) “Music is the most direct route to thinking, because it requires neither words nor symbols to be perceived”. In relation to this modern era of empirical evidence, I found it fascinating that two hundred years ago, the Black slaves knew that music was a powerful tool to evoke emotional responses that would open the

gates to their neo-cortex and higher level thinking, thus misleading the slave masters. How did the slaves use music as a tool to call for a meeting? It was done through music. One might wonder how slaves on a plantation could send secret messages through music, messages that would not make sense to the slave master, and yet convey important life stories needed to cushion the oppression that was lashed out at the slaves. Music was a form of communication that was non-threatening to the slave master and slave madam, and in some cases it was a way of saying:

“We are here by the river,
Come and join us in prayer,
Come and get some reading lessons,
Come and let us fellowship together!
Today, let us meet at the riverside
That faces the rock that is close to that tree
Where, we buried Chavepocho and...
Minty’s brother’s twins and so on”.

(Harris, 2005).

The church minister proceeded to remind the congregation that one of the songs related to his speech was:

“We gonna go and kneel down to pray
Down by the riverside, down by the riverside, down by the riverside,
We ‘re gonna steal our way to pray
Down by the riverside, and study war no more
And gonna study war no more, and gonna study war no more
And gonna study war no more”

When that song was sung, every Black person in that specific neighborhood would know the implications of that song. Further, if everyone nearby joined in the singing, the slave owner would not have the slightest clue of what was going on. The slaves would know that the Negro song meant that:

“There is a meeting where we will
All secretly join our hands together
In prayer to pray to God the Father”.

(Harris, 2005).

The slaves also had their own way of confusing their slave masters. They had a variety of songs that would be sung in diversified melodies, and still convey similar messages. One of the Negro songs that were meant to communicate that there would be a prayer session at a given time, and at a particular venue went as follows:

“There is a meeting in a wilderness,
I know you by the way you cut the sugar cane
You bend and you gonna kneel,

Ain't nobody to pray with me
 You gonna kneel and pray in a wilderness
 There is a meeting, ain't nobody to pray with me
 There is a meeting in a wilderness".

When the slaves heard of this song, they would know that on this particular day, they would not meet by the riverside, but in a forest location far away from the river. The pastor described how they would meet and what kind of prayer sessions they would have. One might ponder to ask this question: "How did slaves pray in captivity?" The pastor participated in a role play with eight of his congregants who came to the pulpit to kneel could read, and would teach others to read at least three to five words or more each time they met. He then prayed as it was then in the days of slavery. He indicated that the prayer was very brief, and it was kept as a secret, otherwise they would run the risk of getting caught, be hanged, and left for dead. Here is how he said the then Negro prayer:

Negro slave prayer of 100 – 200 years ago based on the Bible Book of Isaiah 54:

Ya 'al, how are you doin' ya'al? Bow down and pray, ya' al! Glory!
 Father God, bless us. Remove tyranny that breaks our lives every day.
 Remove terror attacking us. Save this heritage. Come to us Holy One.
 Give ear. Come to us. Hear us that our souls may live. Amen. He-y-men!
 Ya'al, it's the end of prayer. Ya' al, go home! Heey-men! Amen"
 (Harris, 2005).

Slavery in the USA made church and the Bible the only hope and solace for African Americans who would meet at rivers to worship as indicated in the Bible with verses which state:

"By the rivers of Babylon – there we sat down and
 there we wept when we remembered Zion.
 On the willows there we hung our harps.
 For there our captors asked us for songs,
 and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,
 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!'
 How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" (Psalm 137 verse1-6),

On the other hand, some slave masters used the Bible to justify their acts of brutality in enslaving, for instance chopping off a slave's ears if the slave was caught learning to read a book, or hanging a slave to death as part of slave-based-lynch-picnic-entertainment called "pick-a-nigger-for- lynching". An example of the Bible verse that could be used to justify the brutality is from 2 Peter verse 12 which states:

"These people, however, are like irrational animals,
 mere creatures of instinct, born to be caught and killed".

It is well documented that some slave masters consistently raped their slaves and the children would belong to the slave master who would sell the children at will, and make a fortune out of selling the child-slaves to various slave masters. Another verse that was popular with the slave masters was Hebrews Chapter 13 verse 17 which states the following:

“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing – for that would be harmful to you.”

Slavery became an institution where the master expected the slave to be obedient, and submissive. Based on the slave masters' constitution of enslaving, slavery became a culture where the enslaved became inferior objects, or sex machines in the case of the enslaved women. In celebrating the importance of the role of the African American families and especially women during the days of slavery, one of the female congregants or a sister-in-Christ, commemorated this memorable event by reciting one of the most popular and empowering poems written by a famous African American poet called Maya Angelou. Her poem is about getting the strong will and strength to rise, hence its name is “Still, I Rise” which reads:

Still **I** **Rise:**
 This Poem Belongs To Maya Angelou. It Was Written By Maya Angelou:

(In this paper, the poem is written with permission and acknowledgements of Maya Angelou, an African American Poet. This poem was recited by one of the female congregants or sister-in-Christ in remembrance of all the female slaves of the US Black Slavery Era)

“You may write me down in history
 With your bitter, twisted lies,
 You may tread me in the very dirt
 But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
 Why are you beset with gloom?
 'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
 Pumping in my living room.
 Just like moons and like suns,
 With the certainty of tides,
 Just like hopes springing high,
 Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
 Bowed head and lowered eyes?
 Shoulders falling down like teardrops.

Weakened by my soulful cries.
Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awfully hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own back yard.
You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs? Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise”.

By Maya Angelou: (Internet Source, Google search engine, 2005).

Angelou Maya's Poem "Still I Rise" was included on the program as an important tool to revive people's memories, or to teach those who did not know this particular portion of history regarding courageous contributions and sacrifice made by African American female slaves, for instance; Harriet Tubman (1820 - 1913) who with the help of contacts along the Underground Railroad, escaped from her enslavement in Bucktown, in Maryland. She later on dedicated the rest of her livelihood towards helping other slaves to "rise" and escape from slavery. In 1850, Tubman joined the Underground Railroad, and during the following decade she returned down South twenty times to assist approximately 300 slaves to escape from enslavement. Harriet Tubman is well known for her work during the US Civil War. She was proactive, she indeed "rose" and served as a nurse, scout, as well as a spy for the Union Army. According to Gikow and McGowan (2002), Tubman was nicknamed the "Moses of her people" who never lost a single slave to the Southern militia, nor ever got caught by them. As part of her "rising"

mission, Harriet Tubman established a home for the elderly and indigent Blacks. The establishment which later on became known as the Harriet Tubman Home was situated in Auburn, New York . After “rising” for nine rigorous decades, she died on March 10, 1913 at the age of 93 years.

The celebration ceremony also paid tribute to the contributions made by African American child slaves, as well as male slaves. This was done by letting a young male child read portions of the works of Martin Luther King, Jr. while he was in the Birmingham City Jail (1963); where he wrote:

“ I guess it is easy for those who never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, ‘Wait’. But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim, when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick, brutalize and even kill your black brothers and sisters with impunity; when you see the vast majority of your million Negro brothers smothering in air-tight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-oldand see the depressing clouds of inferiority begin to form in her little personality by unconsciously developing a bitterness toward White people, when you are hurried by day and haunted at night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tip-toe stance never quite knowing what to expect next, and plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of “nobodiness”; then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait” (Martin L. King, Jr. 1963; In May, Collins-Chebanian, & Wong, 1998 p. 315).

Looking at the African American/Black heritage in retrospect

The pastor reiterated the fact that the Black History month reminds society of the rich heritage that bestows African Americans. He also reminded his congregants the plight of Blacks in terms of oppression in the USA that can be identified with the teachings of the Bible from the Book of Exodus Chapter 14. This notion is explained in full by York (1992) who defines oppression as “unjust and cruel use of authority to harm a person and keep that person from having access to society’s benefits” (p. 19) He stressed the importance of knowing what to do when the situation looks bad. In the African American community of today, a good percentage of Black males in the USA, are locked up in jails. African American population in the USA is about 21% of the nation’s population, and yet 75% of the inmates in the US prisons are Blacks. There are numerous problems regarding structural inequalities, institutionalized racism, poverty, class stratification based on color, drug in flux in Black communities, teenage pregnancies, teen suicide, denial to opportunities that lead to better education and good paying jobs, police brutality against Black offenders, a chain of untold segregation, racial injustice, and others.

He went on to remind his audience “...not to walk in the valley of despair, but to demonstrate that through prayer, there is God’s demonstration for freedom”. He indicated that every single day, there is a Black person experiencing the trauma of

oppression, the ugliness of depression, and the nastiness of disempowerment. The good news he preached about was as follows: “When I mess up, and when friends run away from me, God is still there for me” (Harris, 2005). He reminded people that African Americans have come a long way, and they have come from scratch, where they had nothing to hold onto. As soon as he mentioned those words, he led another song from days of old which says:

“Ain’t God alright?”
God will see you through
The love of Jesus is amazing
We got to keep holdin’ on
To the love of the Almighty” (Harris, 2005).

The Holy Bible suited both the slave master and the enslaved

The pastor highlighted the fact that the slave owners justified their deeds by referring to verses of the Bible which say: “Slaves, obey your masters...” while the slaves resorted to verses that stated “The Lord is my shepherd I’ll not want...”
At that juncture, he led another Negro song of years ago:

“Ain’t nobody,
Do me like Jesus,
Do me, do me, do me,
No! No! Nobody
Ain’t Nobody
Do me like Jesus” (Harris, 2005).

The Reverend then wound up the sermon by narrowing down the focus of celebrating Black History Month with Georgia on mind, and specifically Milledgeville’s Black History. He taught people to honor with dignity the achievements accomplished by some Blacks in Milledgeville. Here are some of the Blacks who were remembered on this particular evening in question:

Georgia Milledgeville’s Black History, reprinted:

(with permission from Rev. J. Harris, pastor of the Green Pasture Baptist Church).

Oldest Black Church	Flagg Chapel Baptist Church c. 1830 (175 years old)
The Honorable Floyd Griffin, Jr.	First Black Mayor of Milledgeville
Alonza Slater	Founder of Slater’s Funeral Home
Herman Waller, Jr.	First Black Police Chief of Milledgeville
Allen C. Nelson	First Black Chairman – Baldwin County BOE
Dennette Odum-Jackson	First Black City Councilwoman/Mayor Pro-Tem
Mary Ann Smith	First Black Director of Nursing CSH
Brenda Davis-Murell	First Black Female Wardens
Rose M. Renfroe	State of Georgia
Patricia Brown-Hicks	Department of Corrections
Minnie Johnson	First Black Personnel Director/ City of Milledgeville

Mary Prudence Murray Cook	First Black Professor of Nursing – GC&SU Member – Baldwin County BOE
Oscar Davis, Sr.	First Black County Commissioner – Baldwin County Owner & Operator – Peoples Funeral Home
Geneva Bell Davis	First Black Woman elected to Baldwin County Board of Commissioners. Filled un-expired term of late husband.
Payton Brailsford Cook	First Black hired in Chaplaincy Program at Central State Hospital. First Black Division Chief – Developmental Disabilities Division
Henry Taylor, Sr.	First Black Director of Personnel – Central State Hospital
Geraldine Dennis	First Black Deputy Sheriff, Founding Director - Milledgeville Rape Crisis Center Lois
White Lane	Teacher / Curriculum Director/ Author
Baldwin High School Class of 1966	First Integrated High School Class at Baldwin Had 5 Blacks only
Baldwin High School (1967)	First 5 Blacks graduated from Baldwin High
Chuck Downing	First Black Coroner of Baldwin County
Napoleon Clemmons	First Black Supply Sergeant Milledgeville National Guard Armory
Jackie Caruthers	Second Black Female Coach Morris Brown College
Georgia Military College (1965)	1 st Black to be enrolled at Georgia Military College
(1966)	1 st Black to graduate from Georgia Military College

Concluding the Black History Month's Celebration of 2005 at the Milledgeville Church, in Middle Georgia: Deep South

Soul Food Feast

In order to wind up the evening's celebration, everyone settled down in the basement of the church building and participated in the sharing and/or eating from the "Soul Food Feast" immediately following the church fellowship service. I had never eaten "soul food" before, however I had heard the terms "soul food", "soul sister", as well as "soul brother" and I had always wondered what exactly soul food comprised. For the first time in my life ever, I participated in the feasting of "soul food", and this will always be a historic moment to remember! There is a saying that goes: "The way to a man's heart, is through his stomach" (a favorite quote that my Zimbabwean Home Economics teacher always used in justifying the importance of learning or teaching Home Economics in schools: to preserve the marriage institution, she always reckoned). However, on this particular night, when I had several bites of the soul food, I came up with my own slogan which went: "The only way to a Black person's heart is through the soul food feast". This food has strong cultural links with the slave culture of the 1800s, and I applaud the fact that the celebration held at this particular church, decided to conclude the event by

educating some of us all about “soul food”, which has become a very rare and endangered commodity in today’s world of “Pizzas, Hamburgers and others”.

Reflecting on Blacks in US, Zimbabwe, and the African Diaspora:

Similarities Drawn from the Black History in US with the History of Zimbabwe

There are numerous similarities that exist between the African American era of slavery in the US and the history of the era of segregation against Zimbabwean Blacks in partly the 1800s and conspicuously in the 1900s up until the era when the current president Robert Mugabe came into power in 1980. I could relate to how the slaves endured the torture of segregation, because I grew up in a similar era of the then Rhodesia government under the leadership of the then prime minister Ian Smith, whose laws of segregation were regulated under a statute termed as “Separate Development” or what other countries like South Africa called “Apartheid”. During the 1960s, we see civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. getting imprisoned in the Birmingham City Jail in the USA, while in South Africa we see civil rights leader Nelson Mandela getting imprisoned at the Robben Islands Jail for twenty seven years for speaking out against discrimination, racism and “apartheid”, and at the same time, in the then Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), the civil rights leader Robert Mugabe gets imprisoned in the Chikurubi Jail in the then Salisbury (now Harare) for 10 years for speaking out against racism, discrimination leveled against Blacks in the then Rhodesia, and the segregation laws of “separate development”. While in the Rhodesia’s Salisbury prison, Mugabe received numerous “torture-electric-shocks” on various parts of his body, and when his only child he had with his late Ghanaian first wife Sally, he was prohibited from going to West Africa to attend the funeral, and the main reason being for speaking against segregation.

In a letter from the Birmingham City Jail Luther King Jr. wrote: “I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” (1963, p312 in May, Collins-Chobanian, & Wong). This school of thought was reiterated in South Africa by Nelson Mandela and the Black Movements against apartheid, and by Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe with other Pan Africanist Movements against Separate Development in the then Rhodesia. Further, York (1991) reminds us that discrimination is the “practice of giving different treatment to a person based on race, sex, religion, ethnicity, age, mental capacity, physical ability and sexual preference. Based on this definition, if we look in retrospect and ask how blacks in the then Rhodesia lived, one will find that there are numerous similarities that were shared between the blacks in the US and those in the then Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe in terms of struggling for survival against the atrocities of institutionalized racism and segregation. In the 1960s, Blacks in the then Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, could be imprisoned if they were caught drinking clear beer, which in those days, was only meant for Whites and not Blacks. There were certain departmental stores where Blacks were not allowed to go inside. If they wanted to buy a shirt or dress, for instance Blacks would have to point to the item from outside, and the salesperson would wrap it from within the store, bring it outside, collect the money, and hand over the item to the Blacks standing outside the store. Further, Blacks were landless and many still remain landless to this present date, after their land had been taken away from them by

the British during the 1800s, and they were moved to concentration arid areas called reserves, that were rocky and not as fertile. Up until 1980, Blacks were not allowed to go to White schools, which in those days were called Group A schools, and Blacks were only allowed to go to Group B schools which were extremely impoverished. Most high paying jobs were only tailored for White Rhodesians. Consequently, Black natives could only become teachers (hence I am a teacher today), nurses, pastors, housemaids, nannies, garden boys, janitors, nuns, priests, and subsistence or peasant farmers. Blacks who comprised 85% of the population, had been transplanted from their original ancestral homelands that were on rich fertile soil to sandy soil, lived either in arid rural areas called reserves, or densely populated ghettos called “Blacks-only” townships, or “tangwenas” a Shona native term for “make-shift slums”. One might wonder where the term “tangwena” came from. This term is a socially accepted terminology to explain abject poverty shelter made from boxes or cloth, or sticks. That term comes from a chief called Tangwena, who, by virtue of protesting against his moral conscience, left his comfortable home in defiance of the imbalance between the “haves” and “have-nots”, went to join the homeless and tasted what it was to live as a homeless and landless pauper in one’s country of birth. If I could walk you reader a little further, imagine a person like Bill Cosby, or Oprah Winfrey, or Martha Stewart, or Larry King joining the homeless people, and standing in street corners begging! Imagine what impact it would have on the media locally and otherwise. With that analogy in mind, one would understand why 99.99% of these “Black-only” slums or any indecent housing for homeless Blacks in Zimbabwe are called “tangwena(s)”.

On the other hand, Whites who comprised about 15% of the population, either owned vast commercial farms on rich fertile soil, or lived in exclusive sparsely populated “Whites-only” suburbs. The only time Blacks were allowed to stay in the “Whites-only” suburbs or “Kuma Yard” is when they had to go and work as nannies, house-girls, cooks, and gardeners/garden boys, and lived in very small one-roomed “out-houses” or “boys’ kaya” a demeaning term that was given by the White masters to refer to the “Blacks-only” servants’ quarters. The Black workers were referred to as “house-girl” or “garden-boy” regardless of their ages, and the employer would be referred to as “ba’as” or “master”, or “madam”, or “misses”, or “pikinini ba’as” for the master’s son who could be as young as 3 years old, while the garden boy could be as old as 65 years old. If the master, madam, or their children got mad or spiteful at the nanny, garden boy, or any Black person, the servants could receive demeaning labels like “blarry kaffir” which was the terminology used in the then Rhodesia in place of the “N-----” word that was used for Blacks in the USA. The workers’ families were not allowed to visit and stay for long periods of time. Actually at times, Blacks would be required to vacate the “Kuma Yard” or White suburban areas before 7pm if they had visited their relatives in the suburbs. Blacks, especially males, would be mauled by viciously trained police dogs before getting locked up in prison, if caught loitering or drinking clear beer Castle Lager which is a beer similar to any US beer brand, for example Bud Wesier; in the “Kuma Yard” or White suburban areas after 7 pm. I have vivid memories of what it used to be like because both my grandmother and my mother once worked as nannies and/or house-girls in the “Kuma Yard”. I used to wonder where my grandmother got the strength of

running like an Olympic athlete each time her master or madam stood out of their huge glamorous mansion and scream at grandmother who would have taken a lunch break, and had to go back to the kitchen to iron clothes or do house chores. The moment her master or madam yelled: “Mary”; my grandmother, in her house-girl or nanny uniform comprising a maid’s bonnet or hat, flowery or colored gingham dress, matching white apron with edges nicely decorated with flowery or colored gingham frills, and brown, black, or white canvas cloth shoes; would drop to the ground whatever food she would still be eating, swallow hurriedly the portion that would be in the mouth, jump like she had had a snake glide into her skirt, and run as if a lion was chasing after her. As she ran frantically, she would be simultaneously responding at the top of her voice by screaming with a borrowed Anglicized Rhodesian accent: “M-a-d-a-a-am” or “Mas-t-e-er” or “Baas”, and in some cases, the frenzied running would be hampered by the rush to wear the canvas shoes she would have removed while eating her lunch. What was amazing is that all these calculated and yet inevitable episodes used to make me feel second class, angry, helpless, disenfranchised and disempowered as a 6 year old or 7 year old or more. I just felt as though my immediate role models were paying more attention to their abusive and enslaving masters, at the expense of having quality time with me. I could not help resenting the institution of the enslaved house-girl/garden boy and the master/madam/baas institution.

According to York (1992), “empowerment means having a positive and accurate sense of being able to take action based on that sense of self”. I agree with York because I had my self esteem battered and dreams shattered to witness the immediate people I admired and valued as role models, living in their own world of “transformed slavery”. Each time I visited either my grandmother or my mother in the “kuma yard” meaning “whites-only-suburbs”, I would be allowed to stay with them for one to two weeks only, and during those sessions, I got to play once in a while with the master’s children. Either my mother or my grandmother would stress the point that I should comply with them, and in order to show respect, I should always call the master’s children who would be slightly older than me, same age as me, or even younger than me “pikinini ba-a-as” meaning “young-boy-soon-to-become-my- highly-respected-master” or “pikinini mad-a-a-m” meaning “young-girl-soon-to-become-my-highly-respected-madam”.

When I defied using those terms, my grandmother and/or mother, in fear of losing their jobs, ended up making me stay indoors in the one-roomed servant’s quarters and never to play outside. I look back and realize that it was a dichotomy for me then. I wanted to spend quality time with my immediate family, and I would end up as a latchkey child in the “Whites-only” suburbs. That explains why I would long to go back to the ghetto and live in abject poverty with the extended relatives and at least play, than to be with the immediate family, eat good food, but stay indoors facing four walls of a match-box of a room, and deprived of play. That was no fun at all! Sooner or later, I figured it was better to be a happy pauper in the ghetto, than to be a well-fed latch-key child. According to research, through play, children grow intellectually, socially, emotionally, morally, and physically (Van Hoorn Nourot, Scales, & Alward, 1993).

On a positive note, I would spend long hours either engaged in solitary play or reading excessively, or writing essays from numerous volumes of mostly British children’s books and partly Rhodesian children’s books that I read in solitude. Both my

mother and grandmother worked for different couples whose parents lived in England. Both couples had young children of my age or so, and they used to receive from England numerous boxes of used and new clothes, toys, food, children's books, fiction books, magazines, and you name it! It was no surprise that if one visited either my mother or grandmother's servant's quarters, the environment would be print rich because they would get all the unwanted surplus books from their rich bosses who also had overseas networks. Consequently, coming to visit my immediate relatives briefly as it were made short and long term negative as well as positive impact on me in terms of exposure to story books from other cultures, especially that the books that they received from England had collections from the USA, Mexico, China, Japan, Canada, Africa, and many others. They always say: "...in every black cloud, there is a silver lining", meaning there were advantages and disadvantages of having one's immediate family member(s) working as "nannies" or "house-maids" in the all-White suburbs where the children or relatives could only come to visit briefly. To some extent, these new family roles unleashed friction and contradictions to the values of African family lives, and nonetheless created societal traps that were demeaning culturally!

In most case than not, there was a stinging stigma attached to those parents working in the all-White suburbs or as they were nick-named "kuma-Yard" (by other Blacks who did not work in all-White households) "Kuma-Yard" was a sarcastic term which literally meant: "Whites lived on bigger portions or "yards" of land in the suburbs built on land forcibly taken away from Blacks, and were Blacks were prohibited to live unless they were enslaved nannies or garden boys." The stigma did not spare the children of those "Blacks" whose parents worked "Kuma-Yard". It was a common thing to have such derogatory statements like: ".Hello X, the Black-White from Kuma-Yard" thrown at you after visiting relatives from the all-White suburbs and returned to the ghettos or townships or reserves. However, it was also very common to have the elementary teachers praise you for the tremendous command of skills in reading fluently, vocalizing elegantly, and essay writing gained from reading books while staying at the "all-White suburban areas or Kuma-Yard". It was also not surprising to have friends tell you that they wished their parents worked "Kuma-Yard" so that they would bring to the townships or ghetto, or reserves, some dolls and toys from England, books and exotic book-cases, clothing and others like I brought along with me after the end of my brief stay in the "only-Whites-suburban areas". What my friends failed to realize was that even though I would bring with me numerous material tangibles, my inner dreams would have been shattered. I might have been good at hiding the negative impact of the discrimination, racism, and segregation that I would have encountered first hand through the hierarchical practices of the segregated family institutions that my immediate relatives operated or worked from, however, the truth of the matter was that my self-esteem would have been severely battered. The system of "confinement in the servants' quarters" based on the color of my skin, an experience I would have had during my entire stay in the suburbs, was not only demeaning, but it was just as horrendous as being a juvenile captive.

Racism in the then Rhodesia

Blacks in the then Rhodesia, currently Zimbabwe, endured demeaning encounters of racism, a recurring ordeal which was the order of the day, demeaning as it was.

According to York (1992), racism is a belief that one race is better than another and using that belief as the basis for dominating other people. One might ask how one defines “racism”. Instead of giving book definitions, I am going to narrate just a few of the many real life situations. A good example is that if a Black person was standing in the line to be served in the bank, and a White person came after the Black, the bank teller would, by law, serve the White late comer first, and the Black person later. For instance, when the Black person’s turn to cash in her/his pay check arrived, they would be deliberately and systematically given all the dirtiest bank notes. It would be a demeaning experience to witness a bank teller flipping through the bank notes, and each time she came across a dirty or torn note, she would pull it out to give to the Black customer. What such an action does to the Black person is to convey a mixed message that either you are worthless, or your skin makes you sub-human, inferior, dirty, second class, and so on.

Further, if a Black woman happened to give birth to a White or Bi-racial child, she could either be imprisoned or if lucky, the light skinned child would be taken away from her by the police. The brown children or Bi-racial children who were forcibly snatched away from their Black mothers who at times would have been raped by their masters, or secretly consented since racial intermarriages were banned, were put in orphanages where they would never see their mothers ever again. This created a class of another race in Rhodesia, and this group of people was given the term “Coloreds”. In times of war, the “Colored” men were said to be put in the fore-front, and if disaster came during the war, the Bi-racial soldiers were the ones to be killed en masse. Colored people lived in their own secluded sections of different cities in the then Rhodesia. They had a far better status than the Black people of Rhodesia. “Colored” people were not considered Black, and that was a shock when I went to England and when I came to the USA only to realize that some people would refer to me as “Colored”, to which I would correct them that I was “Black”. In the then Rhodesia, it was a privilege to Bi-racial especially for women whose light brown-skinned color afforded them far superior status than the Black people. Unfortunately, Bi-racial men were not as fortunate even when they had their “light brown-skin color”. If there was any war to be fought, they were the ones to be put on the fore-front of the Rhodesian army which comprised of White soldiers only. Overall, the Bi-racial group of people in the then Rhodesia was a class higher than the Blacks, and a class that carried a lesser status than the White people.

Racism in the then Rhodesia created divisions and disharmony among Black families of that nation. Consequently some very dark skinned people felt overly marginalized to a point where they started applying strong bleaching facial creams that contained corrosive mercury that would leave their dark skins turned to light brown, if not yellow. It also became very common to come across some men and women who would have faces that were very light skinned. If you and I tried to stretch our hands to greet them, we would almost faint with surprise because their hands would be dark as coal while the faces were as light brown as a sun-ripened mango or orange. Apparently, in those days it was very common to hear all sorts of verbal abuse and sarcasm thrown against those trying to look like White people by bleaching their skins; for example sarcastic phrases like: “Kumeso Fanta, Makumbo Coca-Cola” which means (Face that is skin-bleached is as light in color as the pop drink called FANTA, while the legs and hands are as dark in color as the pop drink: Coca-cola). Racism made some Blacks in the

then Rhodesia to bleach their faces in order to emulate White people, and also in the hope of getting hired in prestigious and good paying jobs that did not want “ugly dark skinned faces” in the fore-front of the company. Therefore it was not surprising to see nannies, housemaids, cooks, or even overly ambitious garden boys (whose low pay would make it a mockery for them to spend their meager salaries on bleaching creams), applying skin bleaching creams, in order to avoid “scaring off” their boss’ children with their pitch or jet black, dark-skinned faces.

Schooling in the then Rhodesia:

Black students had to go through different examinations, and once they failed, they had to stop going to school. White students did not have to be reprimanded if they did not do well. All opportunities were tailor made to see them succeed, while hurdles were deliberately put in place to deny opportunities to many potential Black students. As a result, a very small percentage of Blacks gained entry if any, into the University of Rhodesia, and hence women became nurses, home economics, primary, secondary, preschool, and college, and kindergarten teachers. On the other hand, men ended up becoming policemen, primary and secondary school teachers, nurses, and pastors. Those who did not make it in school, ended up doing nothing, or ended up working as garden boys and house-maids. High paying jobs like mechanical engineering, pilots, banking, real estate, accounting, university professor, and others were reserved for Whites. Segregation was also equivalent to poverty, racism, human suffrage, and exploitation, and oppression.

The Abolition and Dismantling of Segregation, Racism, and Discrimination

When Robert Mugabe, the first Black president came into power in 1980, he dismantled the racial inequalities, the structural inequalities, racial discrimination, segregation, and revamped the system in order to integrate Group A and Group B schools, and to allow landless Blacks move out of slavery and to own land. He empowered Blacks, especially women by banning all the skin-bleaching creams. He convinced Blacks that it was Okay to be a dark in skin color. At first, it was a rude shock for some who had self-concept that was broken and shattered. However, they soon got over it with time. He also established a Women’s Affairs Department, and in 2005 in the whole of Africa, he was the first president to appoint the first Black female president.

The Blacks in Zimbabwe strongly believe that for as long as they are landless, they are still chained in slavery and bondage. The only difference between the Blacks in the US and the Blacks in Zimbabwe is that the Blacks in Zimbabwe still have not tasted the nuances and rejuvenation that the US Blacks are experiencing by celebrating “The Black History Month”. I hope one day, Zimbabwe will borrow this exciting holiday, and take a moment to educate both the young and old about the richness of the Black History and Heritage. They are many new things that I learned from attending this celebration at the Green Pasture Baptist Church in Milledgeville, Georgia: Deep South.

I hope one day, Zimbabwe and the rest of Africa will learn from this experience that besides celebrating our different African independences country by country, we will join hands and celebrate all “United Africa’s” achievements from the 1600s to date. We

have had strong queens and kings in Africa during that era, and surprisingly, we never celebrate their achievements as one African Diaspora. Most Africans have had wonderful experiences in structuring their family institutions, and we never acknowledge our successes and pass on the history to the present and future generations. I sincerely hope that through the African Diaspora, such celebrations will one day manifest!

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