Sacrifice a lost concept

Foreparents had it right; we don't quite comprehend

MELODYE MICERE STEWART

In the spirit of Ma'at



Sacrifice

A concept our foreparents practiced in hope for a brighter future for their children. From the Middle Passage to the Civil Rights Era, sacrifice was the staple in a diet of racism and its menu of subjugated dreams and aspirations. To give of one's self for the sake of another – sacrifice – was routine in black families,

was routine in black families, striving to provide a better life for black children. Whole communities sent the first African Americans to college; funds came from family, extended family, church family, neighborhood family. Miss Annie Mae would press few wrinkled dollars, made from scrubbing white folks floors, in your hand and tell you, "Be a credit to your race. Make us proud."

Sacrifice Today, because of the sacrifices recorded and unrecorded in our history, African Americans have more than our ancestors ever dreamt possible. We have more money, more education, more opportunity, skills, resources and access, but less will and less vision. Our tragic lack of will, critical thinking and analysis paralysis, as well as a severe case of vision deficiency has brought hard-won progress and its price of sacrifice nearly to a halt. Black people desperately need to learn the lessons of our history.

At the Million Woman March, I advocated rites of passage pro-

grams for our children, but adults need it, too. The reality is that our entire community must shake off the chains of mixed-education so that we might use our considerable wealth and resources to do what no others will do for us. Like the phoenix, we must rise from the burnt ashes of slavery, segregation and integration to create a new consciousness for liberation.

An African proverb states, "If you don't know where you came from, you can't know where you're going." We must do sankofa: look at the past to envision the future. To assist us in a new collective vision, many historical episodes must be studied and learned as a foundation to recreate ourselves. We must reconsider American values and ideals in light of our actual historical sojourn. I call it an exercise in self-knowledge.

For example, if we take the time to exercise critical thinking and analysis skills, we will reevaluate American ideal that works for us as a people. Looking at the historical example, if Harriet Tubman saw herself as an "individual," there would have been no need for her to return, walking, to the South some 19 times to free 300 of her fellow enslaved brethren. Harriet Tubman and the other "conductors" of the Underground Railroad lived lives of sacrifice to our people in far more difficult times than these. Bottom line: as "individuals," we could still be picking cotton today, but our collective agitation changed the course of history.

Clearly the lesson here is that we must reclaim our communal birthright and make the sacrifice of being our black brothers and sisters' keeper and, again, change the course of history.

MELODYE MICERE STEWART's column runs every other week.

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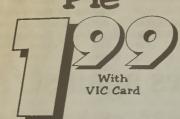




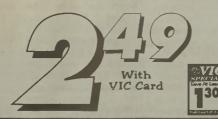




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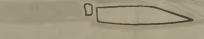


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