

How Much Has Changed for Black Men? An Interview with Haki R. Madhubuti

By Thabiti Lewis

Roughly sixteen years ago poet, publisher, educator, and activist Haki R. Madhubuti published *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous?: The African American Family in Transition* (1991) to wide acclaim. Of his twenty-eight books (some under the name Don L. Lee) of poetry and nonfiction, *Black Men* has sold more than one million copies. Madhubuti has managed to balance the genres of essay and poetry with great precision. In 1991 Madhubuti's collection of essays *Black Men* effectively conveyed the many tentacles of the issues plaguing Black men in late twentieth-century America, from relationships with women and children, drugs and police violence, to poor self-esteem and White supremacy. The book remains a necessary read for anyone thinking about the plight of Black men in America and the world. It is an honest book that raises questions and criticisms, offers missions and visions, and has a wider worldview of the problems plaguing African Americans families.

Few books prior to *Black Men* offered such a wide lens through which to view the problems surrounding Black men. Madhubuti's signature essays in section 1 of the book, "Were Corners Made for Black Men to Stand On?" and the title essay "Black Men," set the tone of the honesty and pain he explores and expresses as a firsthand observer, and even victim of the pain and problems he sets out to change. In fact, a strong indication of the book's promise and agenda resonates in the brief yet poetic prose that precedes the table of contents:

The pain is in the eyes. Young Black men in their late twenties or early thirties living in urban America, lost and abandoned, aimlessly walking and hawking the streets with nothing behind their eyes but anger, confusion, disappointment and pain. . . . These men . . . beaten beyond recognition, with scars both visible and internal. These Black men—sons of Afrika . . . are now kneeless, voice-broken, homeless, forgotten and terrorized into becoming beggars, thieves or ultra-dependents on a system that considers them less than human and treats them with less dignity and respect than dead dogs. I am among these men.

Unfortunately the count of beaten and broken men that are "homeless, forgotten and terrorized" continues to rise as we march into the twenty-first century.

Haki is a very busy person whose many obligations made it difficult to secure an interview with him. In addition to being the director of the Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing Program at Chicago State University, he also is often invited to give lectures all around the United States. An institution builder, he remains involved in the Institute of Positive Education/New Concept School, which he helped found, the Betty Shabazz International Charter School, the Barbara Ann Sizemoore Elementary School, the DuSable Leadership Academy (all in Chicago), and, of course, he is still the publisher

of Third World Press. However, the issues that face Black men are important to him, so he took time out of his very busy schedule to chat with me about the field of Black masculinity studies, his book *Black Men*, and the state of Black men past, present, future.

TL: It has been more than sixteen years since the publication of your widely successful and important book, *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous?* The book lays out a blueprint for improving the lives of Black American men. What was your impetus for writing this book, and do you think it has the same resonance that it had in 1991? Also, *Black Men* became a model or the standard by which subsequent texts on the subject have been written and measured. Do you think that contemporary books on the subject of Black men have effectively extended our original conversation?

HM: As you stated, *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous?* was published over sixteen years ago and continues to play a significant role in the analysis of the state of Black men and Black families in America. The reason I wrote *Black Men*—and it took me approximately twelve years to write the book—is because in between *Black Men* and the conception and the publishing of the book, I was doing community work. I was involved in the Organization of Black American Culture and I was working at various universities. I was trying to build these institutions— independent Black institutions in Chicago, and doing this kind of work over the last, well most certainly I had been in Black struggle at that point for about twenty-eight years working with CORE, SNCC, Dr. King’s organization here in Chicago, and doing international work for African liberation as well as other movements in the Black community, but primarily trying to come to grips with the international problem of Black enslavement, White settlement colonies, and trying to get a grasp on the real significance of why Black people ended up in such a complicated and often confusing condition in America.

I’m primarily a poet and an artist; artists around the world are primarily the freest of people. In fact, when you have your dreams challenged, the first act is to cut the voices, cut the legs out of the artist. As a poet, I had been influenced by the work of Paul Laurence Dunbar, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, Margaret Walker, Sterling A. Brown, Arna Bontemps, and others. And as a working poet, most certainly out of the Black Arts Movement, I saw as part of my responsibility to not only write the truth as I understood it, but also try to practice the truth that I was trying to reveal to myself as well as others. This is critical. So, I took the concepts of liberation and freedom quite seriously and in many cases literally. I began to essentially try to actualize the ideas that were influencing me. And as any person who reads or any intellectual who understands the written word, he or she understands that the power of ideas cannot be denied. Ideas, creators, and carriers of ideas actually run the world. We all tap-dance to somebody’s ideas. And for me, as a young poet and as a young

man involved in trying to come to grips with who I am, I began to question rather early: “Where are the Black ideas? Where are the ideas that essentially allowed us to, you know, create civilization? Where are the ideas that allowed us to begin to create language, the art of science, the art and of use of mathematics, art, and so forth?” So my study of these concepts and others started quite early—at fourteen, in fact, I read Richard Wright’s *Black Boy*. Richard Wright’s *Black Boy* put me on the journey of serious investigation, serious cultural understanding about who we are, where we are, and where we are going.

Prior and since *Black Men*, there were many other books. Primarily poetry books, but I had also published two, I think, very influential books of prose cultural analysis, *From Plan to Planet* (1973). This book was a book of essays around struggle and trying to find our place in the world, but at the same time trying to essentially look at other cultures, other people, to see what took them from one place to the next place. And in between the poetry books and most certainly *From Plan to Planet*—in fact, my third poetry book, *Don’t Cry, Scream*, is the book that put me on the national and international map, selling over fifty thousand copies in the year of its publication, which is unheard of in this country. This, of course, helped me to acquire the position at Howard University. I eventually ended up working there for eight years. And during those eight years, I lived in Chicago, worked in D.C., and I commuted every week via, at that time it was TWA Airlines, Midway Airlines, and American Airlines, between Chicago and D.C. Well, doing all this travel, I was doing national and international work, and I would see the plight of Black men. I noticed that we would change not only the conversation, but our images of ourselves when we would get around White people. That we did not act in many cases as men should act, okay, most certainly empowered men. But not only that, I was visiting prisons almost twice a month and talking to brothers in prisons, wondering—trying to figure out how do we move toward a culture to prevent men, Black men, from going to prison. So, what I saw was needed was a book that not only analyzed our condition and made commentary on our condition, but also tried to give answers to how we can come out of the condition in which we are in. Essentially, that is the genesis of *Black Men*. If you look at the essays in the three sections, I try to address what I feel are crucial, serious problems facing Black men at that time.

There is a scholar at University of Illinois here in Chicago, Charles Mills, who in his very important book *The Racial Contract* makes the case, and I quote him, “that white supremacy is the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today.” And Dr. Mills in his study makes a philosophical and etiological case for the disastrous effect of White supremacy on non-White people worldwide and specifically Black people in America. And so the formation of the ideas and the concepts in *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous?* evolved

as the result of twenty-eight years of active street struggle, serious study, really, really reading the literature that was available at that time—most certainly the history.

I designate W. E. B. DuBois as one of my grandfathers; I consumed DuBois's literature between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one—everything he had published. The same with Carter G. Woodson, Rayford Logan, E. Franklin Frazier, Marcus Garvey, Lerone Bennett Jr. You know, these were foundational works for me, and you add that to the poets and to the fiction writers. Most certainly Richard Wright, Chester Himes, John Oliver Killens, John A. Williams—these were foundational writers for me as I was developing as a young writer. But what was more important was my own life in terms of how I was essentially not mentored, but existed within a family structure that was disintegrating. I write about this in my latest book, *Yellow Black: The First Twenty-one Years of a Poet's Life*. My mother was in the sex trade; my father wasn't there; my sister was taken advantage of at a quite early age. And I, as a young Yellow-Black boy, 131 pounds, 6'1"—and how I was able to try to navigate through those very difficult and perilous times. And so for me, *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous?* was both a personal testimony to where we are, where we must be, and where we need to go. I had hoped that it would, you know, bring about some changes; to the degree that it has, I feel that the work was and is worthwhile. It remains in print, about a million copies in print now. It has sold, most certainly, oh, at least three-quarters of a million, and we probably gave a quarter of a million away to prisoners primarily. We have this prisoner literacy program at Third World Press, and all a brother or a sister all he or she has to do is just write us and we send him or her books, not just *Black Men*, but other books we publish at Third World Press. So I hope that I was able to kind of start the life giving and life sustaining conversation. I think the reason that *Black Men* remains a best-seller for Third World Press is because the conversation is ongoing and that the points I attempted to address in *Black Men*, focus on problems that are still current within the context of our community.

The people who I mentioned being literary parents are Malcolm X; Margaret and Charlie Burroughs, founders of the DuSable Museum; Dudley Randall, poet and founder of Broadside Press; Hoyt W. Fuller, first editor of *Negro Digest*, *Black World Magazine*; Barbara Ann Sizemore, educator extraordinaire; and Gwendolyn Brooks, one of the finest poets of the twentieth and twentieth first century.

TL: Speaking of poets how does one of the premier poets of the Black Arts Movement come to write a political, historical, sociological book of essays about the plight of Black men and families in America?

HM: Once I began to understand the role of White world supremacy and began to understand essentially that White supremacy is a political system (as Dr. Charles Mills writes about in his very important book *The*

Racial Contract), and understood the philosophical, etymological, political, and cultural effects of White supremacy and really how it is denied any kind of scholarly study by the people who perpetuate this system. I quote Dr. Mills, who writes in his book that: “though white supremacy covers more than 2,000 years of Western political thought and runs the ostensible gamut of political systems, there will be no mention of the basic political system that has shaped the world for the past several hundred years. And this omission is not accidental, but rather reflects the fact that standard textbooks and courses have, for the most part, been written and designed by whites who take their racial privilege so much for granted that they don’t even see it as political, as a form of domination. Ironically, the most important political system of recent global history, the system of domination by which white people have historically ruled over and in certain important ways continue to rule over non-white people, is not seen as a political system at all. It is just taken for granted. It is the background against which other systems which we are to see as political are highlighted.” So, what I knew quite early as a young man was that the lives of—at that time 35 million Black people, today it is about 40 million Black people, who live under this system have little or no knowledge of this. And I described the state of Black people in America as one of abysmal ignorance. This is not through a fault of our own, but through the educational, religious, political, economic systems of which we’ve been reared. Seldom, if at all, is White supremacy ever mentioned, analyzed, touched upon, referenced at any stage of our development.

And so here you have a small group of White people, primarily White men—but this is not to deny the White women’s role in this—who, for the most part, run and control this culture, this nation. A perfect example would be this war that we are now in, in terms of Bush and his cohorts and neo-conservatives. There are no more than say, for the most part, ten people, mainly White men, making a decision to take the nation to war, and this is part of the whole global system of White world supremacy. Once I began to understand this fundamentally at the core of my own being, I knew that we were in an unfair fight. Julius Nyerere in one of his books writes about how “we must run while they walk.” Well, while they are walking, we are crawling because we lack the essential knowledge base, or what I call liberation knowledge base, in order to attack this. Therefore, we as poets, writers, and visual artists in general must be about the development of a liberation narrative.

Writers, you know—the artists again as I mentioned earlier—are much freer than most people. And we do not take this freedom for granted. As a poet, I try to use my poetry, but at the same time recognizing I’m not going to reach all people even though my poetry has sold very well. My third book *Don’t Cry, Scream* sold about fifty thousand copies its first year, and the subsequent books of poetry have done well. But I move to really deal with this problem in a much more

pragmatic way in my prose, and when I published *From Plan to Planet* in 1973, it was one of the first books to really attack and deal with the question of White world supremacy, but at the same time tried to give serious practical information around how do we continue to develop. And then in 1978, I published a book titled *Enemies: The Class of Races*, which was not only an analysis of White world supremacy, but at the same time it was a serious attack on those political, economic, and social structures that continue to hold us down. I also dealt with the whole question of anti-intellectuals in the Black community. If you don't know, you can't do and other people use their knowledge about you against you, and that has often happened in our communities. So I felt that poetry was critical, but at the same time I felt that I had to move posthaste into prose, political prose, and cultural prose.

TL: Excellent. Do you feel that the publication of *Black Men* has had a significant impact on the conditions of Black men (young and old) and the perspective of Black men? If so how?

HM: Well, I think that the significance has been marginal around the great majority of Black men. It has had an impact on Black men that I think read and know about the book. We have essentially given the book away to literally hundreds of thousands of prisoners. To that extent, I think it has helped. Every place I go, Black men and women are bringing reread copies of *Black Men* to me to sign, so I know that it is having some affect. And I have met Black men all across the country that have told me that it has changed their lives and how they've used it as an organizing text. We continue to sell many from Third World Press as well as give them away too!

TL: What do you think of recent books about Black men, fatherhood, and masculinity coming out by people like Martin Summers (*Manliness and Its Discontents*), Mark Anthony Neal, Dwight McBride, and Marlon Ross (*Manning the Race: Reforming Black Men in the Jim Crow Era*)?

HM: I feel that these books are absolutely necessary, critical, worthy, needed. I think that these activists and scholars contribute to the ongoing question. The only problem I see with many of the books is that they do not deal with institutional development. What I try to do is move toward, not only dealing with the whole question of definition and our tomorrows, but the importance of independent Black institutions. Many of your readers realize that the major Black institution in our community is the Black church. The Black church as a spiritual base has done its job and continues to do its job, but what is happening now is that we've got these new mega-churches lead by what I call "undercover Negroes" who essentially are pimping the Black community in the name of God. And then of course you've got the new hip-hop rap culture where you see many of these rappers running around here with these gold-plated and silver-plated crosses around their necks. . . . I guess these are new Christians, I don't know. But my point is that we have leadership

coming from one sector of the Black community and one of the reasons that these Black men, these ministers, have been able to rise without being a threat actually to the White community, is because they are not a threat! You see, in fact, the ministry has been the field where Black men have been able to make a mark because they are not challenging White supremacy. The only people these ministers have to answer to in terms of their own livelihood are basically Black people; who are non-critical in many cases. They are most certainly not religiously critical or self-critical. When you look at the Black community, the major capital development across the country is basically Black churches. It's the richest and most powerful institution in the Black community. When you have a leadership that primarily comes from that leadership (I'm saying and stating what I state in *Black Men*), it cannot challenge White leadership that comes from many different areas: military, academia, health care, finance, corporate structure, education, entertainment, and so forth. This leaves us at odds, fighting a battle that we can't win unless we become much more inclusive in terms of our leadership, in terms of our direction.

TL: Okay, back to your book *Black Men*. How would you respond to feminists and others who might critique some of your concepts like man-sharing as not cool? Also can you explain why you proposed this as an option for Black families and whether you still deem it a viable option for Black men and women today?

HM: Well, traveling across much of Africa, I noticed that the polygamist households are not necessarily the best for us, but for the cultures where they exist, in some cases they are working and in some cases they are not working. I really don't want to stress this as being the answer, but just being one of the answers. You find out now within the context of Black communities there is a lot of man-sharing even though it's undercover. I write about that in the book. You know in order for family structures to become legitimate and right and correct, they had to be accepted by all the practitioners as well as the institutional structure of the community. Whether this happens or not, there must be an answer to this somewhere because now we are at a very perilous time where marriages are breaking up quicker than the South and North Poles. It is critical that we realize that there has to be some level of family—stable families that work—because if we don't have stable families, you're not going to have a stable community, stable nation, or anything on any serious level. So, I accept the criticism of Black women, but if you read the book carefully, I say that what's good for Black men is good for Black women too! Also I state rather emphatically that Black men should not be afraid of intelligent, serious, culturally focused, ambitious Black women. In fact, we need to encourage that among our women, most certainly among our daughters as well as our sons. Family is going to evolve. In fact, the idea for man-sharing is actually coming from some Black women scholars also. But it's going to work its way out.

TL: I want you to address another critique of the book. There are some who charge that *Black Men* does not speak to homosexual Black men or consider perspectives of masculinity that are not heterosexual. How would you respond to such critics?

HM: Well, I think these critics are accurate. I did not in any way speak to homosexuality because I, as most men my age—I'm sixty-five—and we were raised in apartheid America. We were raised in sexist America. We were raised in homophobic America. We were raised in classic classism America; ageism America—I mean, all the phobias, all the negative aspects of growing up as a whole person we did not have. We had to grow out of these very negative human categories. I can always remember Barbara Sizemore, Gwendolyn Brooks, and my wife Dr. Carole Lee actually slapping sexism out of me. And, of course, their actions and their work proved to me quite easily that men and women, most certainly intellectually, and in many other ways are equal. These conditions that we put on cultures, put on people are man-made, as with homosexuality. I mean, I would dare say that the great majority of homosexuals in the world are born homosexual. It's not a lifestyle that people grow up and say, "Oh, I just want to start loving men or start loving women of the same sex." I think that the great majority of these men and women were biologically and genetically made that way just as heterosexuals are. I think that we should actually learn to love these men and women of our culture and stop categorizing them in a negative way and allow them to live their lives in a way in which they can be most productive in their chosen professions and lives. I really believe that. And it took some time for me to get to that level, but I feel that is the way we need to go. And I will be talking and writing that as we move into the twenty-first century.

TL: Is this some of what compelled you to write *Tough Notes: A Healing Call For Creating Exceptional Black Men*? What did it achieve that *Black Men* might not have?

HM: Well, *Tough Notes* came about as a result of reading, studying, and realizing that there were some areas that were still not being touched. But before I go any further, let me also mention some additional books that are important and fundamental to the literature of black men. I want to mention Marita Golden's book *Don't Play in the Sun: One Woman's Journey Through the Color Complex* as well as her very important book *Saving Our Sons*. Marita Golden is a fiction writer, but she has really given valuable input on the whole question of raising Black boys. C. F. Gipson's *The Black Man's Guide to Parenting: 50 Ways to Be an Effective Father* is critical and important also. You mentioned Mark Anthony Neal; I think his book is critical. But we have not mentioned Bakari Kitwana's *The Rap against Gangster Rap* and his *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture*, which are very important. Ellis Cose, the writer for the weekly magazine

Newsweek, put out a very important book, *The Envy of the World: On Being a Black Man in America*. John Edgar Wideman, the novelist, has a very important piece, *Fatheralong: A Meditation on Fathers and Sons, Race and Society*. E. Ethelbert Miller has a very important book called *Following Words: The Making of an African American Writer*, which is both memoir as well as dealing with the context of his own family pride and so forth. And Dr. Raymond A. Winbush, a scholar who was at Fisk University for many years and now who is at Morgan State, wrote *The Warrior Method*. It is critical because it's kind of a program for rearing healthy Black boys. I would suggest these texts along with the ones that you have mentioned. I think that they, along with *Tough Notes*, are what I would call liberation narratives. These liberation narratives give our people strong, serious options and directions. As I mentioned earlier, we just don't know. I think what separates my books from many others is that Third World Press, which is located right in the center of the Black community in Chicago and has been around for over forty years now, essentially has its foot, we have basically have our boots on the ground, and we are able to get the books directly to these young Black men as well as not-so-young Black men. And so, *Tough Notes* for me just adds to the conversation, and I have always felt that we had to change the conversation in America. We have to change the tone, the substance, the lives of our Black men and our Black families and our Black women. If we don't do it, it's not going to be done. What I find in terms of my own observations and studies is that essentially this has to be almost a daily, hourly conversation because we are losing the media battle.

I will never forget a piece I read in *Harper's Magazine*, I guess around 2004, written by Lewis H. Lapham. It's a very important piece called "Tentacles of Rage: The Republicans Propaganda Mill." Basically, it was a brief history of how the Republicans decided to take back the media. It was becoming too liberal, it was becoming too conscientious of women and non-Whites, and they decided to take it back. And they have done that! You see, Lapham points out how money has come in and has essentially co-opted the media. So when these commentators talk about the liberal media, it's nothing but a lie. The media is owned and controlled basically by right-winged corporate structures. And, I feel that we, as Black people, have to develop our own media, our own way of talking to and dealing with the Black community. At Third World Press and the institutions that we have developed in Chicago, we try to do just that. So, in *Tough Notes* I was trying to, at one level, deal with the whole question of not only new definitions, but accurate definitions to try and put them in a way that I was unable to do in *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous?* The whole question is one of empowerment, again the question of spirituality, money. It is one of what is an intellectual? Or, why is reading and writing critical to any people's development? Dealing with the whole question of rape, which I have dealt with in other books, is

also important; but also dealing with the whole question of art, relationships between fathers and sons. I am trying to deal with affirmative action and reparations. And reparations become, for me, critical because if you understand the history of America, you understand that this country was built on the backs, the arms and legs of our foreparents, of our African foreparents; where Black men and women, children worked from sun up to sun down for something as little as food and the rags on their backs to make this one of the wealthiest countries in the world. And I feel, when seriously talking about reparations, we don't need somebody to give us a check; we need to begin to transfer wealth within the context of our community. This wealth must be translated into health care, education, cultural institutions, any institutions that are involved in our development. We need to have those in our community. It's just an ongoing question about the wealth of the Black community. What I try to do in *Tough Notes* is to begin to answer some of these other questions.

TL: If you were writing *Black Men* today, what would that book look like? How, if at all, would this book differ from the one you wrote in 1991?

HM: Not too much difference. I think that I would include the same text for the most part. I would elaborate on some points such as the question of man-sharing or the question of homosexuality. I would elaborate a little bit more.

TL: Any final words? Perhaps you might discuss projects you're working on in the area of Black men.

HM: Well, I think that it is critical for us to again, get back to, for me, the essential problem, the lack of independent Black institutions. You measure the strength of communities by the institutional structures that they develop, and that's what we are lacking. Also, I think we need to ritualize our rites of passage such as Jews who have the bar and bat mitzvah for men and women, and other cultures have these rites of passage. We need to have a few rites incorporated in the school systems. I think we need more independent schools. I think charters represent a way for us to do that. In Chicago we have four schools: We have the New Concept School, which is preschool. Then we have the Betty Shabazz International Charter School, which is elementary school K-8. We have the Barbara Ann Sizemore Elementary School, which is K-8. And we have the DuSable Leadership College Preparatory Academy, which is a high school. And I think that any people, if we are serious about trying to deal with this whole question of men, we've got to deal with these boys. Our institutions have got to be anti-prison, anti-drugs you see. Anti- those negative things that essentially steer our children in a direction of which is very difficult to get them back. Too many of our people, people around the world are basically pleasure-conscious, pleasure seeking, pleasure-controlled; that if it feels good, taste good, looks good, go after it. And to recognize that essentially that the people

that run the world, they rise early, they have a work ethic that is very difficult to beat, they are serious about themselves, about their people, and I say serious as a first love. Therefore for me, it's critical that we understand that we are not in a game when you have less than ten white men who are able to push us into a war and use Black people to do that. You have Colin Powell going to the United Nations and literally lying, just lying us into a war; or Condoleezza Rice talking about this mushroom cloud coming as a result of what's happening in Iraq. Just lies—lies. We now have a C-minus president who essentially has been able to lie his way into this war, as well as the serious deficit that this country is now carrying.

I think that we have to have men and women who think, and who go subsurface to understand the importance of ideas. The work I am currently involved in, most certainly in terms of my writing, deals with that. I am trying to deal with practical strategies and tactics and to continue to save and deal with these Black boys out here.

When I say practical, let me give you just one idea of what I've been pushing around the country. I strongly suggest that all Black boys, and girls too, but mainly Black boys carry three documents with them at all times. One, a library card—you know, libraries, the free library system in this country, is really one of the best in the world, but libraries are anti-ignorance; books are anti-ignorance. And so I think that Black boys need to have a library card and use it! Two, they need to carry with them a lawyer's legal aid card or an American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) card. And the third thing they need to have is a miniature copy of the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of the United States of America. Now, the reason that I'm suggesting that Black boys carry these documents with them is because when you are in these cities like I am, and they have these Neanderthal cops stop them on the street and start searching them the cop comes up against the library card and asks, "What are you doing with this?" The response will be: "Well, obviously, you know, I use it. I'm a reader." But that alone [knowledge that he is a reader] may not stop this cop from just going crazy. But as he continues to search you and finds your legal aid card or ACLU card and says, "What are you doing with this, boy?" the response will be: "Well, that's my lawyer's number. You know the ACLU, I support them and I study their work." Then finally, if he continues to search and he sees this miniature copy of the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights of the Constitution and asks, "What are you doing with this?" the response will be: "Well, I'm a citizen and you're invading my rights now by taking my documents." My point is that knowledge about the world, about his world, is going to cause that cop to think before he moves on with whatever he had planned to do. And this is just one tactic that I see is absolutely necessary.

I think there has been development, you know. I think that when

you begin to look at these national organizations that have come about in the last twenty-five or thirty years such as the National Association of Black Social Workers (which is one of the largest), Association of Black Psychologists, National Association of Black School Educators, National Council of Black Studies, National Conference of Artists, and others, you will see that there are men and women who are very serious about the development of our community. But finally, I would just say that what are needed again, in every community, are independent Black institutions because we have to change the conversation. Where's our liberation narrative? Many of us know the liberation narrative of Mormons. Every night we turn on the television news, we see what's happening in the Middle East, we see the Israeli narrative. Read the newspapers, most certainly the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Boston Globe*, *New Republic*, we see the Israeli and Jewish liberation narrative. The only liberation narrative that is greater and more effective is the fundamental Christian narrative; after all, the currently control the White House as we speak.

I think that when we look at the Mormons, we see that the Mormons don't just rent Utah; they own Utah. You go into Salt Lake City, you see their home headquarters, how magnificent it is, how stable it is, and over the last twenty-five years, Mormons have moved into Africa, moved into Harlem, New York. But you really don't realize how powerful the Mormons are until you begin to go into the Black communities in this country where you see young White Mormon missionaries on bicycles. They generally come as a pair with white shirts and black pants, their badge on, selling the Mormon story. I didn't realize how entrenched they began to move into the Black community. You know, you go to Harlem and about two or three blocks from the Schaumburg Library and Cultural Research Center, there's a Mormon Missionary Church on a corner in Harlem. So I am saying the Mormons have a liberation narrative. We grew up influenced and nurtured culturally and politically under the Christian liberation narrative. The Israelis now have a liberation narrative. You don't know what the Palestinians' liberation narrative is because the Palestinians do not have in-roads at all into the United States media. And that's why now when you hear mass media talking about Arabs, for the most part they don't even call them militants or radicals anymore; they call them terrorists most of the time. And so when you control the conversation, you control the definitions.

I think that as we move into the twenty-first century, we need to focus on six things. Number one, we have to control the conversation. Number two, we have to be men and women conscious of who we are, unafraid to run toward fear. Three, we have to really be involved in building independent Black institutions other than just the church, especially wealth developing institutions such as credits unions, banks, and other entities. Four, we have to understand the importance of Black

families, keeping these families together, and understand that there are different structures of families being developed all across the country. We have to respect them and support them in many cases. And, number five, much of this is going to take our own resources, you see. So, I'm building Third World Press, building our schools, and I have always for the last, what, forty years worked at universities. That's how I've made a living. The money I've earned has basically gone back into developing Third World Press, developing our schools, and developing these independent structures. The National Black Holistic Society and National Conference of Artists are two national structures I'm working with now. The National Conference of Artists is the nation's oldest organization of organized Black visual artists and the National Black Holistic Society is a group of men around the country who essentially are trying to move Black men toward a holistic way of life and to understand the political, cultural problems that confront us on a daily basis.

Finally, number six, I just want to say that independent Black study institutions, most certainly the African-centered schools, exist all across the country. You've got three or four schools in Detroit, of course I mentioned Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and other areas. There are men and women doing serious work at this level. These men and women who essentially have helped change the conversation need to be mentioned in this conversation I am having with you. One is Dr. Maulana Karenga, the developer of Kwanzaa and the U.S. Organization, an independent Black institution in the Los Angeles area that's doing serious work. I think we also have to mention Molefi Kete Asante, who was able to bring the first Ph.D. program in African Studies at Temple University and, like Karenga, is a scholar in his own light. Also, Dr. James Turner at Cornell University is among the first serious Africana Studies and research programs. Dr. Beverly Guy-Sheftell has done great work at Spelman College with the Women Studies Department there. Ron Daniels has revitalized the Institute of the Black World. And we must not forget the work Dr. Ron Walters is doing in the political arena at the University of Maryland. In the area of historical and cultural preservation the work of Howard Dobson at the Schomburg Center is of immense importance. Most certainly Dr. Joseph McMillan of Louisville and his Black Family Conference just celebrated thirty-four years of annual conferences. And most certainly we must never minimize the work of Dr. bell hooks, Sonia Sanchez, Patricia Williams, Ruth Simmons, and countless other women and men across the country who continue to challenge the status quo. So, Dr. Lewis, I hope that this helps you or gives you some insight into me and insight into the development of *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous?* Thank you for your time.

TL: No, thank you.

HM: Talk to you soon, take care now.