

WE ARE ALRIGHT: SOME THOUGHTS ON THE ACBH 2019 ANNUAL BLACK HISTORY MONTH CELEBRATION

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You may look at the title above and wonder why I chose to re-mix the theme of the actual celebration. After hearing the Youth Panel speak at this illustrious celebration, I thought: "Hmmm. *Going to be alright?* With a future like this, we *are* alright."

The event transpired on February 22, 2019, at the Hayward Veterans Memorial Building. We started off our day with a light breakfast, which was actually pretty good, but paled in comparison to lunch, which featured some stellar soul food dishes.

The event coordinators broke the ice with some bioluminescent African drumming and dancing. Standing in the building, you could feel the magnitude of the polyrhythms as the whole house shook with the roar of drums and bodies. I was reminded of a quote from a friend I used to have on the Internet long ago, back in the ancient age of America Online. He told me he always gets sad whenever he sees paintings of Egyptians and other Africans of the pre-Columbian era, because he was forced to remember all the horror that happened to his people, and what his people could have been, had the atrocities of slavery and colonialism never happened.

The program then segued to a presentation by the Youth ("youth" as in maybe 8, 10, or 11 years old, if even that) who stomped through the hall, loudly and assertively, bearing placards with such positive affirmations as: "Power to the people," "black girls rock," "Yes We Can," and "We demand equal housing." It was a stirring performance, and if this is our future, it's looking incredibly bright.

Then Javarre Wilson stepped up to the mic, and gave a speech encapsulating the black experience in America, highlighting the horrific traumas of imperialism, colonialism, and mass enslavement, traumas that are undeniably felt to this day, in ways both subtle and overt, in trickle-down effects and blatant actions. Mr. Wilson talked about the history of violence, sexual assault, and violations of the mind and body that African-Americans have endured and continue to endure.

Others spoke, including Barbara White, who introduced Pastor Horatio Jones.

One speaker noted that the African-American response to slavery was NOT docile or passive as has been suggested, as countless, constant rebellions and uprisings were mounted, time and time again. Also expressed, was the media's almost incessant attack on black culture, and its adverse effect on black youth development, self-esteem and self-worth.

Now: full disclosure time. As I was appointed by POCC to assist with food for this event, I missed a trite chunk of some of the other speakers and voices. What I didn't miss was the final Youth Panel, in which about five or six youth (only one girl, I noted) took center stage, to catalyze a quite cerebral dialogue about America's future, race, media, self-empowerment, education, self-love and the patriarchy.

All I can possibly say is, WOW! It was quite a discussion. These individuals clearly all had good heads on their shoulders. They were knowledgeable, had astounding vocabulary, and displayed a great self-awareness and connection to the world and the events that transpire within it. As I commented when I stood up in front of the panel for Question Time, I wish I was as bright as these young thinkers when I was growing up, because if I displayed as much panache and intelligence as they did when I was a kid, my life would not have taken the depressing turn that it did.

The group onstage expressed ideas about wellness and self-care, all great ideas. The highlight for me, as a person struggling with my society's imposed ideas of manhood and sexuality, was when one of the speakers brought up the issue of: Challenging one's own masculinity. A brilliant thought, in my opinion, because that is something I'm dealing with now, as I'm trying to reverse the patriarchal dogma of toxic masculinity that has been implanted in my head since birth. It's a struggle that involves such concepts as feminism, male privilege, and queerhood, amongst other things, as I press on in the world, trying to discover and come to terms with my own identity, amidst emergent issues and attitudes of gender and sexuality.

The Youth Panel also discussed economic disparities and big companies' marketing tactics toward the black community. Also addressed was the legacy of blackface and the racist policies of a capitalist industry. When all was said and done, the conversation had been sprawling and far-ranging, always intelligent and progressive.

I left this event feeling infinitely inspired, and again, let me reiterate: If this is our future, damn does it look ever so bright. I would love to be able to live to see these kids bloom into philosophers, engineers, writers, artists, filmmakers, doctors, scholars, scientists, and whatever else, because it's looking so optimistic, it's genuinely exciting!

Lastly, there was a word I took away from this celebration. It's an African word: "Ma'afa," which means to go back into your past to a painful time, to move forward and change your destiny. That word resonates well with me right now, because it is a personal experience I must soon put myself through. But I do realize and honor the collective weight this

word implies.

This celebration was about the resilience of black people, and recovery from the suffering of decades and centuries past. Yup, we are alright, and we always will be. No matter what. With such a rich future, it feels like we're definitely on our way up.

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