

AFRIKAN MEN – What the hell is going on?

'Darg nuh know dem yard till firetick bun dem'

Some people forget where they are coming from until they are in trouble
(Jamaican proverb)

The previous chapter dealt with 'idealised' stereotypes of Black men. This chapter was prompted by a lifetime of experiences culminating in a series of psychological body blows during 2002, which forced me to step back and to consider the depth and magnitude of the psycho-emotional crisis engulfing Afrikan men worldwide and in Britain in particular. It is important to note that this is an 'if the cap fits' chapter. If you are a positive brother, in word and deed, then don't get vexed. If you recognise yourself in the behaviours and attitudes described, then sort your stuff out and don't complain. However, even if some of the following applies to you, doesn't mean I am suggesting that we should not care about you. We just need to give you some tough love!

Amos Wilson in his book 'Blueprint for Black Power' (1998) suggests that it is the nature of the social relations which inhere between members of a cultural/ethnic group that will determine their prospects for success in a world of competing ethnic groups or tribes (Kotkin 1993). If one accepts this analysis then Afrikans are in big trouble.

I had long ago come to the realisation that we are a sick group of people suffering the long-term effects of CAIDS (Culturally Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) [Dr Patricia Newton], however the depth and pervasiveness of that sickness has come as quite a shock to me.

At one time I used to believe that the acquisition of an accurate understanding of Afrikan history combined with an acceptance of an Afrikan value base, with the implicit relinquishment of alien value systems, was sufficient to set us on the long road to freedom. However I had underestimated the degree to which we, as Afrikan men, have adopted the European cognitive mode of compartmentalisation and splitting.

What I am saying; is that you have numerous Afrikan men who have taken Afrikan values on board, in an intellectual sense, but who have singularly failed to adopt behaviour patterns which reflect these values, particularly in the realm of their emotional lives with women. There are an even greater number of brothers who are disinterested in talk of Afrika and similarly display highly worrying interpersonal behaviour.

Before any of the vast amounts of historical and cultural information on our true past can be of real use there is an urgent need for emotional healing. Brothers are in pain and this pain is manifesting itself in some highly destructive behaviour. When I hear of brothers who are well versed and immersed in Afrikan-centred thinking and activity, being physically, verbally and emotionally abusive to their wives/partners I am clear that what is required is not more Afrikan-centred thinking, but rather more Afrikan-centred feeling.

All around me I see brothers, who are unable to reflect on their behaviour, admit wrongdoing, express their pain and emotions in general, maintain reasonable relations with someone with whom they have a difference of opinion or anticipate the response of others to their planned behaviour.

You may think I am being unreasonably harsh; however no concerned Afrikan can reasonably survey the ruins of Afrikan male interpersonal behaviour and remain untroubled.

One sees that the professed worldview, religion, ideology etc. of Afrikan men is of no predictive power when it comes to anticipating their interpersonal behavioural patterns. What is of predictive power is the nature of the family relations experienced by individuals and the type of emotional nurturance enjoyed during their formative years. It is the failure of our institutions and organisations with a social purpose to recognise the need to focus on male

emotional healing, nurturing and literacy, via the reconstruction of the Afrikan family, that has led to the ever increasing number of rhetorically strong and behaviourally weak brothers. In fact the Afrikan family needs to be viewed as a social institution and one that is failing dreadfully.

If we do not address this problem of male development we can never create strong and viable organisations, let alone build institutions, especially given that most of our so-called leaders are male.

Some of the recurring problem behaviours I have encountered over the past few years – and remember the following refers to brothers who on the surface are well educated, articulate, conscious and in general supposed to have their stuff together, not the stereotypical criminal, 'street nigger' – include:

- Physical abuse of partners, including, punching; pushing, and spitting. In one instance striking of a partner in front of the brother's own mother.
- Verbal abuse – swearing and the use of foul and crude language to demean the other party
- Emotional abuse – this is part of all types of abuse, however systematic cruelty and callousness are common place.
- Gossiping and rumourmongering – the sisters have nothing on some brothers when it comes to this type of behaviour.
- Blanking – often based upon completely or partially incorrect information a brother will decide he will no longer talk to another Afrikan without first questioning the person directly. Super childish.
- Boasting – or l'ism as I call it. Brothers who love the sound of their own voice and need no invitation to tell you how skilled, clever, brave, articulate they are and how nothing gets done without their intervention.
- Skiving off work – and pretending it is some sort of revolutionary act – getting your own back on whitey – rather than an admission that they are unable to do their job, fed up with the job but too scared to leave its security, or just plain lazy.
- The use of grievances and claims of racial discrimination as a cover for gross incompetence in the workplace
- Inability to take advice – then blaming the person whose advice they did not take for being in some way responsible for the resultant mess.
- Threatening behaviour towards other Afrikan men – often from people who present themselves as 'warriors' and defenders of 'the cause'. They seem to be far more ready to utilise violence or threats of violence in dealings with Afrikan men than any other group.
- Gross hypocrisy – For example talking blacker than black and sleeping whiter than white. Frantz Fanon being a famous example of this type of compartmentalised behaviour.
- A complete inability to accept even the mildest, most constructive criticism. This seems to be linked to feelings of inadequacy and insecurity and produces an extreme ego defensive reaction.
- A complete absence of emotional sensitivity when others are clearly in pain and distress

The foregoing is just a snapshot. I live in Nottingham, a city renamed Shot-tingham such is the level of gun violence in the city, a large proportion of which is Afrikan against Afrikan in nature. Therefore you can see; that as suggested earlier, I am not even dealing with the behaviour of the bad men and rude boys. That is what is so worrying. If the so-called 'conscious' brothers are in such a mess, what hope for the rest.

The good news is that there are a large number of unsung heroes. Afrikan men who are doing; rather than just saying the right things. Men who may not all appear particularly conscious, who may not be able to name five ancient Afrikan civilisations or repeat the principles of Ma'at and the Nguzo Saba, but who do know how to be a father, who do know

how to love and cherish an Afrikan woman, who do know how to treat others in the way they wish to be treated.

Too many of the 'Conscious' and Negro community leaders are driven to take up high profile positions by their myriad unresolved personal issues and super fragile egos which need constant massaging. They need to step back from these positions until they sort their stuff out. One cannot divorce personal behaviour from professional or community life. You cannot be licking down your woman behind closed doors one day and waxing lyrical about the majesty of the Afrikan woman the next. There is no substitute for personal integrity.

So how do we begin address this problem? The following recommendations touch on a range of situations where we can begin to assert the need for and promote right conduct in Afrikan men.

1. Develop community based rites of passage programmes which involve parents, particularly fathers. These programmes should focus on the fostering of emotional expression and social skills as much as the development of cognitive and technical skills and the acquisition of historical knowledge. The leaders of these programmes must be men of integrity.
2. Development of Afrikan-centred counselling and mediation services to help individuals before they experience personal crisis and to assist couples experiencing relationship difficulties.
3. Creation of Afrikan brotherhoods. Based upon the ancient Afrikan Masonic tradition. These brotherhoods would regulate the behaviour of members as well as providing opportunities for more mature brothers to take new young recruits under their wing.
4. Community Council of Elders. A body of respected male and female elders who could resolve less serious disputes as well as providing strategic advice and guidance to young activists.
5. Sisters need to expose abusive partners. Too many sisters are suffering in silence. They are placing themselves at risk and letting abusive brothers off the hook. If he hits you, one of you needs to leave the house. If he hits you and there are no community based solutions e.g. brothers you can call upon, Council of Elders to refer to, then call the police, straight away. Don't listen to any crap about 'yu a carl in de white man pan me'. If the Afrikan community is unwilling or unable to deal with spousal abuse then the white man will have to deal with it. A man rarely hits his partner once. Hitting is a habit, a bad habit and bad habits are easily formed and hard to break. Don't let anyone guilt trip you or worry about his reputation. The same advice goes for the brother's friends. Don't defend him, condemn his behaviour whilst showing you still care and encourage him to get help. If he continues to be abusive end the friendship and tell him and others why you and him don't flex any more. If Afrikan men truly care for Afrikan women we would respond to spousal abuse in the same way we would if it was our biological sister being abused. See it deh.
6. Bring in more sisters into leadership positions. They tend to lower the testosterone levels and reduce levels of conflict. We need Ma'at in practice. Sisters also need to take the responsibility to step forward.

I have come to the conclusion that the majority of Afrikan men and women in the UK – and almost certainly in places like the USA and Caribbean, and most probably in Afrika – are *'functionally mentally ill'*. By this I mean that whilst most people in this category can function effectively at a certain level, i.e. hold down a job, obey the rules and laws of society, maintain social relationships over a prolonged period of time, use their cognitive skills to solve various problems, there is something fundamentally wrong or missing at the heart of their psyche. This affective gap manifests itself in a deep-seated but unrecognised sense of racial inferiority, an inability to admire the Afrikan physiological and cultural aesthetic, a lack of racial self-esteem and confidence and a profound difficulty in working effectively with other Afrikans, often induced by the inability to trust one another.

This functional mental illness is one of the main reasons that most Afrikan controlled countries are economic and social basket cases. It explains the widespread use of skin bleaching agents by Afrikan women and why Afrikan women who 'go natural' with their hair often

provoke such enormous and negative emotional reactions from other women who use chemicals to straighten their hair, or who wear wigs, weaves, extensions etc. It explains why Afrikans find it so hard to forgive each other and yet can forgive Caucasians in South Afrika (and other places) for their atrocities without any strong demand for justice or reparations. It explains why we are in such a mess and yet so many of us think we are 'doing well' as individuals. It explains why so many Brothers think that 'things' will help them to feel whole and never learn the lesson when they don't.

It is time for a rethink. Time to get down beneath the rhetoric and the kente cloth (or Versace) and deal with the pain. Deal with pain of being rejected by your absent father, the pain of never being hugged by your physically present but emotionally absent father, the pain of belonging to a defeated and oppressed race, the pain of having to go to your oppressor for the means to live, the pain of a lifetime of insults and accusing looks, the pain of being rejected by your woman, the pain of somehow feeling less than a man. We are a group of men who have been conquered and we have failed in our single most important task, protection and defence of our community. However, no matter that many battles have been lost the war continues apace. Can we face ourselves in the mirror of our ancestors and those yet to be born and summon the will and self-belief to win? For win we must. You cannot have an honourable defeat at the hands of white supremacy.

Let's do some healing and some cleansing and build a nation of men our women and children can be proud of.

The picture below was taken when Del Jones (Nana Kuntz) 'The War Correspondent' visited Nottingham in 2002 and is indicative of the type of warmth and connection we need to engender amongst brothers.



From left to right: Paul Pryce, Del Jones, The author, Donovan Esty and Charles Nembhard

Photograph by Abdullah Uhuru

This chapter is dedicated to the memory of all the great Afrikan men who have shed blood, sweat and tears to firstly, build the great civilisations of the past, and latterly to lead the struggle against our oppressors. These giants cast an almighty shadow over we men of today and make our complaints about the difficulties of being a 'Black man in Britain' seem pitiful and defeatist. We have the **potential** to be the greatest generation yet of Afrikan men to walk planet Earth, since we have all those thousands of years of accumulated knowledge and wisdom to tap into and a clearer view of the nature of the enemy than our forefathers. The fact that we are falling so far short is both the charge and the challenge. Let us stand together in love and unity for victory.

