

## Local Politics Matter

# Coming of Age

## Life's Lessons

“Say it Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud” was recorded by [James Brown](#) in 1968 and released in 1969. For me, that refrain was a coming of age. I took that refrain, shouted so freely by James Brown, to heart. I felt it and began to believe, not just privately but publicly, I was black and proud of it. It seeped into my consciousness. Black is beautiful. Black is hip. Black is good. Black is strong. I am beautiful.

I owned my blackness in the truest sense. Held my head higher, walked a little taller. I am Black and proud. Everything began to change with the shouting of those words. My world view changed. I wore my blackness like a badge of honor. I embraced my natural hair, I embraced my intellect, I embraced my culture, I embraced African fashion. It was like a switch was flipped and the lights came on. I changed. It’s been more than forty years since I first heard those words. I have never lost that feeling of pride and strength. Over the years it’s blossomed and matured. I came to realize that it doesn’t matter how I style my hair or what clothing I wear. I learned that it’s more, so much

more. I know that I come from a proud and diverse people, kings and queens, hunters and warriors. My people, black people were the first. All others come from us.

I don’t shout that refrain anymore. I don’t have to. It’s in my being. It’s who I am. I am black, there’s no denying that, I’m intelligent, there’s no denying that, I walk tall, I hold my head high, I represent. I am black and I am proud.

I was fortunate. I came of age when there was a strong sense of community amongst Black Americans. Guns, gangs and drugs were not the norm, not even in our most impoverished communities. Neighbors looked out for each other and cared about each other. We actually knew each other. Somewhere along the line all of this was lost and with it, that innate sense of pride that ensures that you take care of yourself, your family, your community. We not only expected, we demanded the best of each other.

Those of us who came of age before the guns, gangs and drugs need to share what we



know to be true with those who came after. We need to share the knowledge that having pride in oneself is empowering. We need to help them feel the kind of pride that makes you avoid the guns, gangs and drugs, the kind of pride that demands that you take care of yourself, your family and your community, the kind of pride that makes you say it loud, “I’m Black and I’m proud”, and know exactly what it means.

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