

Reshaping Our Future By Supporting Our Youth

An Analysis By Patricia
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Debbie Allen, renowned dancer, choreographer, actress and singer, was recently interviewed for *Parade* magazine (November 17, 1991) and talked about a situation she faced 24 years ago that too many of today's Black youth are facing on the road to getting an education.

When 16-year-old Debbie Allen went for her audition in 1967 at the North Carolina School of the Arts, she had 11 years as a dancer on her resume' and was confident that she could best her competition. When she was turned down and told by one of the white judges that she should abandon her plans for a career because "her body (was) not right for classical dancing," she was devastated.

Even her mother considered her a failure, so Allen felt that everyone involved must be right. She was a student at Howard University before she regained her confidence and danced again. For that, she acknowledges the encouragement that Mike Malone, a noted Washington, D.C. performer, gave her. She went on to Broadway,

following her 1971 graduation as a drama major, and the rest is an important part of entertainment and Black history.

If it can happen to a talented Black in the supposed liberal, artistic, creative environment of the performing arts, what about Black youth in the environment of public schools? Today's young Blacks come head on against very similar obstacles - the first and foremost of them, racism. The second one, frequently, is lack of any real, viable kind of support system.

It should go without saying that parents play an integral role in supporting their children's efforts in school. Some parents, however, seem oblivious to the impact their callous remarks or disregard of their offspring's achievements have on their self-esteem.

A friend of mine shared with me recently some comments made by her father when she went home for Christmas break from her junior year at WSSU. This bright, attractive young woman had managed to make the Dean's list at the school, following her transfer there from a Virginia university. Instead of basking proudly in her

announcement, her father criticized her weight, her looks, and other misperceptions and misconceptions he held about his talented daughter. He even questioned the truth of her news, insisting on personal notification from the school.

The anger and hurt in her voice and on her face as she recanted his comments (and her mother's silence) were heart-wrenching. Children crave their parents' approval, and it does not take a great amount of intelligence to understand why. Words hurt as much as a fist does. All of it is abuse and can adversely affect a child's performance unless there is other support to bolster a sadly-deflated morale.

The raw statistics speak for themselves on the rate of illiteracy and high school dropouts among Blacks, both nationally and in North Carolina. Also part of that data are the numbers of Blacks who are incarcerated and Black female teenaged mothers. Over all my years of talking with Black men and women, young and old, one thing stands out as a major contributing factor to either their success or failure in achieving personal goals -

positive support.

Positive support can help a young person continue to try in the face of teachers who are racially motivated against the success of their Black students or teachers who are just plain indifferent - Black or white. It can also bolster low self-esteem when any teacher tells a student that he or she is dumb, stupid, or has nothing to contribute. There are Black teachers equally as guilty. I have seen it and heard it, both as a corporate training instructor and manager interacting with public school teachers, and as an educator and journalist, outside the corporate environment.

When anyone is told that they can't do, that they have no value by someone who is respected or loved, they believe it - unless it is counteracted elsewhere. It is that "elsewhere" that concerns all those now engaged in the various "fights" - against illiteracy, the dropout rate, drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, unemployment, homelessness, and all the rest. It's interesting that some of those in prison were super sharp in their

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A Statement From The AC Phoenix

Congratulations to all who
celebrate the King Holiday.
During this 28th year since
his death, how much of Dr.
King's Dream has come true?
Are we better off today?

THE AC
Phoenix

We're in your Future now
more than ever.

McDonald's Family of local owner operators joins the community in celebrating the birthday of one Great Man who had a Dream -

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
January 20, 1991