

# Self-Esteem And Drug Abuse

What does Black History Month have to do with drug usage?

Everything. It becomes clearer and clearer that there is a relationship between cultural pride, self-esteem and drug usage.

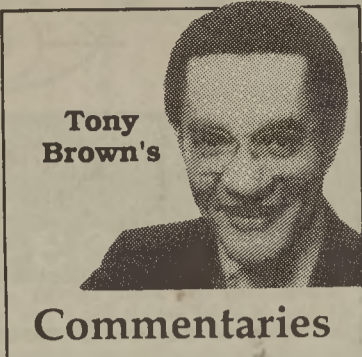
Last week, a panel of very distinguished black doctors, including Dr. Carl C. Bell, one of the nation's leading psychiatrists and director of the Community Mental Health Council in Chicago, announced at the annual meeting of the National Medical Association that the poor health, mental as well as physical, of blacks is due in part to low self-esteem.

Take illegal drugs, for example. Black Americans' drug usage is 30 percent higher than the population as a whole. If you accept the fact that hundreds of years of psychological damage from slavery, Jim Crow, segregation and today's pseudo-integration have produced a low self-image, you're not surprised that we're killing ourselves faster than whites.

"When you get right down to it, many of our problems can be traced to poor self-esteem," said Dr. John Chlissel of Boston. "We live in an intensely racist society that teaches us to hate ourselves."

Evidence? Blacks largely prefer to go to a school that is controlled by whites; prefer neighborhoods with few blacks; prefer to buy from non-blacks; and call anything controlled by other blacks "segregated" or anti-white.

Quite frankly, that's the civil rights agenda. And the Americanized African is so confused that a quest for his or her own de-



Commentaries

struction seems normal. That's low self-esteem at its lethal best.

As a matter of fact, two black psychologists, Dr. Robert Davis and Dr. Lawrence Gray, have concluded from studies that as blacks "assimilate" into white culture, they lost cultural identity, but do not gain equality. The white culture encourages blacks to abandon their cultural support system, but doesn't replace it with cultural acceptance. What these blacks get instead is racial anxiety.

This syndrome leads to suicide. This suicide can be immediate -- a gun to the head or sleeping pills; or it can be gradual -- drug addiction, for example.

People use drugs, drugs don't use people. Drug abuse is not the real problem; it's what therapists call the presenting problem -- what others see and recognize as inappropriate or destructive behavior. Policymakers have recognized that anti-drug efforts must attack the demand for, as well as the supply of, drugs.

Therefore, it is really just com-

mon sense that a strong sense of cultural identity may prevent blacks from being victims of drug abuse. A lack of pride in cultural heritage leads to poor self-esteem which predisposes one to drug addiction. Conversely, pride in cultural heritage leads to high self-esteem which results in no drug addiction.

Pride in one's cultural heritage for a person who has learned a basic feeling of shame because of racial prejudice is a tremendous weapon against drug addiction because it is a tremendous weapon against self-hatred. Amazingly, cultural pride as the basis of self-love is vastly underutilized in the anti-drug arsenal.

Therefore, the message of Black History Month is that a love of cultural heritage is the basis of pride in oneself and this feeling of pride is the basis of a self-determination decision to say "no" to drugs.

My movie, "The White Girl," dealing with the same theme -- black self-hatred and drug addiction -- will open in theaters during Black History Month (February).

Our slogan: "If you love yourself, you won't abuse yourself -- with drugs. And Black History Month is a time of year that you can learn to love yourself."

For Black History Month, let's remember: "It's time we learned to love -- ourselves."

**TONY BROWN'S JOURNAL** TV series can be seen on public television in Charlotte on Channel 58 (WUNG). Please consult TV listings or phone station for air times.

## Letters To The Post

### Opposing The Mayor's March

Dear Editor:

I, for one, am totally in support of any efforts to combat the drug problem that plagues our city. However, I must go on record as opposing the march Mayor Sue Myrick has planned for this Saturday, July 29 at 10 a.m. This march, as I understand, will take place beginning at Fairview Homes, ending at Piedmont Courts.

The reason for my opposition to this march is two-fold.

One, the area targeted for the march is public housing, which seems to suggest that it is the residents of public housing who are the drug users and abusers and who are causing the drug problem for the entire city of Charlotte.

Granted there are drug problems in the public housing projects. But these have been addressed and there are plans underway to combat the problems.

Marches are not what is needed at this time. What is

needed is more police officers, more education and prevention alternatives and a streamlined eviction process.

The residents of Fairview Homes have had an awareness day and Mayor Myrick and I were there. On August 12, the residents of Dalton Village will have a special day of community awareness and pride. In addition, the residents of Piedmont Courts will host their annual Piedmont Courts Day in August.

Drugs are not a poor, black problem. Drugs are killing people and victimizing people across racial and social-economic lines.

We simply cannot, try as we may, isolate the drug problem in one area because others do not want to admit that they, too, are a part of the problem.

If we are going to spend time marching to make people aware of the problems with drugs, then I suggest that the Mayor start in uptown Charlotte and march toward the

south and southeast areas of Charlotte. She should also monitor the number of up-town workers who spend their lunch hour buying and using drugs in and around the up-town area.

My second reason for opposing this march is economic. Why not use the dollars in manpower and other resources to improve the police patrol in some of these areas and to combat "white collar" drug abuse? There are a number of ways the dollars, which are tax dollars, can be used more productively.

Again, I am in favor of meaningful efforts to combat our city's drug problem. However, this particular march seems to be ill timed and more of a hindrance than a help. As always, I make myself available to help in any real meaningful effort to better our city and the quality of life for all residents.

REV. PHILLIP M. DAVIS

### Mayor's Marching The Wrong Way

Dear Editor:

So we want to march through the black communities to end the use of drugs. Big deal. Why don't we stop skirting the truth.

Get the big guys who have the money to buy and sell this junk to the youth and others in these communities.

Get the rich pushers with the fine homes, fine cars, big boats, pools and great vacations.

Misunderstood youth who have little food, poor clothing, poor housing and no jobs are trapped without much hope of having anything. So they are throwing their lives away on drugs. But if you can't get the drugs --- then you can't use them.

Start marching on the people who are bringing drugs into the community. I am real sick and tired of our good God-fearing Mayor blaming all the

bad that happens in Charlotte on the black community.

We need to look at who started this problem in the first place. Take a long, hard look at history --- the things that were printed and the mess that was kept undercover and hidden.

Go back to the source of the problem.

FREDDIE T. SMITH

### WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

Let us hear your comments, ideas and opinions. Write to:

Letters To The Post  
P.O. Box 30144  
Charlotte, N.C. 28230

Please include name, address and phone number. We edit letters for clarity and grammar.



LEARNING THE LESSONS ... "If George Washington didn't get independence for this country non-violently, and if Patrick Henry didn't come up with a non-violent statement, and you taught me to look upon them as patriots and heroes, then it's time for you to realize that I have studied your books well."

Malcolm X in his own words.

## Threat Of Extinction For Black Males Signals Ultimate Destruction For U.S.

Safety and security are never permanently insured for anyone. Yet, it is a mark of a civilized society to strive to ensure safety and security for its citizens as a social, political and economic objective. A recent feature story in the Boston Globe entitled, "Endangered: Black Men" once again raised disturbing and serious questions about the condition and prognosis of the African American male in the United States.

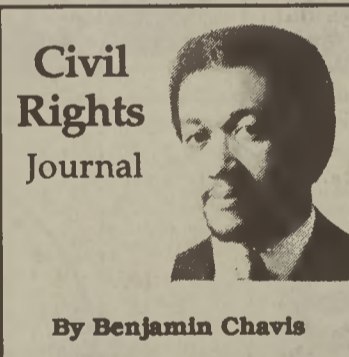
The article by Joanne Ball detailed how African American men are disproportionately suffering from homicides, drugs, other forms of violence, AIDS, and from the devastation of economic injustice. Ed Pitt of the National Urban League was quoted as saying, "What's new is

that now we, for the first time, in the history of this country, have a declining life expectancy for black people. And the biggest factor in this decrease is attributed to the high death rates of African American males between 15 and 44."

Jawanza Kunjufu, a nationally known authority on African American males, has charged that there is "a conspiracy to destroy black males." The negative statistical data concerning the mortality rate of African American males is not an accident or a mere coincidence of history. It is rather a factual explication of the severity of this conspiracy which begins before birth and is maintained until early death. Racism and economic exploitation continue to endanger all African

Americans and in particular African American young men.

Nathan and Julia Hare, who have authored many writings on the plight of African American adolescent and family life, contend that the growing crisis of African American males in the United States demands the attention of all Americans, but in particular the attention and response of the African American community is an absolute necessity. Dr. Nathan Hare, a noted psychologist and sociologist, has suggested that a long-term solution must come from "an independent black intellectual class which puts value on ourselves and value on our youth, and stop looking to the white media for good images." Dr. Hare knows well the negative role the



By Benjamin Chavis

established national media continues to play in stereotyping and demeaning and depicting racist images of the African American community.

One point to be emphasized is that a society that selectively

and oppressively predetermines the genocide of a community of that society is a society that ultimately determines its own destruction.

Are African American males today an endangered species? Yes, this is the sad but true reality in this nation. Will African American males continue to be an endangered species? The answer to this question lies in what response we all make today concerning this crisis. We believe the time has not yet run out. There is still time and great opportunity to challenge this situation.

Alarming, President Bush has just announced that a priority of this new administration in the White House is to put some citizens of this nation back on

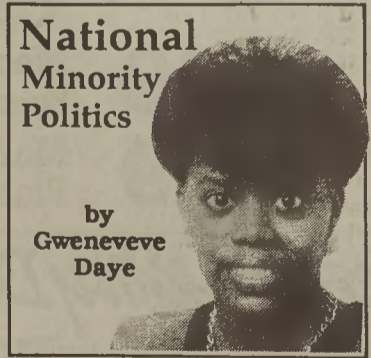
the moon and even to go to the planet Mars safely and securely. This effort will cost in the hundreds of millions of dollars. President Bush: "What about the planet Earth, and in particular how will a multi-billion dollar attempt to find some new species on another planet will help to save the endangered species in this nation?" Whether or not Bush answers this question is not the issue. Let us all be challenged to place our personal and collective priorities in the right place, i.e., the place of joining together in a renewed national movement for justice and empowerment. Not to respond to the challenges of African American destruction and self-destruction is to invite more danger and fear.

## D.C.'s Mayoral Race Should Prove To Be A Watershed Campaign For Voters

With D.C. Mayor Marlon Barry's announcement, through an aide, that he will seek reelection in 1990, and the Rev. Jackson's apparent interest in the job, an engaging picture looms large. This is the first time in the black community that the possibility of serious competition has occurred for such a visible political office.

For weeks, some of Jackson's closest friends and advisers have indicated to the press that he wants to run for mayor. To further intensify the speculation, Jackson is moving his family and his political operations to Washington from Chicago and is also expected to change his voting address. Barry, who is described by journalists covering his tenure in office as "beleaguered," has seen his popularity reach an all-time low in recent opinion polls. But he has been vague about his intention to run for reelection, until now. According to Barry's press secretary, he not only intends to run but he also expects Jackson to support his candidacy.

Although it is still uncertain whether Jackson will actually enter the race, the specter of two black men, who are each political heavyweights in their own



National Minority Politics by Gweneveve Daye

right, vying for Mayor of Washington, D.C., ushers in a new era in black politics. There are finally enough politically-savvy blacks in the pool of potential candidates, with differing opinions and constituencies, that competition is viewed as healthy, rather than divisive. And what better place for it to occur than in the nation's capital.

Why has this competitive spirit been such a long time coming? One reason has been that there have simply not been enough politicians to create a truly competitive environment. Blacks are relative newcomers to the political arena and, although the number of black

elected officials has mushroomed over the past 25 years, the highest political offices are still somewhat elusive. There is a lingering perception that there is a limit as to how high a black person can go in government.

Nonetheless there are a handful of exceptions: Ronald H. Brown, chairman of the Democratic National Committee; L. Douglas Wilder, lieutenant governor of Virginia, and a current contender for the governorship of that state; and Rep. William Gray of Pennsylvania, newly-elected House Majority Whip. For the most part, however, black elected officials continue to represent majority black constituencies in the lowest levels of government.

The limitation for the time being, either actual or self-imposed, appears to be the House of Representatives; officeholders get as far as this point in their political careers and then get stuck in neutral, for example, of the 24 black members of the House currently in office, none, with the exception of Gray, appears to be eyeing a move up, either to the Senate or within the House hierarchy. In addition, those who have been elected to Congress appear to be

there for the long haul, intent upon staying in office until death or retirement, whichever comes first.

Indeed, the primary reason why Barry insists upon retaining his position as mayor is simply that there is nowhere else for him to go politically. There is no higher position in city government he can aspire to, and Congress offers no opportunity for career advancement. The District of Columbia only has one non-voting delegate, Walter Fauntroy, representing it in Congress. In addition to the fact that Fauntroy shows no interest in retiring, Barry knows this would be a step down for him in stature as well as influence.

Another reason for the belated manifestation of competitiveness, is that, unfortunately, some black politicians, particularly incumbents, resort to the use of demagoguery to keep competitors out of elections. A well-meaning contender is first faced with the difficulty of raising funds in order to launch a viable candidacy. Then he must be charged with selling out to the white establishment, creating division in the black community, and not understanding

the "struggle." By splitting the black vote, it is argued, the opponent is allowing a white candidate the opportunity to win the election. The incumbent is thus able to keep his competitors at bay by appealing to black voters' fears and insecurities.

Washington, D.C., is one of the few cities where using this form of demagoguery during the mayoral campaign would be unnecessary. D.C. will almost certainly have a black mayor, no matter how many candidates enter the race. Having a black mayor is of such symbolic significance to D.C. residents that a white candidate has virtually no chance of winning, and the white vote is currently not significant enough to be a factor.

Of course, not everyone in Washington is elated about the possibility of Jackson entering the mayor's race. Two members of the City Council, who, incidentally, want to succeed Barry, successfully pushed a bill through the Council that would bar elected officials from taking more than \$10,000 a year in speaking fees and require public disclosure of outside income.

Since Jackson's annual income from speaking fees far exceeds \$10,000, this bill was considered to be a way of discouraging him from running for mayor.

But that makes the race all the more intriguing. On the one hand, you've got an embattled sitting mayor, hoping for a comeback. On the other hand, you've got Jesse Jackson keeping everyone on the edges of their seats, waiting to see what he'll do next. Then you've got another faction of mayoral hopefuls, plotting a strategy to not only knock Barry out of the race, but thwart Jackson's candidacy as well. Some might call it divisive, but a more appropriate description would be exciting, fascinating, or, better yet, long overdue.

Hopefully, other talented would-be politicians waiting in the wings for a signal that it's o.k. to compete will take their cue from this provocative political contest.

Ms. Daye, based in Houston, is the publisher/editor of the monthly publication, National Minority Politics.