

# FORUM

## Devon Davis and mental health in our community

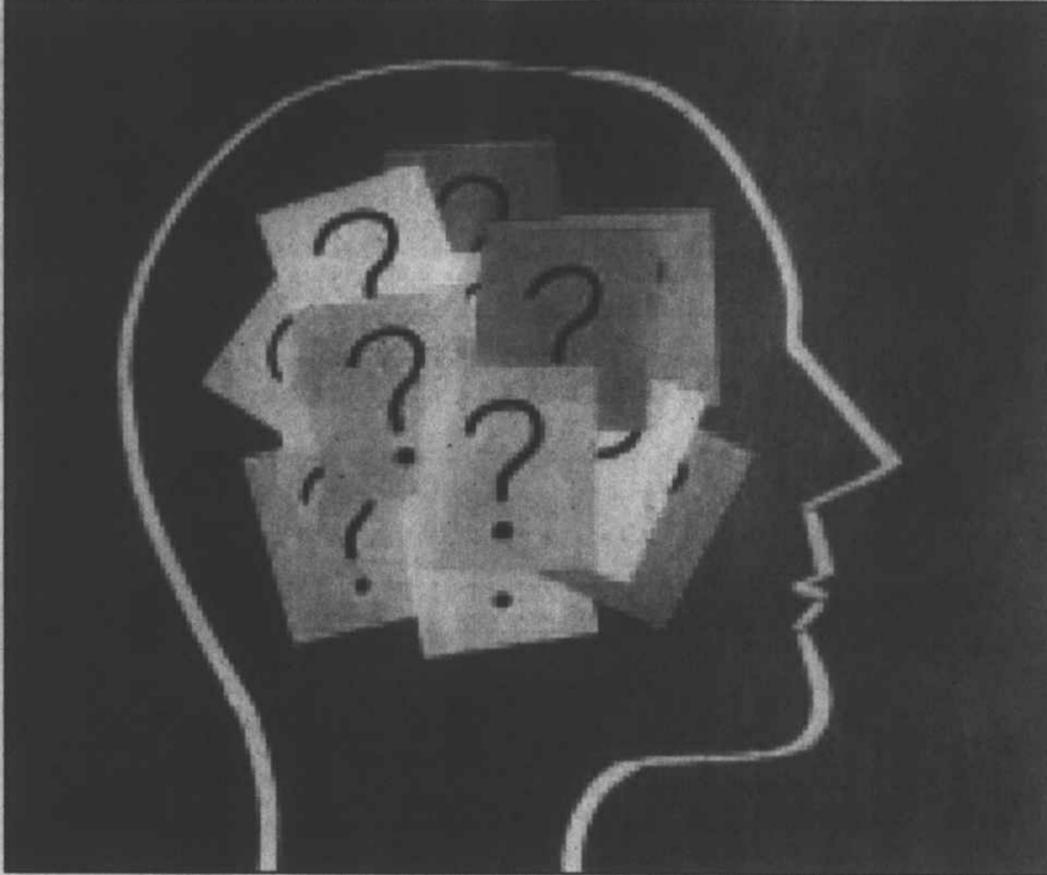


**Kimya N. Dennis**  
Guest Columnist

Devon Davis was one of over 2,000 North Carolina inmates released last year after being imprisoned with a mental illness. This prison release is an example of changes to North Carolina's mental health system.

Unfortunately, this release also shows how difficult it is to bring incarcerated people back into society. There are programs and organizations dedicated to prison re-entry and reintegration. But not every former inmate has access to these programs and organizations. Not every program and organization discusses mental health and mental illness.

Devon Davis is struggling with unemployment and homelessness. He sometimes stays with family. This is a lot to deal with while also dealing with mental illness. The story of Devon Davis is familiar in many communities — unemployment, homelessness, or moving from one place of living to another. Many communities are less familiar with mental health and mental illness. This unfamiliarity is not because mental health and mental illness are uncommon in our communities. Instead, many people do not know the meaning of



“mental health.” Many people do not get diagnosed and treated for their mental and emotional difficulties. This is similar to how many people do not get diagnosed and treated for physical difficulties.

The phrases “mental health” and “mental illness” (and “mental health condition”) are commonly used. But when you ask some people what these phrases mean, some people are not sure. National Institute of Health (NIH)

defines mental health as how we think, feel and behave. Mental health is about how we deal with things that happen in our lives and how we make life decisions. How we deal with our problems and stress. How we deal with other people.

Mental health does not mean there is a mental illness. Everyone has mental and emotional health (and physical health). Our thoughts and feelings can be temporary and short

term (example: sadness) or they can last a long time (example: depression). We need healthy ways to express our emotions. Ways that do not harm ourselves or anyone else.

When feelings and actions become uncontrollable and unhealthy, there might be a mental illness. Mental illnesses are health conditions that harm how we think, feel, and behave. Health conditions are connected to genetics, family background, things hap-

pening in our lives, and things that stress us out.

When should we contact medical and mental health professionals?

\*If we cannot control our thoughts and actions

\*If we struggle to start or keep relationships with coworkers, friends, and family

\*If a loved one is struggling

Mental health is important. We need to pay attention to how we think and feel; pay attention to how we behave and treat other people. Let's get rid of the silence and shame with mental health and mental illness. Let's talk to each other, listen to each other. As a community, help each other get professional help. As individuals, get professional help if we need help. We must take care of ourselves so we can take care of the people we love and our communities.

For more information, go to:

\*The Mental Health Association in Forsyth County: <http://www.triad-mentalhealth.org/what-is-mental-illness/>

\*Mental Health America: African American Communities and Mental Health <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/african-american-mental-health>

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## One can see straight through BET



**Bill Turner**  
Guest Columnist

asked her what she thought of my generation.

I was 20 as we thumbed through the pictures and briefs in Jet Magazine. That week's cover story: James Meredith shot on his March through Mississippi. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King and others took up Meredith's March, with Stokely Carmichael creating worldwide commotion by raising the term “Black Power.” Percy Sledge popularized the romantically passionate tune “When A Man Loves a Woman.”

Last week, I found myself having the same reaction to the younger generation as my Grandma did a half century ago while I watched — blushing at times — the BET Awards Show, along with my 15 year-old granddaughter.

Music, acting, sports and fields of entertainment are the current plots and storylines for black millennials. Whereas Jet carried the scenes, sights and sounds of social change and what black people had on their minds a half century ago, BET now focuses the spotlight on what black celebrities don't have on either their minds nor their bodies.

Beyonce opened the show bouncing

“How long have you been saying young black people would go to hell in a hand basket?”

*Taraji P. Henson accepts the award for best actress at the BET Awards at the Microsoft Theater on Sunday, June 26, in Los Angeles.*



about briskly in fewer threads than Eve in the Garden while co-emcee Tracee Ellis Ross — who changed into fewer clothes between each segment — slinked about once in a skintight snakeskin. Taraji Henson wanted first to “Thank God” after she sashayed onto the stage in a see-through skirt exaggerated in silver to accept the Best Actress Award for her role as “Cookie” on the hit show Empire.

“You know I was going to wear that outfit,” said co-host Anthony Anderson, the star of Blackish — as he pirouetted dramatically to show his bare butt cheeks, framed in white pants — to Janelle Monae, who paid tribute to Prince while showing off her unadorned rear-end at the same time. Transgender star of “Orange is the New Black,” Laverne Cox, wore a plunging, very, very skimpy jumpsuit accessorized with some killer body chains all below an auburn mermaid hairstyle. Jesse Williams' acceptance speech for the BET Humanitarian Award seemed almost out of place.

At least I could discuss the anatomy of Williams' speech with my granddaughter.

“How long have you been saying young black people would go to hell in a hand basket?” I asked my Grandmother. “For at least 50 years,” she replied. I wonder what Grandmother would say about the new pictures presented on BET: where things and people are going.

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Photo by Matt Sayles/Avision/AP