

FORUM

Shape Up African-Americans! Live But Don't Look Like Santa

It's that time of year again. Birth. Life's comin' at ya. A seasonal span when the visions of sugarcorn and tables in the form of large quantities of high calorie food. Fat greens and string beans, soaked in fat black. Pecan pies, chocolate cakes, buttered rolls, candied yams and smothered shoulders. The next three weeks of spiced country hams and pounds of potato salads and miraculously-whipped mayonnaise.

The next two weeks will see African-American health classes and persuasions, joined, at the lips, explaining up what First Lady Clinton is calling an "epidemic" of obesity.

African-Americans are covered by all manner of social and political forces that lie behind premature excess disease and death rates. We are mired in the day alarming high rates and psychological effects of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, drug abuse, crime and violence.

Then comes Christmas and Santa Claus. It is a time when African-Americans, like the majority of Americans, whatever their joys, troubles and woes, over-indulge themselves. Through the year, though, these proximate causes of indulgence — historically and culturally based — become interesting too much of the "wrong" foods — becomes the shovel that digs the graves into which millions of black folk eat themselves. Enters the body of Santa Claus. In this another form of black-on-black crime?

Many jokes will go around about the rotund relatives who "weigh more than the law allows!" Among the blessed ones who will prepare the rounds and mounds of scrumptious soul food for the holidays, African-American women are disproportionately among those who are at least 20 percent above the recommended weight levels for height and age.

Dr. Shiriki Kumanyika, an African-American and professor at the John Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health, has been on the stump a long time about obesity in black women. Her research findings are the basis of the loudest call in the nation that led to Shape Up America. "Obesity is rampant in our communities. (especially black women)." Half of all adult black women are overweight, she finds, in contrast to 34 percent of the general population, and 24 percent of the white female adults. She discusses a number of environmental and genetic factors that put black women at "an especially high risk of accumulating excess fat." The bottom line is flavored by dietary, lifestyle, and metabolic influences.



Shape Up America is a national call to fight the public health threat posed by the relationship between being overweight and a number of disabling and life-threatening diseases. For African-Americans, these include high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes and (some) cancers. Everybody should know that these are the leading causes of incapacity and death among blacks. Ironically, these fall within personal choice and influence. According to former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, who joined Hillary Clinton in inaugurating Shape Up America, obesity is second only to "another habit," that I have, which is dear to the heart of the economy of North Carolina. In addition, there are sedentary lifestyles (mashed couch potatoes?) among a people who watch more television than the general population — while eating.

Yes, Christmastide is a time to sup together and enjoy and savor the full flavor of life. But many who are sick in our community are that way for the manner by which they have consumed foods.

Only healthy ears can stand hearing the words of the sick and aged frail among us. We must be healthy not only to support our loved ones, but we must be fit, robust and vigorous to fight the challenges external to our physical person. Caesar can deny many of our rights, but not our right and responsibility to exercise and be healthy. It takes strength and stamina to bear the cross of the Christ child.

Stand Up African-Americans. Let's give ourselves and our families good health for Christmas and Kwanzaa gifts. Can this be the First Christmas when meals are cooked differently in African-American homes? Can this be the beginning of a life of moderation in eating? Life is at stake, and without life there is nothing. As Charles Brown would sing, "Merry Christmas, Baby." But, you got to be able to get down the chimney. Up with healthy diets and lifestyles!

(Dr. William Turner is a regular freelance columnist for the Chronicle.)

week and participates in the YMCA Fundamental Basketball Seminars for kids on Saturdays. He is also a full-time manager of one of the top banks in the Pacific Northwest.

As we focus on violence in our communities, we must also talk about domestic violence and sexual assault. As signs of hope, one reader, Shani Bakuba of Cambridge, Ma. pointed to rape crisis centers and domestic violence shelters and counseling programs which are found in many communities to treat the victims and provide safe space.

There's no question that violence is swirling all around us, threatening like some horrible tornado to tear down whole communities and kill those nearby. African Americans and other people of color are especially hard-hit by it. But a few weeks ago a Philadelphia suburban white student was beaten to death by a gang of his peers. A few weeks ago assault weapon bullets pierced the walls and windows of the White House. The violence is not just a question facing our American society, it is a basic civilization question. Can we as human beings live together in justice and peace?

People in Lockwood and Coliseum Gardens in Oakland would answer yes. They are signs of the hope. Hope that our communities and our people can heal themselves. Hope that our children's children will know safe and just communities, with flowers and children playing and laughing and flourishing. There's another 1970s song which says, "There's No Stopping Us Now" and that's the truth too.

(Bernice Powell Jackson is the executive director of the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice.)

"Can We As Human Beings Live Together in Peace and Justice"

"Mercy, mercy me, things ain't what they used to be." The line of a song by the poet and singer Mary McLeod Bethune, about our communities and the escalating levels of violence, those words couldn't be more true.

Yet, amidst the drive-by shooting, the illegal guns, the presence of assault weapons, and always, the hope. There are stories of people who don't get pushed around, they just get organized.

In an earlier Civil Rights Journal, I asked you to share with me some of the signs of hope that are springing forth in our communities and many of you have done that. I have heard from people in unexpected places, and from one coast to another. The stories they shared are signs of hope.

In Oakland, Ca. two of the nation's deadliest cities are now beginning to blossom. Under the auspices of the Community Recovery Project, the residents of these cities are regaining once again their sense of self-esteem and pride. They have drastically cut the drug trade, and are responsible for drug trafficking, violence, and crime. Based on beliefs that everyone is born with a healthy inner being and that poor is only a lack of skills, this approach trains residents to heal themselves and their own communities. In addition, as more people have moved into these communities, the project has brought together the African-American and Asian-American

two communities have come together is around gardening by one woman, Linda Schneider. By providing seeds, manure and equipment, Schneider quickly got people involved in planted food and flowers in their own

outside funding, that gardening project has now blossomed and converted them to useful purposes. The blossoming along with the sunflowers and

There is one person to be that sign of hope. In Oakland, Ca. it is Raheem O.E. Shah. In Boise, Idaho, it is Raheem O.E. Shah. After several unsuccessful attempts to get a group of men in Boise to work together in the community, he decided to become "a one man, community organizer" who works with prisoners at the Idaho State Penitentiary at a local elementary school one hour a

week and participates in the YMCA Fundamental Basketball Seminars for kids on Saturdays. He is also a full-time manager of one of the top banks in the Pacific Northwest.

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

By BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

TO BE EQUAL

By HUGH B. PRICE

African-Americans Must Support to Pull the NAACP out of Financial Crisis

This morning I sent off a check for \$1,000 to help with family obligations and the press of other expenses. It's a stretch for me. But it's a stretch that I, and all African-Americans, possibly afford it, need to make because the NAACP is in trouble. It has launched a fund drive to help itself. It's essential for African-Americans to support an organization that has done so much and has so much to do.

The recent problems that led to the NAACP's financial crisis have been amply discussed, but it's clear that the organization needs to recapture its vital role in our society.

It deserves the wholehearted support of all Americans. The community is mobilizing to do its part and the mass media is taking off, led by a \$5 million pledge. The NAACP is including all of the largest black donors in its drive. We live because of its historic contributions and because of its need for the positive role it can play in our society.

Let's never forget that the NAACP was a symbol of segregation and institutionalized oppression of black people. The NAACP was buried and institutionalized oppression of black people largely to the NAACP's protests in the streets and in the courts.

Members of black representatives in Congress, state and local governments today because of the NAACP's long voting laws and its role in helping to bring about 1965.

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