

I Am What Hate Produced: My Journey to Freedom in a Racist World

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Prologue

I was just getting ready to go to bed when my wife called.

“Ernest, are you watching the TV”?

Renee sounded frantic. She and the kids had left our apartment in Atlantic City, NJ late that afternoon and travelled back home to Philadelphia after our Mother’s Day Brunch at Harrah’s Marina Resort Hotel and Casino. It was Sunday, May 13, 1985.

When she got home, she bathed our children, fed them dinner, and put them to bed. She then turned on the TV for the evening news, a daily ritual of hers.

“No. Why”?

“Turn it on; turn on the News”.

“Why do you want me to turn on the TV, Renee? What’s going on”?

“The City of Philadelphia’s police department has dropped a bomb on the MOVE Home in West Philadelphia. There are people trapped inside the house and the police are shooting so intently that no one can escape the burning inferno. And the fire department won’t put the fire out, even after the mayor ordered them to extinguish the fire. This is surreal”.

“Renee, as exhausted as I am, I will turn it on, but I’m tired, and I’ve got to go to bed and get some sleep. I have to get up at 5 am tomorrow morning.”

I remembered the last Police/MOVE confrontation in Powellton Village, two blocks down the street from where my first wife Gail and I had lived when I was in Graduate School at the University of Pennsylvania. During that 1978 encounter, a police officer was killed, and 9 MOVE members were sentenced to 30-year prison terms. Two died in prison, and the last MOVE member was released in June of 2020.

MOVE, not an acronym, was a political and religious organization, originally the Christian Movement for Life. It was a black militant green anarchist group founded in 1972 by John Africa (born Vincent Leaphart). They were Christians who understood the importance of Climate Change and New Green Development; and they were murdered because of the beliefs they held.

The police officer was shot in the back of his neck, and since he was facing the MOVE home during the firefight, the convicted MOVE members maintained that the officer was killed with ‘friendly fire’ from his own people, not from them. From what Renee was saying, it sounded like the police wanted to kill them this time.

The City of Philadelphia, in order to remove the MOVE members from their house, which they had turned into a bunker, initially had the Fire Department turn water hoses on the house hoping to flood them out and onto the streets. However, the MOVE house was so well fortified that the water could not penetrate, and instead, filled the streets and alleys with pools of water. When that idea failed, the Police Department shot missiles into the bunkered house, and then shot tear gas canisters into the holes created by the missile shots.

The MOVE members, led by their founder John Africa, remained in their home. We may never know the exact circumstances surrounding the order to bomb the MOVE house, something that had only occurred once before in all of America’s history. We do know that 11 black people, including 5 children, died in the resultant inferno the bomb created. 61 homes were destroyed, 110 houses were damaged extensively, and 250 residents were left homeless.

It is unconscionable, and incomprehensible, to believe that racial hatred could run so deep that an “American” would make the decision to bomb a residential neighborhood in the United States of America. Yet in Tulsa, Oklahoma (1921), private white citizens took it upon themselves to unleash their hatred against black people by manning private planes to do just that. A two-day race riot (it was white folks doing the rioting) that destroyed the wealthiest black community in America ensued.

In that catastrophe, white supremacy was clearly on display. In a 16-hour assault, which included bombs being dropped from six (6) Bi-plane two-seaters left over from World War One, resulted in over 9,000 black people being left homeless, and a 35-block area, with almost \$30,000,000 in damages; and a death toll that ranged from 55 to 300 black people; and another 800 non-fatal injuries sustained by a prosperous black community, once known as ‘Black Wall Street’.

This time, the MOVE encounter was precipitated by government action (white supremacy in motion). The explosive elements of the bomb detonated in Philadelphia, were supplied by the FBI. We will never know just how far up the Federal ladder someone gave the order to kill 6 MOVE members and 5 of their children. The death of those MOVE members was just the latest example of the privilege afforded to White Supremacists.

Little did I know that what was occurring between MOVE and the Philadelphia Police Department, in complicity with the Fire Department, and other Federal Government officials,

would have such a huge impact on the remainder of my life. Would it have made a difference had I sat transfixed to the TV for hours to witness the actual unfolding of the events? I don't think so.

Eventually, I would be named the developer to reconstruct the 61 homes damaged and destroyed in the Police/MOVE 'confrontation'.

That's how I ended up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, City Hall, Courtroom 414, in October of 1988.

He had done his job and now, perfunctory, Judge Angelo A. Guarino, "the Hanging Judge", announced my sentence of 6-12 years in a State of PA Correctional Institution (a good example of the word oxymoron). Judge Guarino was eventually removed from the bench in November of 1992 by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court for "jury intimidation", but 4 years earlier, on October 18, 1988, I was before him. And as usual, he was in complete control of the jury and the lawyers before him.

The courtroom was packed with my family and friends. I turned around to see the reaction of my family as Guarino announced sentencing. Unfortunately, but fortunately, my mom had passed away 3 months earlier. If she were alive at that moment, she would have died of a heart attack upon his pronouncement. The reaction on the faces of Renee (my wife) and Gail (my ex-wife), as they absorbed his words, was shock.

Ironically, my dad's face was one of relief. He later told me that I should have been glad that all the Caucasian was doing was spanking me with a jail sentence, for supposedly misappropriating construction funds (\$150,000) related to the project. He said that 50 years earlier they would have just killed a black man like me.

"Junior, as long as the white man's face is on the money, it is his country, not yours. If you don't like America, then you need to leave, because you aren't ever going to be able to change it." My dad, with a 3rd grade education notwithstanding, demonstrated his grasp of 'life'. He also reminded me that he had forewarned my arrest if I continued my desire to change things in America.

And yet, as the Amtrak train pulled away from the Newport News, VA station on February 4, 1992, I looked out the window to see my wife Renee and our three children, Qamara 10, Zaki 8, and Akima, who had just turned 7 three weeks earlier, crying as they waved goodbye. Renee's parting embrace told me she understood the import of the moment.

My pain was so deep that tears could not flow from my eyes. I now had to accept the in-my-face reality that I would be away from my family for the next 6-12 years. At that moment, it was incomprehensible.

I knew I had become completely ensnared in the 'trap' that I had been valiantly trying to dodge as I sought the freedom that is instinctive to human nature.

I wasn't interested in being a well-paid slave. I wasn't interested in a better house, a better car, better health care, better education, or better economic opportunity; I had all of that, earned by living what my parents taught me, "never touch, much less take, anything that doesn't belong to you."

I wanted my mental freedom, which meant a disconnection from the European developed enslaving mechanisms for: economy (capitalism is the latest manifestation), politics (democracy is the latest manifestation), and religion.

I had followed all the rules to achieve the "American" dream. I developed my athletic ability to receive the opportunity to attend and graduate from Rutgers-the State University of New Jersey. Dutifully, I had enrolled in the Graduate School of Fine Arts at the University of Pennsylvania with the goal of getting Master of Science Degrees in City and Regional Planning, as well as Landscape Architecture. I had worked for the Philadelphia City Planning Commission, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, and taught at City College of New York (now CUNY), Howard University, and Temple University, right there in the 'City of Brotherly Love'.

I safely and timely, arrived in Philadelphia to turn myself in to begin serving 'hard' time in a Commonwealth of Pennsylvania State Correctional Institution. The sound of the locking mechanism on jail doors is a very distinctive sound, seeming to denote finality, but a sound one gets used to over time.

I wasn't alarmed because, as a Minister in the Nation of Islam, I had often gone to Graterford, the replacement of Eastern Penitentiary, the oldest fortified prison in America operated by a US State, to provide services for the Fruit of Islam (FOI) brothers. I actually remember telling myself that I would never end up in a place like Graterford because I would never do anything or break any law that would cause me to end up in prison.

That's why I now know to never say 'never' because I now know the 'law' is 'his' law.

And yet, that is where I ended up. My cousin, Raymond G. Lee, a then Chief of Police of a small New Jersey shore community, and his beautiful wife Marilyn came to visit me at Graterford after I first arrived. On the phone the next day, he said he and Marilyn cried most of

their way back to New Jersey after seeing the horrible condition of the prison and knowing that, though innocent, I was in for a ‘rough’ ride.

How did I get there?

I, like all human beings, wasn’t born a racist, but racism, a tool of White Supremacy, made me one. How I was captured by racism and eventually freed myself from that ‘prison’ is my essential story. I was never raised to dislike, much less hate white people. My parents raised me with a love that guided, directed, and protected me as I grew to be who I am. My parents love for me and my love for them did not free me, but that love did fuel my struggle for freedom. This book is about that love, the struggle it empowered, and the freedom that struggle eventually made possible.

In writing my memoir I have interwoven business, religion, and politics in a narrative that tells of my successful struggle to overcome the personally destructive effects of racism and find the freedom that all people instinctively seek.

My quest for freedom, both real and metaphorically, occurred in the period between the Korean War (a war that has not yet ended) and the present. I have tried to detail my psychological growth and moral development during a period of simultaneously profound transformation and discouraging stasis in the role of race in American society. My transition from ignorance of race and racism, to becoming a racist myself, and eventually returning to sanity, despite being a captive as a second-class citizen in the richest country on Earth is my story.

My parents instinctively knew and believed that the next step to survival for their family was to work for white folk, with the firm belief that their efforts would not be in vain. Like their forbearers, from sunup to sundown, six days a week, my mom and dad were willing to work to provide a strong foundation for their next generation. From the time I was 5 years old, until my parents died, I was always reminded of the ‘value’ of an education.

By the time I reached junior high school I was well aware of how hard my parents worked to provide for me and my siblings. My dad worked at Ford Motor Company on an assembly line and owned and operated a barber shop; and my mom cleaned the homes of upper-class white families in suburbia when not working in the sewing ‘sweat shops’ in Newark, NJ.

I initially believed that black people could achieve freedom, justice, and equality of opportunity in America. In that context, I am thankful for my mom and dad’s insistence that education was the key to a better life for me and my siblings. My ‘education’ was crucial to me learning the hypocrisy of America. Eventually I found that my belief in America’s promise was ill-informed and definitely misplaced.

“What happened in 1619 staged America as a race-based nation, with race-based laws, institutions, and treatment of black people.”

Dr. Colita Fairfax, Norfolk State University Professor

The Colony called Virginia, now 400 years later, the United States of America, was launched from the **barrel of a gun**. Its foundation was flawed from the beginning.

The American Revolution only served to perpetuate slavery, not end it. While proclaiming universal equality and rights, it was deeply hypocritical at its core. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, both leaders of the American Revolution, were among the leading slave holders in the Virginia colony. American slave holders bought and sold human beings as if they were farm animals. The rape of female slaves was only one of the many mechanisms of racist terror and social control that they employed. The sordid story of Jefferson’s relationship with Sally Hemmings is a reminder that rape was widespread in slave culture.

Many important thinkers at the time, including Jefferson, were aware that the existence of slavery weakened the case of the Americans who were engaged in a struggle for their liberty with England. Over and over again, the leaders of the Revolution asserted their commitment to human freedom while directly negotiating the destruction of other human’s freedom.

The Virginia colony was founded in 1609; but America, with Capitalism at its core, began in earnest with the import of black slaves into Jamestown colony in 1619. Over 400 years later, the American colony has succeeded for the 1/10 of 1% of the world’s population who own and control 90% of the world’s natural resources. The American colony allowed the white ‘ruling elite’ to further develop and hone economic, political, and religious narratives to justify their hegemony. What about the consequences for people of color? For the vast majority, it only produced slavery, poverty, and death.

When I, an African born and raised in America, learned of these truths, my experiences led me to a path that dictated my life. I remain hopeful that my experience will encourage the reader to revisit questions about race that may have arisen in your own life.

Have you ever had racism directed at you, or have you ever directed racism toward anyone? I am now clear that race, as a biological concept, is a fiction, at the expense of people of color.

Scientifically, no valid fact regarding human behavior can be drawn from the melanin content of a human being’s skin.

Human beings are shaped by our genetic heritage, our parents' lessons, the "schooling" we receive, our own personal experiences, and "the proverbial environment" as we traverse 'life'; also, learning from the experience of others who have already gone before. I hope my experiences, as expressed in this memoir, will help others to understand that no matter our genetics or environment, we need to remain open to new information, and to new experiences.

My transformation from ignorance of race, to becoming a racist, and a return to sanity is an example that life is a 'constant state of change'. Having been a racist, I can bear witness that it prevents one from being free. Freedom can only be experienced by removing not just the physical chains that bind, but also by removing the mental chains that bind.

I now know that enslavement was not limited to just people of color. I now know and understand that all people (over 99% of Earth's inhabitants) have been enslaved and still are enslaved to a 'paradigm' established by the 'ruling elite' centuries ago, and one that is still being modified to adjust to the evolution of life.

"... 'hoodwinked', 'flimflammed', and 'bamboozled'."

Malcolm X

That's how I felt when I woke up on the morning of November 22, 2018. I had an epiphany, meaning it was at that moment that I realized I had moved from being born a human being, becoming a racist as a result of the White Supremacy that shaped and formed me, and back to being a human being with the knowledge, wisdom, and understanding to know when, how, and why racism developed.

There are probably as many individual definitions of racism as there are human beings who give thought to the subject. I have chosen to use the one defined in the American Heritage College dictionary.

Racism – the belief that race accounts for differences in human character or ability, and that a particular race is superior to others...discrimination or prejudice based on race.

Most folk will reject this definition because it strikes 'too close to home'. No one, black or white, wants to believe they are, or have been, a racist. Everyone born and raised in America, as well as the rest of the world, at one point in his or her life, was/is a racist, by the definition above. The thought of being a racist causes white folk, and black folk, to deny a reality.

Can you honestly say that you never considered your race (black, brown, yellow, red, or white) to be superior, or inferior, to others; or that you believed that your race had greater, or lesser,

character and ability? When you saw people of another color, can you say that you never had a preconceived negative notion/emotion?

It's a definition that fitted me perfectly before my epiphany. I absolutely believed that black people, were superior to white people. When I heard the Honorable Elijah Muhammad say that the black man was the 'Maker, Owner, Cream of the Planet Earth, and God of the Universe', my personal life experience had me accept it as 'truth'.

At one point in my life, I believed that all white people were evil, wicked, unrighteous, unjust, and corrupt by the very nature of their birth. And conversely, I believed that all black people were righteous by birth, though some had been corrupted by their slave master's teachings. There is no doubt that I prejudged people based on the color of their skin.

Now that I have awakened to the reality that I was a racist, it is difficult for me to understand how I could have actually believed that racism, prejudice, and discrimination are justifiable attitudes intrinsic to human nature. But the hatred, animosity, and divisiveness engendered and promulgated by 'racism' are threatening human survival. The exigent circumstances that we face today demand immediate attention, and immediate action.

In order to better understand what events in my life made me a 'racist', and what events caused the changes leading to my newfound sense of freedom, I think it necessary to look at some of my past experiences for clues. So here is my best recollection, and understanding, of who I think I am, and what forces operating then, and today, that I believe have changed me, and set me 'free'.

CHAPTER ONE

“...I don’t even consider myself an American. If you and I were Americans, there would be no problem. Those whites that just got off the boat, they are already Americans. Polacks are already American. Everything that came out of Europe, every blue-eyed thing, is already an American. And as long as you and I have been over here, we aren’t Americans yet.

Being born here in America doesn’t make you an American. Why, if birth made you an American, you wouldn’t need any amendments to the Constitution, you wouldn’t be faced with Civil-Rights filibustering in Washington, D.C. They don’t have to pass legislation to make a Polack an American.

No, I’m not an American. I’m one of 22 million Black people who are victims of democracy, nothing but disguised hypocrisy.

So, I’m not standing here speaking to you as an American, or a patriot, or a flag-waver – no, not I. I’m speaking as a victim of this system. And I see America through the eyes of a victim.

I don’t see any American dream; I see an American nightmare.

Malcolm X

Even before I entered high school, I never felt, much less believed that America was my home, my country.

“Boy, get outta da cah”, was a command, and a demand. It was 1951 and we were in Georgetown, DE, south of the Mason-Dixon Line in the dead of night. The cop was speaking to my dad.

He stood next to my dad’s driver’s side window with a flashlight shining in my father’s black face. The other cop was at my mother’s passenger side window shining his flashlight, first in my mom’s face and then me and Freddie, my younger brother.

I sat in the backseat, fearful, crying, and traumatized as I watched the two police officers with hands on their guns order my dad out of our car. They continued to call my dad “boy” as they manhandled, cuffed, and hauled him off to jail – for supposedly ‘speeding’ through ‘their’ town.

“Mommy, mommy, what are they doing to daddy?” My mother pulled me to her side and put her arm around me and held Freddie’s hand to calm and assure us that everything would be okay. My mom, Freddie, and I spent the night on a couch, at the home of a very gracious older black woman.

At the age of 5, my subconscious mind was recording the scene that I had just witnessed and was storing the data. It was my first conscious encounter with white authority, and it was negative.

My dad was given his one phone call; fortunately, the next day his friend Ricky drove down from Newark, NJ with sufficient bail money for my dad to be released. We continued our travel south and the ensuing conversation between my mom and dad let me know that those ‘white’ police officers were not my friend, and that Delaware was not friendly territory.

With the exception of our trip to Florida in 1951, I don’t ever recall my parents visibly showing any animosity toward white people. Maybe it was because my dad’s grandfather was a white man who was banished from his family for ‘taking up’ with a black woman. My great grandfather’s father was a Florida State Senator who despised his son for openly living with a black woman and disowned him.

And what a devastating effect that had on his grandson Fred, my grandfather. Being disowned by his grandfather and the disconnection, rejection, and scorn no doubt produced his feelings of low self-esteem and a lack of self-respect and caused a self-hatred that resulted in a lifetime of alcoholism. It is just one of the issues that entrapped black men then, as it does to this very day. My maternal great grandfather was also white. But I don’t believe my great grandfathers’ racial backgrounds influenced my parents’ attitudes toward white people.

In addition to my encounter in Georgetown, DE in 1951, I can also vividly remember a ‘newsreel’ that I saw in 1953, when I was just 7 years old. I was at the Beacon Theater, on the corner of Main and Grove Streets, across the street from the Kings Supermarket, in East Orange, NJ. I was catching a double feature that also included two cartoons and a ‘newsreel’ of current events around the world.

Residential television was just beginning and was only broadcast from 4 pm to 11 pm each day. Since most folk didn’t have TV, you read a newspaper, listened to the radio, or went to the movie theater once a week. For twenty-five cents, you could watch two movies, hear of the world news, and if you were a kid, watch some cartoons too. Popcorn only cost 5 cents.

To this day, I can hear the inflection and intonation in the voice of the narrator. The newsreel that week was describing the overthrow of Mohammed Mossadegh, the 35th Prime Minister of Iran, who though initially appointed by the Shah of Iran, was subsequently duly elected by the people of Iran.

Mossadegh was only in office for two years (1951-53) before his government was overthrown in the 1953 Iranian coup d’état orchestrated by the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)

and the United Kingdom's Secret Intelligence Agency (MI6), which they only conceded to sixty years later, in 2013.

I have no idea how I, at the age of 7, knew there was something wrong in 'their' description of the events. By the look on that brown man's face as he was being led away by white police, similar to the look on my dad's face two years earlier, which said, "what the hell is going on, what did I do?" I instinctively knew that Mossadegh was not the bad guy. Just like my dad, Mossadegh was also handcuffed behind his back and led away by a cop on each arm. Though quiet, his face said it all, just like my dad's.

They were both 'guilty' of being men of color. Even though I didn't consciously understand it at the time, that data was also stored in my brain. I was on my way to separating myself from white people. They were the bad guys.

Unwittingly, I had become a victim of the 'plan' to divide, conquer, and rule.

When I was 30 years old, I remember reading a book by a 70-year-old man who said that, at the age of 30, "he wanted to change the world, to make it a better place" and forty years later, without any success in his endeavor, he said he realized that he should have first started with changing himself, then his family, community, city, county, state, nation, and then the world. I was arrogant enough to believe that I could prove him wrong. At that point in my life, I was convinced that I could achieve any objective that I could conceive of and believe.

"Where is the Black man's government? Where is his king and his kingdom? Where is his president, his country, his ambassador, his Army, his Navy, his men of big affairs? ...I could not find them, and then I declared, I will help make them."

Marcus Garvey

Motivated by the words of Marcus Garvey, I wanted to change the world order. Now, at the age of 73, I see that the 70-year-old man was right. Let's not forget the Flight Attendant's announcement prior to an airplane's departure. "In case of emergency, please put your oxygen mask on first, before attempting to help others." You can't help anyone if you're dead.

My experiences have allowed me to let go of the attitude and feelings that I had developed toward white people, individually and collectively. I must constantly remind myself that the degree of ignorance that exists among the masses today is directly related to the systemic institutionalized racism that pervades all mankind and its human activity.

"Racism exacts a toll on those who are racist, distorting their humanity and hindering their ability to be fully self-reflective beings"

I now have to overcome a habit that was 73 years in the making. How do I continue to fight the ugly habit of my own personal racism? That is a never-ending battle, one that I will fight the rest of my life. I am committed to the fight.

As far back as I can remember I have always wanted to be 'right': I have always wanted to be the 'first'; I have always wanted to be the 'boss'.

As an eight-year-old third grade student standing in line with my classroom at Lincoln Elementary School (it was later renamed "Dionne Warwick Entrepreneurial Institute"), I was waiting with my class to walk to an Assembly in the school Auditorium when my classmate, Gaylord George, decided to show off. We were lined up alphabetically, and since E was ahead of G, I was in front of him.

He didn't like that. So, he said, "I hope you know that G.G. stands for "Good, Good." My - response, without hesitation, was, "I hope you know that E.E. stands for "Excellent, Excellent."

From that point forward I had a sense of "competition", and the exhilarating feeling that comes from "winning", which can also be extremely intoxicating.

But my eighth year was an important year in my life for other reasons as well. My dad owned a barber shop in Newark, New Jersey (310 15th Avenue). Even though he worked at Ford Motor Company as a 'ding' man forty hours a week, and sometimes overtime, he also had his own barber shop, where he charged the other three barbers for renting their chairs in his shop. His income was additionally supplemented by cutting hair himself on Friday nights and all-day Saturday. In retrospect, I can see that my dad was a budding entrepreneur.

Because his own father had 'hired' my dad out to a white farmer at the age of eight, my dad knew that a child at that age was capable of work. My dad told me that his father received \$10/week from the white farm owner. Grandpa Fred kept \$9 for himself and gave my dad \$1/week.

My grandfather also arranged the same working conditions for his other three sons. Fred Edwards, an alcoholic (just one of the negative effects of slavery for mixed children) who never worked, made \$36/week by just sitting on his ass and collecting the fruits of his sons' labor (self-hatred is a stoned-cold bitch). That arrangement only ended in 1929, when my dad ran away from home at the age of 16. The experience taught him that he would never subject his children to working for anyone in order to support him, or them.

He set me up as the shoeshine boy in his barber shop, and from the time I was 8, until I turned 15, I worked in **Edwards' Barbershop**, every Friday night, and all-day Saturday. But there was a difference. My dad never took one penny of the money I made shining shoes. He put me in

business for myself. I actually had my own cash register for my shoeshine business. Little did I know that I was developing a 'self-confidence', nurtured by my dad, that would steel me the rest of my life?

My dad advanced the money for the shoe polish, shine rags, and the other supplies I needed to open my business, but he made it clear to me that I had to pay him back for the supplies when I made a profit. I cleared my debt with him after the first month, and from that point forward, all of the profits were mine.

My dad was so proud that he had been able to make the leap to ensuring that his son would never be a 'hired' hand of anyone. He put me in business for myself. And, for the first time, at the age of 8, I was the boss; of my own business, my shoeshine operation. And for the first time, I felt what is called 'a sense of pride'.

Even though I didn't know it at the time, I learned another equally important lesson while apprenticing at **Edwards' Barbershop**. I had no idea who the two white men were who brazenly walked into my dad's barbershop early one Saturday morning. I now know that they were members of the Newark Italian mob (Mafia) who tried to move in on my dad. I failed to mention that my dad had an additional stream of income from his 'numbers' racket. My dad had set up his own 'numbers' book and was doing quite well in our area of town.

When the mobsters approached him, they told my dad that he would have to give them 50% of his profits for 'protection', or he might find unwanted trouble. I don't know how high up in the 'organization' were the two guys who spoke to my dad, but they had no idea that they were talking to a man who had slaved for white folks as a child, and in his young adult life worked for white folks on farms up North as a 'seasonal' hand. Now my dad worked for Ford Motor Company as one of thousands of employees of a white-owned company.

Ernest, Sr., was not about to become another employee of white folk, and for sure not that day, because his son was a witness to the proceedings. My dad told the 'mobsters' that "nobody wins here". "I'll close my 'book', rather than give you any part of my business. We both lose money, but that's better than anybody losing their life. And I suggest that if you come into my shop again, you had better need a haircut if you want to leave in 'peace' (even though the inflection and intonation of my dad's voice conveyed 'leave in one piece')."

When the mobsters turned to leave, they saw that every black man in the shop, and there were at least ten, had my dad's back. Four of the brothers actually stood up when they came in, and remained standing, with hands hidden. My dad and the other three barbers had barbershop razors in their hands. The two mobsters left, without another word.

I was again witnessing racism, in one of its many forms. At the age of eight I witnessed white men trying to control the life of black people with threat and intimidation, all for the sake of

money. And I also witnessed my dad, a black man, stand up to white people, without fear. My dad found a way, to live another for day, with his manhood intact. Money was less important.

There is one more lesson of an 8-year-old that bears mentioning.

In 1954, directly across the street from Lincoln Elementary School, on the northwest corner of Central Avenue and South Maple Avenue, was an active construction site. My curiosity peaked; I walked across the street to ask the construction workers what they were building. They said, “It’s a Dunkin Donuts Shop”.

Since I was only 8 years old, I think I can be excused for innocently asking, “Well, what will you sell here besides donuts”. When one of them said, “just coffee and donuts”, I immediately said, “you can’t make any money selling just coffee and donuts”. What audacity, and with what credentials, at the age of 8, could I be so bold as to make a prediction, and be so wrong.

But that is the point in life.

One makes an assessment based on the available information that one has at the time; one then acts on the basis of that information and assessment; and then looks at the results of the experiment/experience, with the belief that their expectation will be matched by the outcome. If so, things are fine, and one has ‘succeeded’.

If not, then one has to determine if, based on the experience, one should walk away without achieving their expectation, or should they seek additional information that could possibly alter the outcome in their favor on the next attempt. I am grateful that it is a process that I have undergone my entire life.

1954 was also the year the Supreme Court of the United States of America handed down its verdict on “Brown v Board of Education”. And even though it took over 10 years to begin implementation, adjustments were being made to deal with racism in another one of its ugly manifestations.

Looking back, I believe that it was ‘the’ watershed moment in planetary American Caucasian rule. Not because it struck down the ‘policy’ of ‘separate but equal’, which still thrives in American education today, but because black children and white children were now allowed to sit in classrooms with each other. Integration already existed in classrooms in major cities in the North, but the South was adamantly opposed.

A natural familiarity between the races began, and the result has had white supremist up in arms in fear of genetic annihilation via miscegenation. Today’s advertising of consumer products and services is a clear indication of what is coming, and white supremacists are not happy.

At an East Orange High School (EOHS) reunion in 2001, Virginia Bristow, a British cutie, walked up to me and told me she had had a crush on me when we were in high school, but because of the times, she never let me know. Ginny and I had played Romeo and Juliette in Miss Geimer's Advanced English Class. EOHS was 60% black, yet I was the only black guy in the class, and I am sure Ms. Geimer thought it would be cute for 'Romeo' to be black.

I mention this because once people of all 'colors' got to know each other directly, it weakened the message that people of a different 'race', are different, and were to be avoided. Even though I was not a racist at that point in my life, I wouldn't have dated Ginny. My subconscious mind knew that 'race mixing' was forbidden culturally; and it was actually prohibited by law in America. It was finally outlawed in 1967, a very interesting year in my life.

I was about to embark on a journey that anyone would call an odyssey, and there was no turning back. Even though I didn't know by its name, I was about to be introduced to its substance.

CHAPTER TWO

I loved to play American football, and all that it represented. Most importantly, it taught me that after each play, I needed to pick myself up off the ground and get ready for the next play. It was a sport where one grinds, on each play, and then, immediately, starts all over again on the next play. Yes, it was a violent sport, and still is, but sufficiently safe if one were smart. I could hit people with impunity and get away with it. The game allowed me to play with reckless abandon in my need to strike out in anger at the wretched conditions we black folk faced, even though I was unconsciously aware of the forces operating inside of me.

In the fall of 1958, the year I entered Vernon L. Davey Junior High School (VLD), East Orange High School was vying to be ‘the New Jersey football powerhouse’ with Montclair High School. Whichever team won the game between those rivals, and remained undefeated, would inevitably be named New Jersey State Champion.

The first time I went to an EOHS football game was, to say the least, my most thrilling event as a 12-year-old. It was played in Martens Stadium. I didn’t know of another high school football team in New Jersey in 1958 that played their football games in a concrete stadium. Needless to say, I was blown away. I was in a stadium (capacity 10,000) with over 8,000 screaming, cheering fans, watching All-State Quarterback Cliff Baskerville orchestrate the defeat of Montclair and the famed Haines brothers. EOHS went on to be named 1958 New Jersey State Champs. I dreamed that one day my EOHS team would also be named State Champions.

I had to really beg and plead with my dad to take off that Saturday from shining shoes so I could go to -the- football game of the year. He only agreed to let me go because my grades in school were good. He was so proud of my scholastic achievements that he would brag to anyone in the barbershop about how smart his son was.

However, Junior wasn’t smart enough to know that black folks were not welcome in Belleville, NJ. That summer, GG, and our friends James “Tweety Bird” Holmes, Melvin “the Iceman” Sanders, and I decided to ride our bikes down to Branch Brook Park in Newark. What I didn’t know, as we rode one of the paths in the park, was that Branch Brook Park was an Essex County Park, and it would dump us out in Belleville. We were 12 years old, and thankfully, with enough sense to realize, after two blocks, that we were not in Newark. And the proof came quickly.

As we rode past a group of white boys, about our age, one said, “Look, niggers”. Their recognition was not a welcoming one. As they scrambled to get their bikes to chase us, we ‘hauled ass’ and headed back to the park before they could catch us. I had never heard venom spewed like what sounded in that voice saying, “Look niggers”.

It was the first time I remember being called a ‘nigger’. I didn’t live around white people then, so I never knew how any white person felt about black people. There was never any social interact with the few white kids in my elementary school. To me, they were just kids like me.

Until that incident, the color of a person’s skin had never entered into my equation as a means of judging people. I was only 12 years old. By then I knew I was called a ‘Negro’, but since I didn’t know Spanish, I had no idea it referred to the color of my skin. And it seemed to be a term of respect in our community to be known as a ‘Negro’.

While at (VLD) I excelled academically. I made the Honor Roll and High Honor Roll, and I should have automatically been placed in the ‘college prep’ program upon entering East Orange High School. VLD sent a letter to our house indicating that I had been placed in the –vocational – track at EOHS. This was another example of the racism that affected every aspect of a black child’s life, and in reality, every black person’s experience.

My Homeroom teacher was also my Industrial Arts teacher, as well as my Academic Counselor. Mr. Smeltz didn’t like me. I was already developing an ‘air’ that would come to irritate some white folk. Smeltz decided to get back at me by placing me, someone he considered to be an ‘uppity nigger’ who thought he was smarter than anybody else, into the -vocational– courses.

He was clear that I should not receive any more academic training. His problem was I was the son of Ernest Edwards Sr. Once again, I was rewarded with an opportunity to see my dad deal with a white man in a manner that most black folk may have considered, but never acted. When he read that I was to take vocational, rather than college prep courses, my dad took the next day off from work, which was a rarity.

After school was dismissed, I met him exactly where he told me he would be, and we went back inside and right to my homeroom. He introduced himself as my father and without further ado, emphatically, without threat or intimidation, told Mr. Smeltz, as a matter of fact, that if I was not immediately placed in the East Orange High School ‘College Prep’ program he would kill him, right there, at that moment, in that very classroom.

With the grades I had achieved in junior high school (honor roll and high honor roll), there could be no reason, except for racism, that would have Smeltz do what he did. I was on a track that my dad had placed me on, and that was to be the first Edwards in his family to graduate from a university.

Smeltz’s overt racism was another peek into the window of white supremacy, where the white man had power over all black people, including a black child. My subconscious mind recorded the event and stored it in the category of ‘white people’ do bad things to black people. To this day I am fortunate that my dad was a man who loved his children; a love so strong that he would put his life on the line.

Until the day my dad died, he talked about how getting an education was the most important achievement a black man could attain. He felt that with an education, a black man could achieve wealth and success, which is what he wanted for me and my brothers. He said there was many a day when he was a child working in those hot fields picking whatever crop was in rotation that season that he longed to have stayed in school and received an education.

But in 1921, those prospects for a black child were ‘slim to none’, and for my dad, they were zero. My dad did live long enough to attend my graduation from Rutgers, his grandson Khalif’s graduation from Stanford University, as well as attend his granddaughter Akima’s high school graduation from St. Paul’s School in Concord, New Hampshire. Akima went on to graduate from Stanford as well, but my dad had died by then.

I wish that I could convey to you the strength and power in my dad’s voice as his words were being absorbed into Smeltz’ brain. My dad was also 6 feet tall and weighed 230. The paperwork was completed before we left the classroom. Little did I realize that I was once again witnessing the power of a human being when they are fearless and unconcerned about the consequences of their actions once they perceive and believe that they are pursuing the right course of action for themselves and their family.

I knew parental love early in my life, and it was the one thing that has kept me guided and directed throughout my entire life. I was proud of my mom and dad, and I wanted them to be proud of me. To this day I still ask, when I have a decision to make, what would my mom and dad consider the right choice.

I entered East Orangs High School in 1960, so in addition to being the starting center on our high school freshman football team, I managed to get all A’s, with the exception of a B in English on my report card. Academically, I was ranked 9th out of a class of 500 and the top male.

I felt I was riding high and right where I wanted to be. I was also placed in the ‘advanced’ track of college prep in my freshman year. I remember taking World History and being one of ten freshmen in the class. Most were juniors, and all were white with the exception of Sheila Wilson, who later changed her name to Intisar Shareef. She and I remained brother and sister until her passing.

My sophomore year in high school was a total lost academically. My parents were fighting almost every day, and finally my dad hurt my mom physically and emotionally, to the point that we went to stay with her mother in Matawan, New Jersey. They reconciled, as they always did, days, sometimes weeks later, when my dad would sober up and apologize. Soon, after that most recent breakup, my youngest brother, Bobby, was born; though the stress my mother was under caused Bobby to be born 3 months premature. He weighed 2 pounds, 12 ounces at birth.

I lost my interest in schoolwork and worried about my mother’s physical safety, my dad’s alcoholism, and the survival of my newborn little brother Bobby; as well as the effect everything

was having on my younger brother Curtis. And all of this was only 5 years after my brother Freddy died. I still had not related any of our experiences as a black family to the ideology of racism that was produced by White Supremacy, but it was certainly having a profound effect on our lives.

Even though I was two years older than him, Freddie was my protector. When anyone attempted to pick on me, a short fat kid, Freddie would intercede on my behalf. Freddie, just like my dad, was fearless, a sense of confidence that I did not yet possess. I will never know the total effects on me, of his death in 1956, but some things still linger. One of them is to never fear. He is someone I will never forget; my little 'big' brother Freddie.

My guidance counselor told me that the reason my teachers didn't fail me was because the school had a policy that they would not lower a student's grade more than two levels from the previous year if there were mitigating circumstances, which I had. So, I got Cs on my report card for the entire year. My guidance counselor, Miss Jane Perry, knew what was happening at home and advised my teachers. She deserves a Medal of Honor for saving me from what would have been a disastrous report card, with major ramifications in my future college application process.

I was able to recover in time to get back on the Honor Roll my junior year, and High Honor Roll in my senior year. I was still ranked in the top 15% of my class, but not where I felt I should be. It was about that time that I remembered my fourth-grade teacher, Mrs. McNett, telling me her husband was a Wharton School graduate, and that I should consider the University of Pennsylvania when applying to college.

That was the first time I had ever had anyone besides my mom and dad, ever mention college to me. And I never forgot her recommendation.

I had made the varsity as a sophomore, so I did not have to go to the barbershop anymore. I was 15, going on 16, and I didn't want to shine shoes and listen to old men and their stories. Some were great stories about the Negro League baseball players, as well as stories about the brothers who had made it to the big leagues, like Jackie Robinson, Satchel Paige, and my dad's favorite, Willie Mays. I loved our times when dad took me to the Negro League Newark Bears' games.

The one treat that I would miss was listening to 'Preacher', who was a brother who came to the barbershop quite often and always walked barefoot, even in the snow. He said he was a "Hebrew", and as such, didn't wear shoes. He called himself a Rabbi, but black folk called him "Preacher".

When he started 'preaching' in the barbershop, everyone stopped and time stood still while he gave us a narrative about the Original Man being the Black man, a subject matter that would ultimately shape my adult life.

In my senior year, at the beginning of fall classes in 1963, when Miss Perry asked me what colleges I wanted to apply to, I mentioned U of P; the University of Southern California, a college - 'football powerhouse'- in those days; and West Point Military Academy.

I had only gone to the library twice in my young adult life, both times being driven inside by the pouring rain; once when I was walking home from high school, and once when I got to my Boy Scout Troop meeting early. The doors to the church were locked, so instead of waiting outside in the pouring rain, I decided to go across Munn Avenue and wait in the East Orange Public Library.

While there, I had the opportunity to read about Saladin, Muslim Sultan of Egypt, Syria, Yemen, and Palestine. If my life depended on it, I could not give an explanation as to how I found that book on Saladin. Without knowing it, I had my first introduction to Islam.

I vividly recall reading how there were people called the - 'Crusaders'- who invaded other people's lands, killed the people, and took whatever they wanted. Saladin successfully repelled the invaders and was determined to push the Crusaders back up into Europe so far, that they would be a long time in returning to Africa. His goal was thwarted however, by a jealous adversary, and the Europeans returned as soon as Saladin lost his military commission, conquering and pillaging at barbaric levels.

Leave it for me to say that I was not happy to read of Saladin's fall, but I was inspired by his ability to successfully defend his nation against the barbarians. At the age of 13, moved by Saladin's story, I decided that I wanted to be a soldier, a General. I had not yet developed a rejection of all of what America represented, so I guess that is why I decided to apply for entry to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, NY.

I was weak in English. My family didn't own a dictionary, much less a set of encyclopedias. I would read whatever assignment a teacher gave, but I never developed the habit, nor the desire to read material outside of my schoolwork, and that cost me admissions to U of P. I got a score of 679 in Math on the SAT, but the best I could muster in English after three tries, was a 499. And even though I had the grades and scores for the University of Southern California at that time; I was not offered a scholarship with financial aid.

Miss Perry personally handled my 'application' to West Point Military Academy. I didn't know that appointments to all of the US military academies go through the two US Senators in each State. Miss Perry made a call and was told that all of the appointments to West Point for the following year were filled, but because of her recommendation, United States Senator Harrison Williams would give me an appointment to the U. S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Ms. Perry explained to me that I could still graduate with a degree in Civil Engineering, graduate as a Second Lieutenant, and go to graduate school for Architecture on the GI Bill if I didn't like

the Air Force as a career. There was only one problem with that scenario. I feared flying. I was a black kid from the ghetto. I had never been on an airplane, and I didn't know of anyone else who had ever been on an airplane. I had no interest in flying anywhere, much less to Colorado Springs, Colorado, with its severe winters.

She said I would be getting the acceptance letter shortly, which I did, and asked me to take some time and think about the opportunity.

Our football team went 7-2 in my sophomore year. In our junior year we improved to 7-1-1. Everyone predicted that in my senior year, the fall of 1963, East Orange would go undefeated and re-capture the state title. Our star running back, Jimmy Oliver, was considered the best high school football fullback in the nation. His presence was a big reason why we were predicted to win the state title.

For me, a 17-year-old kid, playing the - 'center'- position for EOHS in the madness of New Jersey high school football mania was beyond words. There were over 12,000 screaming fans in Martens Stadium (they literally brought in additional bleachers and placed them on the track surrounding the football field to seat our parents, family members, EOHS alumni and EOHS Boosters) that came to see us play Montclair High School.

When we emerged from the tunnel under the stadium and onto the field, running between the walls our cheerleaders and our marching band had established on both sides of the tunnel; it was like emerging from a - 'womb'- and seeing light and experiencing life for the first time. The sky was a sunny blue, the grass was thick and green, the cannon firing announced our arrival on the field, and the 'fight song' played by our band was a tonic that fueled our bodies. That game was the day I truly believed we were a team of destiny.

The irony that every team we played was white, with the exception of Montclair, never crossed my conscious mind. Montclair was integrated because it was heavily populated with the black maids, servants, gardeners, and nannies who served the upper class. The racism was so strong that our team actually had to have a police escort to and from both our Orange High School and Barringer High School games. Both teams were all white, while EOHS only had 4 white players among our 55-member team.

We beat Montclair and went on to win every game that year and were named New Jersey State Champions. Belleville, Montclair, and Phillipsburg were our toughest opponents, with all three games being decided by a touchdown. Jimmy Oliver scored the winning touchdowns and was named First Team All American Fullback in Parade Magazine.

Of the 11 New Jersey All-State First Team players, four were from EOHS (Ollie, GG, Quincy Yarborough, and George Coppola). All of the starters made First, Second, or Third Team All-County, including yours truly. The **New York Daily News** named EOHS the best football team in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut.

To have a dream come true is something most folks don't get to experience. To be the absolute best at what you do is a sensation that can only be experienced by being undefeated. This was another confidence builder for me. I was now among the best in the State of New Jersey, the tri-State area, and quite possibly, America. The experience would be another factor that has kept me alive.

With football season over, I now had to turn my attention to getting additional college applications in the mail. Ms. Perry had handled my Military application, but I now had to turn my attention to getting my applications to Rutgers, Brown, Lehigh, and Lafayette. I had a few other small football schools in Pennsylvania and Maine who were recruiting me, so I applied to them as well.

Once I discovered the Reserved Officers Training Corps (ROTC) Program, I decided to go to Rutgers. I would still graduate as an Engineer and a Second Lieutenant, my family could see me play football, and being only 30 miles from home I could ride home on weekends, and I wouldn't have to ever worry about getting on an airplane any time soon, to fly anywhere. All of Rutgers' away football games were less than a day's bus ride from the campus.

With all of my believing that I was becoming a scholar/athlete, I was dumb as a brick. On the first day of practice for our senior football season, I noticed that Fred Hoggard was missing. Fred was another great athlete that played football, basketball, and was 'the' track star. I asked GG where Fred was, and he told me that Fred had been arrested by the police for smoking marijuana and Coach Dean had kicked him off the team.

I was incredulous, both because I didn't know what marijuana was, and why it was so egregious that Coach Dean would be willing for our team to go without our star split end. At the age of 17, I had never even heard of marijuana, much less seen anyone using it. To this day I am thankful that my parents protected me from the 'evils' of 'drugs'.

And that episode of ignorance was followed up a few weeks later when Stephen Fuchs – (now a Rabbi) – told me that he was sorry for the bad experiences black people were suffering from in the South. Lynching's were still occurring; and now armed police, police dogs, and tear gas were relentlessly being turned loose on black folk who were beginning to protest the horrible conditions we lived under in the Southern States.

As we were leaving Ms. Geimer's English class that fateful fall afternoon, Steve said to me, "Ernest, I am a Jew, and my people suffered similar conditions in Germany before and during World War II, so I can empathize with the conditions your people are facing in the South."

I said, "Steve, what is a Jew?"

My knowledge of the world outside of my cocoon in East Orange, New Jersey was about to expand exponentially. I was bound for Rutgers-the State University of New Jersey.

CHAPTER THREE

I was so proud that last summer Saturday in August, during the Labor Day weekend. I hugged my mom and dad goodbye, and my cousin AA and my brother Curtis jumped in the back seat as my cousin Raymond drove me to New Brunswick NJ, the home of Rutgers-the State University of New Jersey (RU). With all of the schools that I had applied to, including the ones that recruited me for football, one of the reasons that I chose Rutgers was because they had a Center named Alex Kroll, a College All-American who led Rutgers to their only undefeated season in the school's history in 1961, just three years earlier.

Rutgers also had a great football history. The first intercollegiate football game ever played was between Rutgers and Princeton, on November 6, 1869, in New Brunswick, New Jersey. You know who won. That's also one of the reasons why I chose Rutgers.

I was now in New Brunswick, New Jersey. I had just barely survived the summer and only because I asked my dad if I could I quit my job at Ford Motor Company. I had only been working there for 30 days, with 30 more days to go. Ford Motor Company had a policy of hiring the sons of Ford employees for summer work (a great morale boost for the employees who were so honored).

I just couldn't handle getting up at 4:00 am, leaving the house at 4:30 am, riding 60 miles, and starting work at 6:00 am; 'spot-welding' and drilling holes in pick-up trucks every 24 seconds (that's how fast the trucks were rolling off the assembly line). The work was kicking my ass.

Since working on the assembly line at Ford Motor Company was not a career goal of mine; I was bound for RU, with the objective of getting a degree in Civil Engineering to pursue my goal of being a builder. Fortunately for me, Ford Motor Company was not my dad's goal for me either.

Words can't describe the relief that I felt when he said, "Junior, I just wanted you to know what you will have to go through to earn a living if you don't graduate from college. I'm glad you have enough sense to want to leave this grunt work alone. The pay and benefits are fine for a man like me with a 3rd grade education, but you are smart enough to do better. And that's all I want for you. I want you and your brothers to have more and better opportunities in life than your mother and I had. Who knows what you will do with your opportunities, but an education is the key to your success?"

I arrived a week early for orientation, not just academically, but athletically as well. As excited as it was to check into my dorm, meet my roommate Lew Bornstein (a future Rabbi), and put my things away, Sunday morning was more exciting. Freshman Head Football Coach, Bill

Speranza, welcomed us in the Stadium, thanked us for choosing Rutgers as the university for our matriculation, and the extension of our athletic career.

He told us the Initial Depth Chart for our team (we had a little over 100 guys in the stands that day) was posted in the locker room, on the Bulletin Board, and our names were posted on our lockers. He made it clear that even though the present depth chart was the way he saw the team for the moment, everyone would have to earn their position, whether as a starter, or just as a team member. That statement caused the competitive fire in me to grow from a flame into a bonfire.

He then instructed us where to go, and what to do if the football equipment in our locker was the wrong size or defective. As soon as Coach Speranza finished his speech, I raced to the locker room to see where I was on the Depth Chart. Coach had made me the starting center. He had scouted both our Montclair and Phillipsburg games and was sold on me being his center. When I saw that, my self-confidence rose to a level that I didn't know existed inside of me. For the next 3 weeks, I wanted to let Coach know that he had indeed made the right choice. And my work effort was rewarded because I was named the captain of our freshman football team.

Our first game, under the lights at Princeton, was awesome. My dad came, with my brothers Curtis and Bobby, and my foster brother Ernest. They got there early enough (Matawan was only 45 minutes away), to see me walk to the center of the field as the Captain of the RU freshman football team. I don't know who was prouder, my dad or me. We won the game and they met me on the field after the game. It was a memory that I will cherish forever.

My brother Curtis was later to become a New Jersey All State running back for Matawan Regional High School and the star running back for Rutgers in his senior season. He was named All East, and received Honorable Mention All American, and later honored as the team's Most Valuable Player when he received the Homer Hazel Award.

He was also the Captain of RU's Varsity football team (the first black captain in Rutgers' football history). Hopefully he was inspired years earlier when he saw his big brother walk onto the center of the football field in Princeton, as the captain of his team.

It was 1964, and the "Social Revolution" in America was just beginning. It was rooted on college campuses, and Rutgers, equally distant from New York and Philadelphia, was in the middle of it all. President John F. Kennedy had been assassinated less than a year earlier. Malcolm X would be assassinated 14 months later, and civilian protest, including riots, were beginning to increase in number and intensity.

My contact with racism (directed toward me personally) began in earnest in October of 1964 when I led our freshman football team through the tunnel onto Franklin Field after halftime. Franklin Field was the playing field used for University of Pennsylvania football games.

Philadelphia may be called the ‘City of Brotherly Love’, but that can only refer to how white folks felt about each other. I can only assume that the U of P students attending the game were not integrationists and did not like the fact that Rutgers had black players on its team. U of P certainly didn’t have any on theirs, even though my friend George Burrell would be the first the following fall.

I would guess that maybe ten (10) of them hovered over the team tunnel entrance and another ten were lined up along the wall, and ready to denigrate. When I led our team back onto the field after the halftime break, those students spit on us and called us every derogatory racial slur in the book. And even though it wasn’t the first time I had been called a ‘nigger’ to my face; it was the first time someone spit on me because of the color of my skin. I had left my cocoon in East Orange, and I was now in a larger and more overtly hostile world.

I was also now old enough to realize that ‘race matters’, but not old or wise enough to know that ‘race’ was not real; that it was a fiction created for very specific purposes.

In the spring of 1965, a few months after Malcolm’s assassination, I was walking back to my dorm when I looked up and saw a banner affixed to the dorm across the street from me. In letters at least 18” tall, it said, “S.P.O.N.G.E”. When I got closer, I could see in smaller lettering that S.P.O.N.G.E stood for “Society for the Prevention of Niggers Getting Everything”. It was the first time that I felt a sense of rage regarding race. This banner hung from a dormitory on the campus of Rutgers-the State University of New Jersey.

And the deep thing was that I did not know “niggers” had anything, much less everything. Yes, I was on the campus of RU, which seemed to represent something progressive in 1965, but my 1964 Rutgers’ incoming class of 2,000 had a black student enrollment of 20 (1% of 2,000), with ten of us on the football team. I am sure some white folks saw that as ‘progress’. It should be noted that 3 years later (1968), former Governor of Alabama George Wallace, a confessed racist and bigot, won the Democratic Primary for President in the State of New Jersey. And to this day, the KKK are still alive and well in New Jersey.

I rounded up every black person on the RU campus that I could find, including the few upper classmen who lived on campus, and I led a march to that dorm, and directly to the student’s room where the banner hung from.

The only thing that saved that student from a good ass-whoopin' was the fact that I was pledging a fraternity (Phi Sigma Kappa), and the dorm monitor for that floor was a fraternity brother in Phi Sig. I knew I would be "black-balled" if I touched that kid, or allowed anyone in my entourage to touch him, so we settled for the dorm monitor making the student take the banner down. I was also lucky because the New Brunswick Police would have arrested me and whooped my ass, something I never thought of at the time.

Despite acts of vicious racism, however, Rutgers had a history with Amer Africans about which I knew nothing at the time. There was a picture of a black man named Paul Robeson sitting in the trophy case in the Rutgers Gymnasium where the Athletic Director's Office was located. I hadn't seen it on my Weekend Recruitment Visit, so Paul Robeson was a man I knew nothing about.

I would eventually learn that he was an inspirational man of courage and talents of all kinds; earning letters in four sports, including All-American status in football; being elected to Phi Beta Kappa in 1918; enrolling and excelling at Columbia Law School; and enjoying a career as an actor and singer of international renown.

Eventually, I would also learn that he was a man of political and social convictions that would make him a target of vengeful and racist discrimination. Without question, he remains the most accomplished of all Rutgers graduates.

Football season had just ended, and I was the freshman football player chosen as the Willard Sahloff Scholar. Willard Sahloff, Rutgers alumnae, was a vice president at General Electric Corporation, and the one who developed **G.E. College Bowl**, a very popular game show back in the day.

Being a Sahloff Scholar meant that Rutgers would begin to promote me for All-American status, and I would be a starting member of the Varsity the next fall, as a sophomore. It also meant that I now had a 'sponsor' who would send me additional money on occasions.

In those days Rutgers was considered a "public Ivy" and played Princeton, Columbia, Yale, Penn, and Cornell. The university behaved that way; and expectations for its athletes were shaped by that ethos. There were no athletic scholarships (Scholarships were based on family need and academic merit).

But Athletic Director Al Twitchell wanted to change all of that. He had visions of Rutgers expanding the size of its Student Body and taking on larger institutions in athletic competition. Twitchell knew there was money in big-time athletic programs, and he wanted to start with football.

He and Dr. John Bateman, PhD., and Head Coach, needed the approval of the University President, Dr. Mason W. Gross, in order to incorporate full equipment contact into the spring football regimen. Prior to that, the Rutgers football team met in the spring, but only in warm-up gear, without any equipment, and therefore, no physical contact.

Twitchell and Bateman wanted to begin immediately, and hatched the idea of me, the freshman team captain, asking Dr. Gross for permission for Rutgers to initiate a Spring Football Program in full uniform (helmets, pads, and cleats). Dr. Gross was a liberal academic by background, and they believed that the request coming from me, an urban black kid, would sway him.

And it worked. I met with Dr. Gross, offered all of my cogent reasons (obviously prepped by Twitchell and Bateman) as to why Rutgers needed to have full contact spring practice if it was to expand its football program beyond the Ivies and teams like Lehigh, Lafayette, and Colgate. Dr. Gross gave the green light.

Today Rutgers is in the Big Ten Football Conference, one of the five Elite Conferences in the NCAA. The effort to expand the program succeeded, but Rutgers has never been able to compete at the national level in football, despite many millions of dollars of investment and a great price paid by young black men like me and my brother Curtis, who later converted to Islam and is now known as Fareed Muhammad Salahuddin, to support the effort.

Little did I know the devastating physical effect that 1st Spring Full Contact Football Practice would have on the rest of my life? I had never dreamed of playing Professional Football. It wasn't what it is today. There was certainly no big money being paid to the professional players. Every football player, including famed players like Jim Brown and Johnny Unitas, held jobs in the off season to make ends meet.

My dad had hammered into my head that I was at Rutgers to get an education, not to play football, and I accepted that. But being the captain of my freshman team and looking to be a starter on the Varsity next season caused me to be the first one out of the locker room and onto the field each day of our 1st Spring Practice in full equipment.

I believed that's what leaders were supposed to do, lead by example. On the third day of Spring Practice, I was out early and blocking a tackling dummy. Word was that they were going to convert me to guard, so I was practicing my pulling and knocking over a defender at the end of the line. Coach Bateman, probably wanting to see who was out early, was out early himself, and saw me knocking the dummy over.

"Men don't just fall like that, men give you resistance", he barked as he approached me. Instead of holding the dummy himself, which I know he didn't want to do, particularly given how hard I

was hitting the dummy when I pulled and hit it; or asking another player to hold the dummy, he put the dummy up against one of the telephone poles on the practice field that held the lights for our nighttime practices in the fall when it got dark early.

He said, “Now you have some resistance, let me see you hit it now”. When I pulled and hit into that dummy against the telephone pole, that pole provided resistance all right. Since it was cemented into the ground, the only thing that moved was the vertebrae in my back.

Spring practice was over for me. The Team Physician, Dr. Joel Fertig, wasn't sure what damage I suffered. There were no MRI or CAT-Scan machines in those days (spring of 1965). All I knew was that I had difficulty walking, my back constantly hurt, and it would be years before an attempt was made by the RU Athletic Department to diagnose my injury.

I had convinced the University President to let us have Spring Practice, and Dr. John Bateman, a confirmed racist and abuser of players, comes over on the third day and ends my football career with his attempt to make sure that there was resistance when I hit the dummy. He should have held the dummy himself, or asked another player to hold the dummy, but Mr. PhD. decides to put the dummy against an immovable object.

In retrospect, obviously I was the dummy. I wanted to impress the head football coach with my physical prowess, so without thinking, I did what he told me to do. I am also sure it was because it was 1965, and black people did what white folks told them to do. I eventually sued Rutgers and Bateman. There were no witnesses to the actual incident because it was early, and practice had not officially begun.

The damage to me was evident by the accumulated medical reports. The jury only had to decide whether I put that dummy against that pole and hit into that dummy on my own, as represented by Bateman, or as I maintained; that I did it because Bateman placed that dummy there and told me to hit it. It came down to the word of a young black athlete against the word of Dr. John F. Bateman, PhD, the white head coach who, in 1961, had coached Rutgers-the-State University of New Jersey to its only undefeated football season.

When Bateman got on that witness stand and told those white jurors (there were no black folk) that he did not place that dummy against that pole and that he did not tell me to hit into it, my view of white people changed, and so did I. The case was adjudicated in 1968, and I lost. Bateman had lied. At that moment, the anger that coursed my body and fired my mind made me accept the white man being the ‘devil’. That was the birth of my racist attitude, which I ignorantly, but proudly refined as I moved through adult life.

Because of my injury during the spring of my freshman season, and with the doctors and coaches not knowing the extent of my injury and ability to play the next year, I was listed on the Depth Chart as 3rd string defensive tackle in my sophomore year. I tried to handle John Bateman's condescending attitude toward me and the other black players on the team, but his racism was smothering; and I couldn't endure it any longer. With my back still hurting and no relief in sight, I quit the football team in the fall of 1965.

It wasn't the only change during my sophomore year at Rutgers. I wasn't totally devastated that my back injury had ended my football career, at least as a star. Right after I quit the team that fall, I found out that Rutgers had started a degree program in Landscape Architecture. I was in Civil Engineering, with plans to go to Graduate School in Architecture because Rutgers didn't offer a degree program in Architecture.

In the spring of 1965, my sophomore year, I switched majors. I left the College of Engineering on the Busch Campus at Rutgers Heights and went all the way across town to the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, adjacent to Douglass College, to enroll in the Landscape Architect degree program. So, it was against that backdrop that I entered the "era of my discontent".

As I said, I loved the game of football, for so many reasons. To be out there playing football again, injury and all, in the fall of 1966, didn't take much coaxing. Coach Speranza and Coach Bob Naso, the defensive line coach, asked to meet with me. My respect for Speranza for listing me #1 on the freshman depth chart and naming me the captain and Willard Sahloff Scholar was enough 'cred' for me to listen to their sales pitch. I felt good that they wanted me to play again.

So, in my junior year at RU, when Sid Rhines (now Siddeeq El-Amin), a teammate, a classmate, and a fraternity brother, as well as my friend and roommate in our apartment in Franklin Township, told me his girlfriend Cassie Powers was coming down for our game against Boston University that weekend, and that she was bringing her cousin Gail Powers with her, I got excited at the prospect of seeing Gail, whom I hadn't seen since high school. Sidney agreed to hook me up with a date with Gail.

Gail Powers and I knew each other from EOHS. She had moved from Newark to East Orange in her freshman year (my sophomore year). In my junior year, our mutual friend Lavonia, who had moved to Plainfield, New Jersey, was having a party and asked me to come, and bring her girlfriend Gail. Gail was a cutie and had made the cheerleaders as a sophomore, so I knew who she was.

One day in the high school hallway, I introduced myself to Gail and asked her if she wanted to go to Lavonia's party with me (Lavonia was Gail's best friend, and my best sister friend). I had

just gotten my Learner's Permit but wasn't allowed to drive without a licensed driver in the car until I passed the Driving Test (3 weeks later).

Guess who rode in the car that night, as the licensed driver, and our chaperone. To be fair, Miss Sylvia and my mom were best friends (next door neighbors) who had pretty much lost contact, as every family we knew was fleeing Newark. My mom wanted to see her friend and check Gail out, I wanted to go to Lavonia's party, and I definitely wanted what I considered a date with Gail. Gail and I never did date after the party.

But that day, four years later, Gail was in the stands as my date, and even though she was a cheerleader who saw all of my games at EOHS, I still wanted to impress her. I was on the kickoff team when Rutgers kicked off, and true to form, I was the first one downfield to meet the kick-returner. I hit the receiver, Reggie Rucker, who later became a Wide Receiver for the NFL Cleveland Browns, with such a force that I knocked him out, and in the process, I knocked myself out too. We were both carried from the field on stretchers, totally unconscious.

I received the 'Blue Max' award (an unknowing racist tout to the Germans who fought in World War II) for the 'hardest hit' that game. I was not allowed back in the game after that kickoff because of the concussion I received on the hit.

After the game, I was conscious enough to know that I had a date with a beautiful woman, one who I would later ask to marry me. Gail and I were married on January 15, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday; and the same year he was assassinated.

CHAPTER FOUR

By the fall of 1964, when I arrived in the segregated city of New Brunswick, NJ, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had been passed. The Civil Rights Movement was making almost daily national news. In August of that summer, the bodies of the murdered SNCC workers, James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman, had been discovered in Philadelphia, Mississippi.

Bloody Sunday (Selma, AL) was the next February and although little noticed by white people, Malcolm X would be assassinated just weeks later on February 21. And 1965 took it another notch higher with the uprising in Watts. Almost simultaneously Congress passed, and President Lyndon Johnson signed into law the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Riots followed in Washington, D.C. Newark, New Jersey had its own rebellion in July 1967. Another Civil Rights Act followed swiftly in 1968.

In early 1967, Muhammad Ali spoke on the Rutgers campus at Records Hall. He linked racial injustice at home to the ever-widening war in Viet Nam. Rutgers and the country were changing, and in many directions simultaneously, including prohibitions on “interracial marriage”, which were struck down that very year.

My college crew consisted of Ronnie “Groove” Williams, Byron the “Blade” Raysor, Sid the “Snake” Rhines, and Greg “Monty” Montgomery. My nickname was the “Burner”. We all attended Records Hall to hear the Champ.

Groove was the only one of us who didn’t play football, but our relationship was based on much more than being teammates. We were brothers. In fact, we had all pledged Phi Sigma Kappa (there were no black fraternities on the Rutgers campus in the spring of 1965), and with no one in my family ever having gone to college, I knew nothing about black frats such as the “Alpha’s, the Kappa’s, and the Ques”.

But for the first time in my life, I felt a bond of brotherhood with my new crew (a bond that still exists today). My high school crew was also my brothers, but now the meaning content of the word ‘brotherhood’ had expanded and awakened a new feeling in me. Blade, Groove, and I got an apartment our sophomore year and moved off campus. It was a brand new two-bedroom apartment, and we needed a fourth roommate.

Curt Morrison, a black All-American swimmer from Evander Childs High School in the Bronx, NY, even though a sophomore, had lived in my freshman dorm. After the S.P.O.N.G.E incident, where Curt had my back, we became friends.

Both Byron and Curt flunked out at the end of the year. We requested, and Greg and Sid agreed to be our new roommates for the following fall. But before I go on, let me say that both Curt and Byron returned to RU and graduated after their stints in the military. They used the G.I. Bill to finance their education.

Curt served as a Captain in the US Air Force before returning home to practice law. He was a General Counsel at both Prudential Life Insurance Company and Massachusetts General Life Insurance Company before retiring.

Byron graduated with a degree in Chinese (at one point, Blade could speak Japanese, Chinese, and Vietnamese fluently). Dr. Byron Ronald Raysor was commissioned a Major when he graduated from The New Jersey College of Medicine and Dentistry. Blade had served his first tour as a 2nd Lieutenant, and a member of the famed 82nd Airborne, jumping out of airplanes over Vietnam. I am grateful he survived that experience, but sadly, he is no longer with us.

The Black Power Conference, held on April 26, 1967, in Scott Hall on College Avenue, was the day of my 'baptism' into the "Black Revolution". I remember two upperclassmen, Frank McClellan, and Oscar Miller, telling me to make sure that I attend. The crew and I showed up. There were members from SNCC and C.O.R.E there, and I remember Roy Innes delivering a fiery speech.

I had never directly heard of the Teachings of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad before that day (in Ali's appearance, he did not speak of the Nation of Islam (NOI). But what Minister Jeremiah Shabazz, the East Coast Representative of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, had to say that day struck a chord in me.

I truly liked the idea that we, as Africans born and raised in America, needed to stop begging white folks for everything, and begin doing something for ourselves. Minister Shabazz spoke of his Leader's program to "get some of the Earth we can call our own". The Civil Rights leaders were doing just the opposite; asking the Federal Government to create laws that they believed would alleviate the suffering of black people (something still being promised to this very day).

The Conference was the first time that I saw and heard, firsthand, a black man 'call' the white man the 'devil'. Jeremiah did a great job at providing proof that the 400-year history of the black man in America demonstrated his Leader's justification for calling the white man the 'devil', meaning evil, wicked, unrighteous, immoral, unjust, and corrupt.

I couldn't deny the logic of the history of how we had been treated, particularly since I was clear that we, as a people, had done nothing to deserve the slavery, suffering, and death that we had endured, and were still enduring in America in 1967.

All of the speakers on the program were only given 15-20 minutes each to state their organization's position on their program to extricate black folk from the 'slavery' that we all felt still existed, so no one, including Jeremiah, had any real time to dig deeply into their subject.

The other speakers, including someone from the Local NAACP, talked of "Civil Rights" and forcing legislation to bring about equality for the poor Negro, but not Jeremiah. Minister Shabazz said our only solution was to 'do for self', in the Nation of Islam. He made it plain that we should not ask the very people who caused our problem, to fix it.

"A problem cannot be solved by the consciousness that created it"

Albert Einstein

America was enjoying the greatest period of economic prosperity since the Great Depression of 1929. Its 'Negro' problem was the only problem America had. Integrationists were trying to convince Negroes, that if they were patient, laws would be passed to give them opportunity to integrate into American life. Jeremiah asked, "Why would we want to integrate into a society of people that stole 3,000,000 square miles of land from the Native Americans?"

He said that of the 15 – 20,000,000 Native Americans living in North America when the white man showed up, less than 2,000,000 remained. The math was simple. The white man had murdered and or caused the death of over 13,000,000 people. Jeremiah went on to say, "And you, my poor ignorant black brothers and sisters, are descendants from the 12 - 15,000,000 black folk who were stolen from Africa to work this land because the Native Americans chose death over slavery."

He finished by describing the 'Middle Passage', where up to 40% of our people died in transit; the treatment that was endured of those who survived the long voyage across the Atlantic Ocean, and the treatment we received once we arrived in America, including the deliberate break-up of our families. When I compared that history to what was happening in America before my very eyes, I had to bear witness to the truth of what he was saying.

I was 21 years old, and my personal experiences with racist white America were beginning to add to a huge pile of previously stored data. I was clear that there was a double standard for black and white, with the black man always coming out on the 'short end'. And it was tied to the fact that we were living on stolen land, as members of a stolen people, seeking to be free.

I accepted and believed that I too, didn't want to live in a land with the greatest murderer, and the greatest thief in the history of 'Mankind'. After the conference ended, I had one question for the Minister. "If we lived in a separate State or Territory, how could we black folk protect ourselves from a military onslaught if the white man wanted to kill us?"

I was now convinced that a ‘race war’ was coming. I honestly don’t remember his exact words in response, but it wasn’t sufficient for me to want to live anywhere where the white man, given what little history that I did know, could attack us, and destroy us in one military campaign. In fact, *Korematsu v. United States*, 323 U.S. 214 (1944), which justified the incarceration of the Japanese Americans during World War II, was constitutionally effective in America until 1983.

I wasn’t ready yet to join the Nation of Islam (NOI), but my militancy was growing. On the second day of the 1967 Newark uprising, my birthplace, I decided we needed to act. One of the crew knew someone who sold guns and invited him to our apartment for a demonstration and discussion of price. Fortunately, Groove’s wisdom prevailed, and we passed on the opportunity to purchase the guns and join in the subsequent melee.

Our days in Phi Sigma Kappa were over. Even though Phi Sig was known as the International House on the RU campus, it had a majority of white ‘brothers’, and we felt that as black men, we would be betraying our cause by associating with a ‘white’ fraternity, so we never attended another function at the house.

The social functions at the House totally reflected white culture, and now that our black consciousness had awakened, there was no purpose being served by attending. We missed Carrie, our Amer African cook, and her fantastic culinary skills, but our commitment to the cause prevented our return.

One of the beneficial outgrowths of the Black Power Conference in 1967 was the establishment of the Rutgers Black Student Union, which I immediately joined. One of our first objectives was to get additional Black History classes introduced into the curriculum, and to have Rutgers hire some black professors to teach those classes.

At that time, what few courses we had were about the history of our slavery forward and being taught by white professors. This was my third year at Rutgers, and I had not been in one class that had another black student in it, much less a black instructor. I met with President Gross again, and Rutgers did respond, as best they could.

My trial against RU and Bateman in the fall of 1968 was my moment of truth with white America; but like a ‘crock pot’; it was on a slow burn. I considered myself an African Nationalist, but I didn’t belong to an organization that addressed the issues of me and my people. I felt compelled to finish my undergraduate degree.

I had only gone to college because my mom and dad wanted me to. I still didn’t know or understand the ‘import’ of a university degree, but there was no question that it was a goal that had to be accomplished. It was a promise I had made to my mom and dad. As I said, I wanted

my mom and dad to be proud of me, as I was of them. Their love, attention, and guidance were the source of my energy that kept me fueled. When I graduated, I gave them my diploma, which hung in their house. My dad carried it to Florida with him when he retired there after my mother's death. It only hung on my wall 37 years later, after my dad died in 2006.

I had rejected religion (Christianity) and politics (Democracy via the American Republic), but I was still wrestling with Capitalism, the governing 'economic' ideology on our Mother Earth. I still didn't know that the concept of racism was developed solely to enable Capitalism and justify the murder, theft, and destruction of people of color. It would be a few more years before that reality hit me, and when my first attempted 'break' with America would come.

I was successful with the Agricultural School administration as well. I went to see Dean Leland Merrill, so, in addition to me being enrolled in the first African History course, I was given a Black Assistant Professor in the Landscape Architectural Program. I don't know how Roy DeBoer, Head of Landscape Architecture, found William L. Wilson, but he did. Bill was one of only nine Black Landscape Architects in America. When I graduated in 1969, I became the 10th.

Married, and with graduation approaching, I was trying to decide where I was going for Graduate School, not that I needed many choices. Dr. Lawrence Mann, the Head of Rutgers Planning Department, and my instructor the previous semester had just received the appointment to be the Head of Harvard University's Department of City and Regional Planning (undergrad and graduate degree programs).

I suppose he liked the fact that I took a real interest in his course. The book, "Design of Cities", by Edward Bacon, was one of the course textbooks, and I was gaining an interest in City Planning. Before Dr. Mann left for Harvard, at the end of the spring of 1968, he insisted that I apply to Harvard. He wanted me in his master's Program, but after applying and being accepted, I did not attend.

In addition to being accepted to Harvard, I was also accepted into the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Design. Bill Wilson was a U of P alumnus. My brother-in-law Wendell Whitlock (Gail's sister's husband) was enrolled in the MBA program at U of P's famed Wharton School of Finance. He had a job offer with Hay and Associates in Pittsburgh, and they wanted us to lease their home in the Wynmfield section of Philadelphia when Wendell graduated the following year.

U of P was also the only rejection letter I received in my undergraduate college application process, so I had to show them they were wrong. And if that weren't enough to have me choose Penn over Harvard, the day I am on the train, going to Philadelphia for my Penn interview, I find myself in a seat across from Ed Bacon (Actor Kevin Bacon's dad), the Executor Director of the

Philadelphia City Planning Commission, and the author of the book I had just read the year before.

I recognized his face from the jacket of his book, and I struck up a conversation. Before I knew it, he was telling me to choose Penn over Harvard. He said he wanted me to work for the Philadelphia City Planning Commission the coming summer. I had had a few no brainers in my short history, and this one was easier than any of them.

The day after I graduated from Rutgers, in May of 1969, Gail and I left our one-bedroom apartment in the Married Students Housing Complex at the Heights Campus, loaded up our little 2-door Chevrolet Corvair Monza convertible, and we took off. All of our worldly possessions fit in that little car. We were on our way to Philadelphia, and my summer job at the Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

I had spent the last five years of my life in New Brunswick, NJ, and in so doing, witnessed events that profoundly shaped me, and the world we live in today. My experiences started with getting spit on by Penn students and ended with me getting spit on by the United States Judicial System.

It was my first time with a day in Court, but it wouldn't be my last.

CHAPTER FIVE

In September of 1969, I was enrolled in U of P's Graduate School of Fine Arts joint degree program in Landscape Architecture and City and Regional Planning as the best way to affect my goal of being a builder. With the racially charged political climate, I no longer wanted to be in the US military, under any conditions.

My Ford/HUD Fellowship paid for my tuition, books, housing, food, and a monthly stipend for incidentals. And I needed it. Gail was pregnant with our first child. The baby was due in January, and I wasn't sure if the Fellowship, as generous as it was, would be enough for me to pay our bills once Tariq was born.

On the day of Tariq's birth, I took Gail to the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania's Emergency Ward because her 'water' had broken. We attended Lamaze classes so Tariq would be born using natural childbirth methods, without anesthesia and pharmaceuticals, and I would be there in the delivery room with Gail.

I witnessed firsthand, that the process of birth brings the mother the closest to death she will ever experience in life, and simultaneously, the process of birth provides her the greatest exhilarating feeling she will ever experience in life.

I went to the Emergency Entrance, explained Gail's condition, and asked for directions on where to go? In those days I was sporting the latest 'revolutionary' garb of blue work shirt, blue jeans, and black combat boots, and my Afro was no longer 'mini'; and Gail's Afro made her look like Angela Davis. Because of our hairstyles and my sartorial flow, we were sent to the outpatient clinic for the 'indigent'. When we got there and I saw only black folk, I realized where we were.

Trying hard not to be indignant, I went to the front desk and inquired as to why we were where we were. I explained that I had full medical coverage because I was a graduate student at U of P. After producing my student ID and my Blue-Cross/Blue-Shield card, we were directed to another part of the hospital where Gail was able to deliver Tariq; in the comfortable confines of quite a different setting than the clinic we had just left. The experiences regarding the two different worlds that existed in America were reaching a boiling point.

My job at the City Planning Commission that summer was to assist Barry Malko, the Area Planner for Tioga-Nicetown. It was my reintroduction into the black 'ghetto'. When I toured the area for the first time with Barry, I saw vacant, boarded up houses; empty, trash-strewn lots; and abandoned cars lining narrow streets that were dirty and rubble-strewn. And I was able to

compare that to Society Hill, Ed Bacon's successful attempt to rebuild the 'urban core' of Philadelphia, one of America's decaying cities.

I can still remember the stark difference. Society Hill had brand new townhomes built on previously vacant lots, as well as refurbished and renovated houses that were once abandoned; and the streets were clean. What struck me the most was the fact that the streets in Society Hill were tree-lined, like my old days in East Orange, New Jersey.

I must also mention that Society Hill, through 'Urban Renewal', replaced the area where Philadelphia slaves once called home. The only thing they left standing was Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church, the burial place of Bishop Richard Allen, who, in 1784, founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the first independent black denomination in the United States.

The only tree found in uppermost North Philly, which is where Tioga-Nicetown was located, was 'Atlantis Altissimo' (the botanical name). Its common name, 'the Tree of Heaven', is an oxymoron if there ever was one. The 'tree of heaven' only grows in the 'hells' of North America. It is the only plant that can survive the wretched conditions of city life, including the ability to grow in the middle of a cracked concrete sidewalk and through broken glass and rubble.

And that plant was not lining any streets. It was growing wherever there was an opening, and trying to survive, just like the residents.

I was beginning to understand why the disparities existed, but for the moment, I was content with the idea that I could change those conditions with a good plan, and I thought that City Planning was the way to go. I hit the ground running with my plan for activism. I formed the Black Planning Students Union and was named its president.

One of the students who also joined was Hugh Clark, a Harvard undergrad who was in a joint program at Penn to receive degrees in both Law and City Planning. We instantly hit it off and became fast friends in our drive to better the living conditions of our people. That's the year I stopped eating meat; and I am still hanging in there.

Hugh had just gotten a job for the spring semester (1970) at Temple University and suggested that I apply. With Tariq's impending birth, my need for additional income had become a priority. At that time Temple's admission record regarding black students was abysmal, particularly given the fact that Temple's main campus was in the heart of black 'North Philly'.

Temple was adjacent to, by then, the notorious Richard Allen Homes, a public housing project rife with drugs and murder on any corner. The very few black students, who were admitted, wanted Temple University to change its 'racist' admissions policy immediately.

The concept of the Special Recruitment and Admission Program (SRAP) was formed by Temple's black students, with Clifford Jeffries as the leader of the student group who negotiated the deal with Temple Vice President Lee Montgomery (Greg's dad). Clifford insisted that all faculty and staff hired for SRAP had to be approved by them.

Just to be sure that the faculty and staff had an African centered perspective, Brother Clifford 2X (Jeffries) arranged an Orientation Program for the Faculty and Staff, with his fellow Assistant Secretary in Temple #12, Brother Ralph 3X Arnold, as the Featured Speaker.

Brother Ralph was born in Louisiana and moved north to Philadelphia with his mother and family in the '60's, after his parents divorced. Ralph was a graduate of West Philadelphia Catholic High School and LaSalle University, and he had attended Yale Law School in New Haven, CN. Sadly, a few years later his father, a successful Mortician, and Insurance Broker, would be murdered by white folk in Bogalusa, LA. His anger and dislike toward white people never abated.

I had been hired by SRAP and was among the crowd. Jeremiah's speech 3 years earlier was now coming back into clear focus. This intelligent brother had just presented a cogent logic that was inescapable.

By the time I had arrived in Philadelphia in 1969, Temple # 12 was already well established as one of the strongest Temples in NOI. After his fight with Sonny Liston, Herbert Muhammad, Ali's Business Manager, one of Elijah Muhammad's sons, arranged for Muhammad Ali to move to Philadelphia, where, under Jeremiah Shabazz' leadership, Ali would receive unparalleled security. When the term soldier was used, #12, 'the top of the clock', was the standard.

The soldiers, known as the Fruit of Islam (FOI), were synonymous with bowties, bean pies, and **Muhammad Speaks** newspapers; but in Philadelphia, most importantly for their fearlessness of white people, including 'organized crime'. And the FOI had an unprecedented, respected presence in every black section of 'segregated' Philadelphia.

That Black Power Conference in 1967, Bateman's lie in 1968, and my own witness to the injustices presently being suffered by my people were bad enough, but now I couldn't escape from the logic of a 'nation of my own'. I had found an organization that appealed to me and my circumstances. Unfortunately, I didn't see myself as aiding and abetting the plan to divide and conquer, but my ignorance couldn't deny the fact that I had separated myself from 'America'.

I will admit that I had problems with some of the ‘religion’, such as the “Mother Ship” and “Yacob”, but the Nation part was me, 100%. When I heard the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, say:

“Heaven and Hell are conditions of Life, not Death.”

I was sold because I thought the same thing. He said that the concept of ‘paradise’ after we die was a slavery teaching to keep us focused on obeying the white ‘slave master’ in this life and looking for our “‘pie’ in the sky, when we die”. It was later said that the Reggae Singer from Jamaica, Jimmy Cliff had joined the Nation. When I heard the lyrics to “The Harder They Come”, I was convinced.

**“They tell me about the ‘Pie’ up in the Sky,
Waiting for me when I die,
But between the time you’re born,
and when you die,
They never seem to hear even your cry...”**

When the Messenger said, “I bring to you Islam ‘as’ a religion, I had my own interpretation and belief of what he was saying. I believed he knew that Christianity had a stranglehold on the mind of our people, and if we were to break free, we needed a ‘substitute’ while we made the transition to a Nation of Our Own, where I believed religion wouldn’t be necessary as an element of control over people.

On the practical side, the Messenger had instituted a “Restrictive Law” that had to be obeyed by every adherent. We were not allowed to use drugs, alcohol, or tobacco. And that was fine with me. I saw them as traps to ensnare black folk and keep us deaf, dumb, and blind to the true cause of our suffering.

I didn’t use drugs, I wasn’t a drinker, and now I had a great reason to quit smoking cigarettes, a habit that I had picked up after I quit playing football at Rutgers. The Restrictive Law was also a bonus for me because it condemned adultery and fornication, something I had sworn off as a result of my dad’s treatment of my mom.

I received my X in October of 1970, and was then known as Brother Ernest 9X, meaning I was the 9th Ernest to join the Nation in Temple #12 in Philadelphia. I finished out my 1st year at Penn, and enrolled for the fall of 1970, but when I received my X in October, I resigned from U of P. Since I was rejecting western culture, I felt I didn’t need the white man’s degree to work in it. I saw myself as checking out of white America, and entering into my own nation, the Nation of Islam. I knew I had found my home. And without a doubt, it was the moment that I began to live out my definition of a racist.

In addition to being the greatest program to reduce drug addiction among our people, I felt the Messenger's Program produced a brotherhood and camaraderie that I had never known before. It felt good to refer to members of NOI as my brother and sister. It meant that I was a member of a much larger family that to me, was warm, kind, and loving. Respect for each other was the common thread that connected our members, something we never received living in white supremacist American culture.

When I first joined the Nation of Islam, I remember a brother asking me if I had seen the CBS documentary called, "The Hate that Hate Produced" (1959), which was narrated by Mike Wallace, the authoritative voice in media at the time. When I reviewed the documentary, I saw that the 'media' was dealing with the 'product', not the 'producer'. I am a product of what white hate produced.

I had taken a seminar in "Communications and Human Values" while at RU and I was now seeing Marshall McLuhan's thoughts actualized in my 'real time'. And the same scenario is still being played on today's world stage. Blame the 'product' for existing, while denying the existence, much less the role and culpability of the 'producer' who created the product. My seeing that film only strengthened me, and confirmed that I had made the right decision to join NOI.

We didn't hate white people. I know that I didn't hate white people. Was I angry that black folk had been, and were still being treated as second-class citizens in America? Yes, I was, but the only hate I saw was the wrath white people were heaping on black people, and that documentary was proof.

I was now a part of an organization that did not fear white people. A human being's fear immobilizes and weakens one's response to a threat to life. It brought back the memory of my little 'big' brother Freddie who feared nothing and no one. I had played football to overcome my physical fear of 'combat with white people' and was successful. And now I was a member of NOI, which enabled me to overcome my mental fear of engagement with white folk.

The confidence my parents instilled in me was strong enough for me to weather the storm created by the white supremacy teaching of racism that swirled throughout all life in America. I can honestly say that I never considered myself to be inferior to white people at any time in my life, even though my encounter at the age of 5 in Georgetown, DE had created a fear of them, and only because of the 'gun'.

"Whoever said the pen is mightier than the sword obviously never encountered an automatic weapon"

General Douglas MacArthur

I considered white people to be parasites, sucking the blood of black folks in order to survive. Other black groups were either 'militant' or 'political'. NOI had no interest or intention to engage the US in military combat, nor did it intend to get involved in the 'politics of 'Democracy', two things I agreed with.

It became clear to me that I needed to completely separate myself from white folk. If we were to succeed as a Nation, there were certain business opportunities we needed to immediately capitalize on. My racist mind had me immediately reject the thought of doing business with white people.

There could be no partnerships because I no longer trusted white people. Every professional I dealt with was now Amer African. My entire focus fixated on black people in America, and with that, the exclusion of white folk, least we be 'kidnapped' again. The white man was my enemy and is still my adversary. Only time will tell if we ever reach at least a détente, much less a mutual agreement (similar to the one my dad reached with the 'mob').

My First Savior's Day Convention, an annual event held in Chicago to celebrate the birth of his Teacher, Master Fard Muhammad (February 26th) was an eye-opener. The Messenger had a white man on the Rostrum. The Messenger introduced him as a friend who was helping him to buy farmland in Georgia and Alabama. He said there actually were some good white people who were willing to help black people, and this man was one of them.

Seeing this white southern farmer sitting next to my leader, teacher and guide was unexpected. When I got back home to Philly, it caused me to give further thought to "the white man is the devil", but it didn't stop my immediate plans to 'do for self' in a 'nation of our own'. I was in stone cold racist mode and I wanted nothing to do with white people.

As I was leaving the Savior's Day Convention (1971), I accepted a leaflet from the Black Peoples Topographical Society that was being distributed. The headline said, "Television is white people." It went on to say, "It is their thoughts, their problems, their wants, and their ways, why do you watch it, is that what you want to be?" When I returned home to Philadelphia, I threw out my television set and didn't buy another one for years.

A few years later, when I saw the way Muhammad Ali interacted with Gene Kilroy, and Ferdie Pacheco, as well as other white folk, I reflected on that white farmer at Savior's Day, and I became more amenable to dealing with white folk again, but the TV was still 'off the table'.

Now, it was time for me to do for self. I decided to open my own business, Your Brothers' Naturel and Organic Food Center, (we were the forerunner to a 'mini' Whole Foods Market). There would be a need for the distribution of the food products that were being grown on our

new Nation's farmland, and I decided that I would open up stores around the country for that purpose, beginning in Philadelphia. With food, clothing, and shelter being the then 3 basic necessities for life, I thought food was most important, so that shaped my focus.

After his graduation from Rutgers, Groove had moved back to Jersey City, NJ, his hometown. We kept in touch and when I mentioned SRAP was hiring, he applied, was hired, and left Jersey City to come help Counsel our youth in Philadelphia.

I will never forget the day we were on our way to the mailbox on the corner of Broad and Montgomery Streets on Temple U's Main Campus. I glanced at the envelop he was about to mail. It was addressed to The Honorable Elijah Muhammad, 4855 South Woodlawn Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

My envelope also had the same exact address. He and I had both begun processing to join the Nation at the same time. He was going back home to Jersey City on weekends and attending the Temple in Jersey City. I was processing through Philly. Neither of us had ever discussed joining NOI with each other, and I never knew until that day that we were both sending off our third letter, that if found acceptable, would allow us to earn our X's.

Byron and Sidney would later get their X's as well, with none of us knowing what the others had done. We never discussed NOI among ourselves before joining. That is certainly the greatest coincidence that I have ever experienced in my life. Greg was the only one of the crew who never joined NOI, and the irony is that he was the most militant of all.

The five of us met as freshman in the fall of 1964, joined Phi Sig together in 1965, and by 1970, had shared so much together that we were truly "brothers" in every sense. We were all we had. As black men trying to survive and thrive in a very turbulent time in America, we were and are the product that "Hate Produced." The hatred white folk had for black people was so deep that it produced men like us, men wanting to be free of the wretched conditions rooted in white supremacy, a paradigm that made our life 'hell'.

Your Brothers' Natural and Organic Food Center was located on Chestnut Street between 52nd and 53rd Streets. Directly around the corner on 52nd Street was Temple 12-C in West Philadelphia, where I was the Minister and Groove was the Secretary. We also partnered in Your Brothers'.

One Friday evening after services ended, the Captain of the Philadelphia FOI, Sam Christian, whose reputation preceded him at the time, paid a visit to 12-C to address the FOI. He said he was concerned that Brothers were not fulfilling their duty to NOI by selling their prescribed weekly quota of 300 Muhammad Speaks newspapers.

When Brother Vance 2X expressed exasperation at the difficulty that he was having trying to sell his quota of newspapers, Captain Sam began a 'dissertation' on his love for the Honorable Elijah Muhammad and what he would do in service for the Messenger. And Sam's voice was as calm and matter of fact as my dad's was when he was speaking to Mr. Smeltz. Sam's voice level indicated no threat or intimidation. Sam was speaking in a loud whisper.

During the course of his 5-minute dissertation, Sam told the brothers his love for the Messenger was so strong that if he knew where Malcolm X's body was buried, he would dig it up and kill him all over again for disrespecting his leader, teacher, and guide.

And if that wasn't graphic enough, he then told Vance that if he, Brother Vance 2X, ever disobeyed a direct order from the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, Sam said, "I will kill you and then make you walk to your motha-fuckin' grave."

Wow, the mixed emotions that produced. I felt proud that I was in the presence of, and associated with someone so strong, with that powerful conviction, and resources to back it up. I also loved Malcolm for the service he had provided to our then growing nation. That was a lot to process in one night.

I had never experienced the kind of loyalty Sam communicated that night, before or since. I was clear that Malcolm's ego had him betray the Messenger with his public pronouncement of the Messenger's other wives. And I was truly saddened that the FBI exploited the rift and by their direction, with their assistance, Malcolm was assassinated. But my love and respect for Malcolm never wavered, even after Sam's soliloquy.

Malcolm's love for the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, and his ability to successfully deliver our message nationwide was beyond reproach. Times change and people change, and separations never seem to work out amicably. I had only been in NOI for less than 5 years after his death, but Malcolm's life (death) was a lesson for me that I learned that night. And needless to say, Vance was motivated by Sam's speech and sold his quota of newspapers the following week.

I was comfortable knowing that I was among men who had no fear of anyone, or anything, including white folk. Once I became Manager of our bakery, Minister Jeremiah assigned Sam to ride with me as I collected the money from the supermarkets and shops that sold our pies. I certainly didn't have to worry about anyone robbing us. We had our own security (police) force that even white folks respected and feared. I no longer feared anyone, or anything, physically or psychologically.

Your Brothers was an instant hit, and I decided that we should be in other markets. I found locations in Princeton, Cherry Hill, and Hightstown, NJ to open additional stores. I made the

decision that we needed to succeed financially, and that meant expanding our market from 30,000,000 black folk to the 300,000,000 people in America. Additionally, Brother Ralph and I developed a Sales and Marketing Approach to selling the goods and services produced by NOI farms, and its individual members, to a national market.

We knew that if we wanted to get our plan implemented in NOI, we had to go to Chicago and ask permission from the Messenger. From his days at Yale, where he attended Muhammad's Temple, Ralph knew the new National Secretary, Abbas Rassoul, the former Secretary in New Haven, CN. Ralph believed Rassoul would arrange for us to have an audience with the Messenger.

Gail was pregnant with our second child, and I was leaving for Chicago, so I took her to stay with her mom in East Orange, NJ, while I was on 'the' mission to take NOI to another economic level. When I got the call that she was going into labor, I bought a ticket and flew home in the middle of our discussions with Rassoul. I arrived in time for Tamida's birth, stayed overnight with Gail in the hospital, and then returned to Chicago, knowing Gail and Tamida were safe and healthy, with the hope that an audience with the Messenger had been arranged.

Two days later, upon my return to Chicago, much to my chagrin, and Ralph's too, it became clear that Rassoul was stalling. At the time, I thought it was internal NOI politics that was causing the delay in allowing us to present a plan that would catapult NOI into another stratosphere.

Years later I came across a report that linked Abbas Rassoul to being an FBI informant. Who knows if he, as an undercover US agent, sabotaged our idea? Whatever, and whoever he was, Ralph and I were totally wiped out when Rassoul came to the Ambassador Hotel and threw the Registered: Return Receipt Requested letter that we had sent to the Messenger on Ralph's bed. He accused us of not trusting him and going behind his back.

And his last words to us were clearly understood. "If you know what's good for you, you will be out of Chicago in the next 24 hours."

I was no longer a member of NOI. My transformation into a full-fledged Black Nationalist; was complete and I referred to myself as an African Nationalist. In fact, in my mind, and certainly in the 'authorities' mind, NOI was not a religion, but one continuous Black History Course. As a Minister, I would start out teaching from the Quran or Bible, but my topic was always to historically demonstrate that throughout our contact with the Caucasian, we had endured slavery, suffering, and death.

The only part of the ‘religion’ of NOI that I still accepted was The Honorable Elijah Muhammad being a Messenger to the Black man in America, and his being taught by Master Fard Muhammad, a man who said he was ‘God’. The teaching that the white man was the ‘devil’, someone evil, wicked, unrighteous, immoral, unjust, and corrupt was how I still saw all white people.

The Messenger had said that we should not follow Arabs and their religious tenets, so it was easy for me to accept his version of Islam. In fact, I saw the Quran and Bible as similar instruments. Most of what I taught as a Minister to lambast Christians could have just as easily been directed toward Arabs.

The first 5 books of each religion (Torah, Bible, and Qur’an) are all similar. And the Arabs (Islam) were very much a part of the African ‘slave trade’, so I saw them no different than the white Christians or white Jews who controlled ‘chattel slavery. I no longer felt ‘religion’. And I was no longer a member of an organization that I believed could deliver my goals of a Nation of Our Own, on some of this Earth that we could call Our Own.

“Without some of this earth that we can call our own, we cannot hope to ever become a free nation out of the nation of the slave master. It is far more important to teach separation of the blacks and whites in America than prayer. Teach and train the blacks to do something for self in the way of uniting and seeking a home on this earth that they can call their own.”

Elijah Muhammad

He said that teaching “separation of the blacks and whites in America” was more important than prayer. To me, the Messenger was saying that the only real way our prayers would be answered was in a nation of our own. In a nation of our own, I believed we would have freedom, justice, and equality of opportunity in an egalitarian society.

With my brothers and sisters in NOI, I had shared a common goal of living righteously and enjoying ‘heaven’ while we ‘live’. Even though I was no longer in NOI, that ideal never left me. I was clear that our need, as a people, was to ‘do for self’ in a nation of our own. The only question was how was I going to do that in America in 1972, at the age of 26?

A few years earlier Greg had said, “Ernest, you are the only person who I know, that when something isn’t working, can turn on a dime, and move 180 degrees in the opposite direction within seconds”. And that’s what I did. I formerly ‘left’ NOI, but not the Messenger’s teaching to ‘do for self’. I was disappointed, but I wasn’t mad at, or angry, with anyone. I was still growing, and learning.

I had met M. Paul Friedberg at a Landscape Architectural Conference in NYC during the summer of 1969, right after I had graduated from Rutgers and moved to Philly to start U of P. I distinctly remember that weekend because there was more talk of men landing on the moon than the Conference topic itself, which was convened to discuss ways of beautifying the Urban Environment.

We didn't chat long, but he told me that if I ever needed anything, give him a call. So, in January of 1973, I called Paul and asked him if I could come up to his office in NYC. I told him I had a problem that I was hopeful he could help me with. Tariq was about to turn 3 on January 18th, Tamida was 3 months old, and I needed money. Only later would I come to understand that money, and its need, is the most essential element of human control in Capitalism.

I told Paul that I needed to earn an income. He said, "Ernest, I don't need another partner, and you are too talented to be anyone's employee". Race was not a factor, for Paul, and at that point, nor me. By then I had had time to assess my NOI experience, and my immediate takeaway was to do what the Messenger and Muhammad Ali had done; find some white friends who could be helpful.

Paul called his friend Jerry Lindsay, a brother who was Dean of the School of Architecture at Howard University. Jerry agreed to hire me for the fall semester of 1973, and I became an Assistant Professor of Architecture (the irony that I had finally arrived in a school of architecture never crossed my mind). I would be the instructor for a landscape design studio that Jerry wanted all of his senior architectural students to participate in.

And last but not least, Paul said that he would hire me for the rest of the semester at City College of New York (CCNY), now the City University of New York (CUNY), where he was the Head of the Landscape Architectural Department.

I had left NOI and moved into the world that I had shunned. I knew that I wasn't totally comfortable, but I felt I had an obligation to my family to earn enough money for them to 'enjoy' life, however it was defined by me at that moment. Without realizing it, I was about to put on a 'white mask' over my 'black skin'.

While working at CCNY that semester, I had the good fortune of meeting Dave Paul. One day during a class break (I was assisting Paul Friedberg in a design studio); I went outside to get a cup of coffee from one of the food trucks parked along Convent Avenue. I saw a huge black limousine parked between 2 food trucks. There was a black chauffeur leaning against the front fender on the curbside of the car.

I said, “Hey brother, whose limo is this parked here on a college campus?” “It belongs to my boss, David Paul, he’s an instructor here in the Architecture Department”, was his response. I immediately asked, “How can he afford a limo on a college professor’s salary?”

The brother said his boss was also a real estate developer, so I said, “I’d like to meet him, that’s what I want to be.” Lester motioned his head and said, “He’s coming this way now.” When I turned around, I saw a guy who looked nothing like a professor of architecture, or a real estate developer.

In fact, Dave was also an attorney who counted among his classmates at Harvard Law, Herb Stern, then US Attorney for New York and Northern New Jersey. Dave’s father was in the Dry-Cleaning business in Queens and had left an estate worth a little over \$15,000,000 to his only child, David. Dave had studied architecture but went to law school to be a businessman.

I introduced myself to Dave, told him I was a teaching assistant to Paul Friedberg, and that I wanted to be a real estate developer. He said, “I’m going to look at some properties in Belleville and Nutley (New Jersey) this Saturday, why don’t you ride with me, and we can talk?” He gave me his phone number, we arranged a time and place for me to be, and he and Lester picked me up at the Newark, NJ train station at the agreed upon time.

In those three hours, I received a lesson in real estate development that enabled me to enter the business. It would take a few years for me to fully understand all that Dave said that day, but I did walk away with the clear understanding that the first step in the process of real estate development was ‘site control’.

If you could tie up a piece of land long enough to get site plan approval from the local planning board, you could create equity by simply getting an appraisal on the land that exceeded the agreed upon purchase price, all based on the municipal approval, a process called ‘entitlement’. It is the vision of the developer, and what he thinks is the highest and best use of the land that separates the “men from the boys”.

I tried to walk a thin line between the 2 worlds, the corrupt rat race of white America, and the insular world of black NOI. The toughest thing I had to deal with was my attitude toward white people as I re-entered ‘their’ world. I had to now conceal how I really felt about them. Even though I was no longer directly involved in NOI, I still saw the white man as the ‘devil’, but there were a few rare exceptions; Paul Friedberg and Dave Paul being two of them.

At first, I saw myself as an ‘undercover’ brother, but in reality, I had turned into a ‘closet’ racist as I navigated through ‘their’ world, trying not to lose sight of who I was, and who and what I

wanted to be, while never letting the white world know my true feelings regarding race, a stupid, ignorant construct that regulated my thinking.

My adjusted chosen field of study in Landscape Architecture, in addition to providing me the opportunity to meet and receive help from Paul Friedberg and Dave Paul, prepared me to fulfill my dream of being a builder/developer.

And the opportunity came the next year.

CHAPTER SIX

In the summer of 1974, Tom Fisher, my new-found white steward, asked me to meet him at his office in Cherry Hill, NJ. He wanted to show me a single-family development that was for sale, so he drove us to Lawnside, New Jersey, a town of 3,000 black people incorporated in 1840. As soon as we exited the car, he said, “Well Ernest, what do you think”? Tom Fisher’s question was mixed with pride and pleasure.

He was proud that he had brought me to visit, and consider for purchase, an unfinished 83 lot subdivision in a community that would probably welcome me as a developer. I had hired Fisher and Sampson, Professional Engineers, to present my site plan for subdivision approval to Mt. Royal/Clarksboro Township, where I was subsequently turned down when the town ‘fathers’ found out that I was black.

I had hired all white professionals (architect, engineer, and attorney), and informed them that my identity should not be revealed. But I was black, so what did that mean.

Mt. Royal/Clarksboro was a great wakeup call for me. My experience in Chicago two years earlier had me run away from any business activity with all black folk, but the Mt. Royal/Clarksboro experience made it perfectly clear to me that if I was to become a successful real estate developer, I needed to develop, build, and market homes to my own folk. I judged that the Amer-African market wanted market-rate housing in suburbia, just like their white college-educated counterparts in upper-middle income America. I was one of them.

“I like what I see”, was my immediate response. During our drive to Lawnside Tom told me that the previous developers had recently completed building 40 homes in the subdivision but had to stop before they could complete the remaining 83 homes because they were running into problems with the Borough of Lawnside. It wasn’t until I had toured the remaining 25 acres of undeveloped ground that I found out the truth as to why the developers couldn’t go forward.

Initially, Tom had taken me to the higher ground that was beautifully wooded with Pine and Oak trees that enjoyed a rich sandy loam soil to thrive in. When we went down to the lower portion of the tract, on the other side of the development, I saw pools of water that had developed into ponds, complete with koi and frogs. When I asked Tom what was happening, his response was, “I think there are underground springs that feed these ponds, because even in July and August, when there is no rain, these ponds are always full”.

As I walked the part of the site where the water was located, I could see through the trees and the fence that lined the property, that there was a golf course next door. And it was no ordinary golf

course. Tavistock Golf and Country Club is a New Jersey Municipality with 8 residents, living in 3 houses at the front of the golf course. Legend has it that the notorious Al Capone and his 'friends' used Tavistock as a very Exclusive Country Club Resort and Casino, on the outskirts of Philadelphia (less than 10 miles from downtown), during the 'Roaring '20's, when Prohibition was in full force.

Tavistock was an incorporated municipality, with its own police force, and back then, State Police and Federal Agents were required to contact and cooperate with the local police regarding any criminal investigation. Tavistock was a 200 acre preserve where the 'rich and famous', during Prohibition, played day and night, without the fear of police intervention. No white person will ever voluntarily give that 'life' up.

I also noticed that the trees that I looked through were 'liquidambar styraciflua', more commonly known as 'Sweet Gum'. Sweet Gum trees were not indigenous to wet, swampy conditions. So, if the water was there first, the Sweet Gums could not have grown. The logical conclusion was that the water came after the Sweet Gum stand, where we stood, had developed. Where was the water coming from, even in the summer when there was no rain? Tavistock Golf and Country Club was the source.

The land where Tom and I stood was a valley, with the hills of Tavistock on one side, and the partially completed "Warwick Hills" subdivision on the other side. Each night when Tavistock watered its handcrafted fairways and manicured greens, the water (both surface and subsurface) would drain and run down to Lawnside, watering the ponds, even in June, July, and August when there was very little rain. There were no underground springs. The clay soil in the valley did not permit the water to drain any further.

Without offering Tom my analysis of the situation, and without offering my assessment of the development potential, once the water issue was resolved, I asked Tom to set up a meeting with Al Linzner, one of the sellers.

The first thing I had to deal with was price. Al Linzner and his partners Morris Sarshik, Harold Sarshik, Charlie Cutler and Gil Bloom were asking \$250,000 for the 83 lots, based on \$3,000/lot. The lots weren't improved, and the approval of the remaining subdivision was up in the air because the Borough wasn't issuing any more building permits to build homes next to mosquito laden ponds.

I told Al that he would be lucky if someone offered them \$125,000 for the land; and I was standing there to tell him how lucky he was that that was my offer. I pointed out the obvious. Without further Borough Council approval, the best that anyone could do with the land was build

40 houses on the lots on the high ground, and leave the valley, 43 lots and all, to the birds, frogs, and koi.”

Since I still needed Town Council approval, I required a contingency clause that stated that if I couldn't get Council's approval to pull the building permits for the 40 houses, I could back out of the deal, but I would forfeit my deposit. Usually, a 10% deposit is the down payment tendered at the signing of the Agreement, with a closing date usually 180 days later.

I told Linzner that I was willing to risk \$10,000 to see if I could get the deal done, so all I could leave as a deposit was \$5,000, which represented a 4% deposit. I explained that the remainder of my \$5,000 was needed for engineers, attorneys, and an appraiser in order to get approvals and to arrange the financing to pay for the ground and to start my home building operations. They were so desperate to sell that they agreed.

I had \$5,000 left from my earlier foray into development in Gloucester County, where I actually paid my engineers, attorneys, and an appraiser. So, I decided to make the bet that I could pull the deal off. What better opportunity did I have available to invest the \$5,000? Besides, long-shots pay big dividends.

After my debacle with Mr. Royal/Clarksboro in racist Gloucester County, I found out that most professionals worked 'on the come', meaning they got paid, when a developer received his financing, something similar to a contingency fee basis in law. In my case, because I was black, I figured I would just ask for help, as I had done with Paul Friedberg and Dave Paul, because I didn't have any money to pay them up front.

I'm just glad Linzner accepted my reasoning as to why my deposit was less than normal. But nothing about this deal was normal, including me offering to buy land and build houses; something I had never done before.

My initial step was to meet with the Mayor and Council in Lawnside. I was very fortunate. They liked me and were sincerely appreciative that a young black man, I was 28 at the time, wanted to build new upscale housing for professional black folk in their town. I came away from my meeting with the Lawnside officials believing they would cooperate with me and be supportive of my efforts, which they were.

I still hadn't told anyone that I knew where the water was coming from, but I guaranteed them that I would solve the problem. My next move was finding an appraiser for the property. I had met Harold Sarshik, one of Linzner's partners at the signing of the Agreement of Sale, and he offered that if I needed any assistance in going forward, don't hesitate to call him, so I did. Harold referred me to Henry Fineberg of Fineberg and McBurney, Appraisers.

When I went to Henry's office, I noticed only one desk. I asked him where was McBurney? He told me that he made McBurney up because people were reluctant to deal with a Jew unless he had a gentile as a partner. When I left his office, I thanked him for his assessment and appraisal of the land which I had under agreement, as well as the advice regarding public perception.

Fineberg told me that if I could solve the water problem, the land would be worth \$600,000, and he would give me an appraisal to back it up. Henry had already done the appraisal for the Al Linzner group, and it wouldn't take much to update the appraisal, once I had proof that the water issue would be resolved.

Tom Fisher introduced me to this deal, and now it was necessary for him to perform another service. I needed an introduction to the owners of Tavistock, which did not have Jewish members. Tom, being Irish, was a member. I finally told him I knew where the water was coming from, and I asked him to arrange a meeting with the 'big brass' at Tavistock because this was an urgent matter that required their immediate attention, particularly since I was now about to buy the remaining Warwick Hills subdivision, land contiguous to their golf course.

I was invited to have lunch at Tavistock, probably the first black person to ever do so. The brother serving us was both surprised, and pleased. It was 1974, and the issues of race in the '60's were carried over into the '70's and were very much in play that day. Tom, I'm sure, had already briefed the three Board members. The Mayor of Tavistock also attended, so Tom and I rounded out the 6 people the table was set for.

After pleasantries and lunch, Dave Taylor, a civil engineer and one of the board members said that Tavistock, the Town, and the Country Club, were willing to buy my Agreement of Sale. He said they would pay me \$100,000 for the right to buy my Agreement, and that I could just walk away with the cash in my pocket, within 30 days.

Dave conceded that the water was coming from them, and thereby devaluing the property that I was about to purchase. He said they would need to spend \$100,000 to build a Storm Water Drainage System along the entire border of the property, which extended for over 1,500 feet (almost a 1/3 mile).

That would cost them the same \$100,000 that they were offering me. He said he thought it would be great for a young entrepreneur like me to earn a handsome reward for my diligence in discovering the source of the water feeding the ponds. He looked at me for a reaction, and when I offered none, he said, "Well what do you say?" These guys were willing to spend \$225,000 to make sure black folks didn't have backyards directly bordering their golf course, 6-foot cyclone fence notwithstanding.

I told Dave, the other two Board members, and the mayor that I would have to think over their offer and get back to them. I am grateful that it was probably the only time in my life where I had not acted immediately. And I'm sure it was because I really didn't know what to do. As arrogant as I was at the time, I had enough sense to know that I didn't know what to do, at the age of 28, with \$100,000 cash staring me right in the face. I didn't know if I should take the money and run or build out the subdivision and fulfill my dream of being a builder (a dream that increased in probability with \$100,000 in my coffers).

By then, I had realized that I needed to discuss my business dealings with someone. Guess who I went to for advice? I went to my dad. How a man with a 3rd grade education knew so much about life, is a mystery for the ages. He simply asked me one question. "Junior, you've talked about being a builder for years. Deep down inside, is that what really what you want to be?"

I needed my dad to tell me to be what I want to be, and don't ever let money affect my judgment in matters of freedom. Being what you want to be is 'freedom', once you know who you are. It was a process that I was still undergoing.

I called Dave Taylor and told him of my decision. He then asked me would I be willing to sign an agreement that if they construct a drainage system along the boundary line, to take away their runoff; I could never bring legal action against them regarding the water runoff. I gladly agreed and was now ready to find financing to buy the land, complete the offsite improvements, and begin building homes.

Harold and his father Morris were the developers of Woodcrest, the most prestigious upscale housing development in Cherry Hill, Camden County, New Jersey. Woodcrest Golf and Country Club offered Jews the opportunity to have their own exclusive Golf Course Community, without having to beg to be members of Tavistock, or Pine Valley Golf Course, another 200-acre incorporated municipality with 12 residents, less than 10 miles down the road.

Morris Sarshik was shrewd enough to have bought as much farmland as he could assemble and acquire in Delaware Township in the early '60's, before it became Cherry Hill Township, and synonymous with 'wealth' and 'success.' For whatever reason, Harold also liked me, and he wanted to see me succeed, certainly in part because, from his perspective, I would be buying 'worthless' land that he and his father held an equity interest in.

When I told Harold that I had an appraisal on the land for \$600,000 with the provision that I solve the water issue, and an agreement with Tavistock that they would spend \$100,000 to solve the water problem, he asked me how much I needed. I told him that I needed \$300,000 to buy the land and to operate my company until I started having a positive cash flow. I also needed a Construction Loan of \$500,000 to complete the improvements, build and decorate 3 Model

Homes, and a Line of Credit of \$2,000,000 to build the homes once my buyers were approved for financing.

Harold's response was immediate. "Ernest, call Jim Rogers, President of Heritage Mortgage Finance Company (HMFC) and tell him that I suggested you call him." I had applied to its parent company, Heritage Bank, for a \$3,000 car loan a month earlier, and had been turned down. Nonetheless, their subsidiary approved me for a \$2,800,000 development loan. (At least I had a driver's license to drive a car. I certainly didn't have a license to build houses.)

I closed on the loan a month later and started my career as a home builder and real estate developer. I hope you are beginning to see that I am a very fortunate human being. And it continues to this very day. Some folks have said that I am 'blessed', and this was certainly an example.

Warwick Hills meant everything to me. I wanted my children to grow up in a neighborhood seeing successful black professionals and believe that they too could one day be a doctor, lawyer, teacher, business owner, corporate executive, and pursue any other career opportunities where they could succeed and reap the benefits of our hard-fought struggle for freedom in America.

At the loan closing, George Ortlip, the construction inspector that Jim Rodgers hired to oversee my project asked me how long it would take for me to build my houses once they were sold. I told him I had just sold one, even before closing, and that if I could start building by March 1st, I would have a Certificate of Occupancy (CO) by April 1st.

He told me that it was not possible to build a stick built, conventional home, without any panel components, in 30 days. George also knew that I had never built a house in my life. I was good in 8th grade shop class, in spite of Mr. Smeltz, but that was the extent of my vocational skills.

I had done some research and made a construction schedule for myself (Microsoft Project didn't exist in 1975), just so I would have an idea of how much time it would take to build a house. I also knew that I needed to know something about scheduling just in case someone asked me about the construction process. George Ortlip bet me I couldn't do it. Since I had never built a home before, with all of my bravado, I only made the bet on dinner, with the loser paying for food and drinks for a party of 4, at the winner's restaurant of choice.

We received our Certificate of Occupancy (CO) on March 31, and Gail and I enjoyed a wonderfully expensive meal at George's expense. I invited him and Jim Rodgers to join Gail and me. I enjoyed eating my meal as I watched them swallow their pride.

I had talked my way into being a builder/developer, but now I had to deliver. I knew I needed help, and so I turned to GG and Greg. GG had recently graduated from Edison State Teachers College and was a high school Industrial Arts teacher. He didn't hesitate to accept my offer to become my Vice President-Construction, particularly since he was planning marriage and I had offered him a higher salary than he could make as a schoolteacher.

Greg had finished his overseas duty as a Captain in the US Air Force and was graduating from Rutgers' Law School in Newark. He was trying to land a job with a NYC Park Avenue law firm. I knew Greg would be perfect as Vice President and General Counsel. Greg was a detail person, and that was exactly what I needed in the person to handle the legal and financial matters of Fidelity First Corporation.

As my luck would have it, GG's fiancée Paulette was the stepdaughter of S. Howard Woodson, the then Speaker of the New Jersey Assembly, the pastor of the largest church in Trenton, and the nephew of Carter G. Woodson, who's famous quote from his book, "The Mis-education of the Negro" regarding the depraved mental condition of black people still rings in my head today.

“No systematic effort towards change has been possible, for taught the same economics, history, philosophy, literature, and religion which have established the present code of morals, the Negro's mind has been brought under the control of his oppressor, the problem of holding the Negro down, therefore, is easily solved. When you control a man's thinking you do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his 'proper place' and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary. The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples. The Negro thus educated is a hopeless liability of the race”.

The quote comes from his book that was published in 1933, and it is still as relevant today as when it was written. I can bear witness to having seen Negroes “cut in a back door” where one didn't exist, just to please their white “slave master”.

I had invited Speaker Reverend Woodson to be our speaker for the Grand Opening of our model homes. He was a huge draw, both in New Jersey where he functioned as Acting Governor whenever Governor Brendan Byrne was out of State, and in Philadelphia where he was also well known and well respected as a pastor.

After his speech, I brought to Reverend Woodson's attention that Lawnside, one of the oldest black settlements in America for freed slaves (1840), didn't have an active or passive recreational facility for children or adults. As Speaker of the New Jersey Assembly, he offered to provide State money for Lawnside to build a park through its' Green Acres Fund. Our Lawnside Park included football, baseball, and soccer fields, tennis court, basketball courts, an outdoor covered pavilion for family gatherings, and a picnic area with built-in BBQ pits. We also had enough additional open space for a children's play area complete with a sandbox, sliding board, and swings. And for the young adults, we installed a ¼ mile track and a fitness station. We had bleachers installed for the sporting events, and erected lighting for all nighttime activity (the park closed at 10:00 pm in the summer months).

Since the contract to design the park was a Professional Services contract, I asked Ike Bryant, the Borough Administrator, to hire one of my former classmates and teammates from RU, Addison Bradley, a landscape architect, to design the park. There was only one condition that Addison had to agree to, unofficially; that I be allowed to do the design (free of charge), with his people preparing the working drawings, the specification documents, and mutual oversight during the construction, that was publicly bid. I received no financial remuneration.

I was now where I wanted to be. Ironically, it was my succession of contacts with Paul Friedberg, Dave Paul, Tom Fisher, and Harold Sarshik that paved the way for my business success. With all of the help that I had received, and was still receiving from white folk, my racism still had me take the position that white folk should not be designing anything for black people. I felt their 'design' of racism was enough. I had no intention to leave the design of Lawnside Park to white folk.

It would be years before I, as a landscape architect, designed another park. I was now a real estate developer, building and selling market rate single family homes to black folk. I was a proud black man.

CHAPTER SEVEN

In 1976, I came across a story in the Sunday New York Times about Princeton University, and how it was looking to develop 500-600 For Sale housing units on its campus to alleviate their difficulty in luring top professors to accept positions at their prestigious university. The housing costs for buying or renting were more than a professor could afford.

Paul Firstenberg, the Vice President overseeing the housing development project, said they were in the early stages of developing a ‘game plan’, and once they did, they would be looking to name a developer to build and sell the homes. “Our primary objective is to name a developer who builds a quality product, and at the same time, one who will make the homes affordable in the marketplace.”

He was referring to selling homes below the median cost of housing in the ‘Princeton market’, where costs were so high that Princeton University was willing to sell some of their land at a discount in order for a developer to build homes and sell at 50% to 80% of the present market rate prices in the ‘Princeton housing market’. Paul Firstenberg’s definition of affordable was not the same as the definition used by the New Jersey Supreme Court, which had recently decided a landmark case now known as *Mt. Laurel I*.

When I read that word ‘affordable’, bells started clanging in my head. The Mt Laurel 1 decision, *Southern Burlington County N.A.A.C.P. v. Township of Mt. Laurel*, 67 N.J. 151(1975) was a watershed event in the Home Building Industry in New Jersey, the most densely populated State in America, and a bedroom community of NYC in the north, and a bedroom community for Philadelphia in the south. And as such, was, at that time, ranked among the top five housing markets in America,

The *Mount Laurel I* decision established that municipalities were constitutionally mandated to provide low -and moderate- income housing units when new housing units were built. Typically, at that time, builders were permitted to build four market rate housing units for each ‘affordable’ unit provided.

I wanted to be named the developer for those 500-600 housing units. It would give me inventory for the next 5-7 years. I just needed an advantage over the large home builders. For the first time in my life, it looked like being black could be an advantage.

The real issue with the NAACP’s lawsuit was to make sure black folks weren’t denied the right to buy homes in suburbia via exclusionary zoning or selling practices. My approach would be to convince Mr. Firstenberg that with me, a black developer, no one would accuse me of discriminating against black folk because I was a black developer with a demonstrated track record building and selling market rate housing to black folk.

I knew that I was back to where I had left off in Mt. Royal/Clarksboro, going after a development deal in a white community that was aimed at the white home buying market, but this was Princeton University, located in one of the most prestigious housing markets in America. So it was worth a sincere effort.

Princeton, New Jersey is almost a perfect example of the ways in which racism works. It is a model of segregation, but with a very 'polite' touch of racism. A reporter who now works for the New York Times grew up in Princeton during the 1970's, was once asked what that experience was like. He said, "It was okay... if you liked Johannesburg (South Africa) under apartheid."

There weren't many black folks in the Princeton Area who could afford the market rate housing I intended to offer, even with the houses selling for 80% of Princeton's present home prices, but I was confident enough that I would find the few and sell them a home if I were selected the developer. When I met with Paul Firstenberg, I guaranteed him the NAACP would not raise its head with me as the developer.

Princeton had a shabby record of race relations, dating back to Woodrow T. Wilson's reign as President of Princeton University and Governor of New Jersey, before he became President of the United States. Princeton didn't want any national notoriety regarding matters of race.

Woodrow Wilson had personally denied admission to Paul Robeson, who though born in Princeton, graduated at the top of his class at Somerville High School, and was the captain of his football team. So, Paul Robeson had to travel 18 miles up the road to Rutgers University to further his education.

In that meeting with Firstenberg, he said he was delighted that I wanted to be the developer and home builder for their housing development. He explained that Princeton University was keenly aware that the *Mt. Laurel* decision would impact their plans, and I was offering a view that they should consider.

The law required that Princeton University would need to provide 20% of the housing to be offered to low- and moderate-income families in Mercer County.

Paul agreed with me that the only way to provide low and moderate housing in the market was through rental housing. But before getting to that bridge, Paul said he had to address the problem with naming me the developer for a project of the anticipated magnitude.

He accepted that my Warwick Hills subdivision was a success, but it was only 83 homes. Even though I had a 100-unit senior citizens project on my drawing board, their project, which called

for 500-600 housing units, was much too big for someone like me who had only been in business for 2 years.

Paul Firstenberg was being honest and forthright. He appreciated that I even had the ‘balls’ to approach Princeton in the first place; and with Mt. Laurel 1 staring them in the face, I did offer an intriguing way to resolve that issue. I asked Paul, “If I can find a joint venture partner with the kind of experience and financial wherewithal that is substantive and meets your standards, and work out an agreement with them, would you give me serious consideration?”

“I certainly would.” “You find the right partner and I will make sure your proposal is given serious consideration.” He told me there was no doubt in his mind that with me as a part of the development team, there would be no racial issues related to our project. He told me the ball was in my court.

My mind immediately went to Harold Sarshik. He had introduced me to Heritage Mortgage Finance Agency, and I was successful in my first real estate deal as a builder/developer. I needed a partner that had a track record building 500-600 market rate housing units, as well as a big bankroll. And Harold and his father fit the bill perfectly.

When I met with Harold and his dad Morris to pitch my idea for the Princeton development, Morris was quick to say he was in his 70’s and wasn’t looking for any more work. They owned over 1,000 acres of land in Cherry Hill to subdivide and build, and Harold would be taking over the day-to-day operations of the company.

Morris said, “Harold, what do you think of Ernie’s idea?” Most white people called me Ernie, so I was used to it from the Phi Sig days at RU. “I would like to go to Princeton, see the land, and talk to the Vice President that Ernest met with before I can make a decision.” I really appreciated the fact that Harold, like all black people, called me Ernest.

I set up the meeting and received a real lesson in how white people function, meaning less than “6 degrees of separation.” I had already experienced Harold’s financial influence when I received my loan for Warwick Hills.

The first thing I found out was that the Sarshiks were Republican, as are most Princeton folk, and that Harold had served as the Vice Chairman of the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency under former Republican Governor Tom Cahill. Previously, Harold had been the President of the New Jersey Builders Association. Ex-Governor Tom Cahill, of the law firm of Cahill, McCarthy, and Hicks, located in Princeton, NJ was now on the Board of Governors of Princeton University.

Harold and I later met with Cahill's law partner, Tom McCarthy and agreed to hire him as our general counsel for the Princeton University project, which we intended to name Forrestal Village in our proposal.

The project was to be built on 100 acres of the 600-acre Forrestal Campus, named after James Forrestal, former Secretary of the Navy and Princeton alum. The land was part of the over 1,000 acres the Rockefeller Family had donated to Princeton via Laurence Rockefeller, himself a Princeton grad.

It was in 1910 that J.P. Morgan, along with John D. Rockefeller, SR stopped by Princeton to pick up Woodrow Wilson, on their way to Jekyll Island, Georgia to work out the creation of The Federal Reserve System, and a Federal Income Tax, which was later introduced and implemented by an act of Congress.

The Senator who introduced the legislation was Senator Nelson Aldrich, Republican (Ohio). His daughter was married to John D. Rockefeller, JR. The Act was completely consistent with the modus operandi of Meyer Amschel Bauer (he later changed his name to Amschel Rothschild), who in 1790 made a statement that gives us the key to unlocking the chains that still hold us in perpetual economic slavery when he said,

“Let me issue and control a Nation’s money supply and I care not who makes its laws”.

Less than 90 days later Sarshik and Edwards (the name of our joint venture) was named the developers for Forrestal Village. Princeton was a private institution and could choose whoever they wanted to develop their land, without any Request for Proposals to the public. It was another lesson in how white folk do business.

All of these white folks were part of a network that they inherited from their families. They were all connected to begin with (President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was related to 12 other US Presidents, not to mention the Adams and Bush families). Being black, I was not part of their network, not that I wanted to be. It was bad enough that I had to pretend to care about their culture, but I certainly wasn't socially comfortable when I ate Brunch at the Nassau Inn on Sunday mornings, usually being the only black person in the Dining Room.

The Host would always sit me somewhere where I would be least exposed to the crowd, which was fine with me. The variety of items on the buffet table, with omelets made to order, was too good a deal to pass up so I 'suffered' through it. The history of Princeton, as displayed in the Nassau Inn was enough to give one the creeps. The pictures that hung in those halls, on those walls, were some of the greatest capitalists, and therefore some of the most brutal slave holders in US history.

I attended the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) Convention in January of 1977. The Show was an incredible eye-opener, and it accelerated my learning curve about business in general and home building specifically. I had the opportunity to see the latest technological developments in the industry. Every major supplier of home building material, construction equipment, and home building products had an exhibit on display. The NAHB convention was the largest trade show convention in America, with over 100,000 in attendance.

Only a few cities in the country could host such a huge crowd and to my benefit Dallas, Texas, was one of them. It was where I met Maurice Barksdale, a black man who was then the Assistant Secretary of HUD in the Jimmy Carter Administration. He was born and raised in Ft. Worth and had used the convention as an opportunity for a return visit home. He was genuinely happy to meet a black developer who was doing what I was doing.

The only other black developers at the time were Floyd McKissick, the former President of CORE, who had been named the developer of ‘Soul City’ the Federally funded New Town in North Carolina, but not a builder; and Herman Russell, a general contractor and subsidized housing developer who was joint venturing with two large developers to build low- and moderate-income rental housing projects in Georgia and South Carolina.

H. J. Russell and Company was the General Contractor, and Herman had the guts to ask for, and received, an equity interest in the projects as well. Soon Herman was doing the deals himself, without J. A. Jones and Cousins. Maurice suggested that I meet with Herman, and when I showed an interest, he called Herman right then and there, and introduced us over the phone. I took Herman’s phone number down and I promised him that I would come to Atlanta to see him within the next few months, if his schedule permitted it.

I arrived, for the first time, in Atlanta, Georgia, and the city blew my mind. It was a predominantly African America town, with a Black Mayor and majority Black City Council. And Herman was smack dab in the middle of it all. Hotels were owned by black people. Atlanta Life Insurance Company was a privately owned black life insurance company. Herman owned Citizens Trust Bank, the largest black bank (there were at least 2 others).

“Ernest, in 2 weeks, the owner of the Schlitz Beer distributorship, who has agreed to sell to me, is having a party to make the announcement and to celebrate our deal, why don’t you come back with your wife and be me and Otelia’s guests?”

I will never forget that party for the rest of my life. It spawned an idea that, given my racism, I had to pull off.

The party was at a house located on Atlanta's most exclusive golf course community, situated in the Buckhead section of moneyed white Atlanta. The outdoor terrace, made of a beautiful Italian Slate, where the alcohol was being served, overlooked the 10th green, whose flag, rippling in the evening breeze, clearly revealed the hole.

What impressed me the most about the entire soiree was the fact that food was being served in every room in this enormous house, with the exception of the bedrooms. The Living Room, the Dining Room, the Kitchen, the Family Room, the Library, the owner's personal Home Office, and the Media/Rec Room all had food for the guests.

And what was slick was the fact that you had to go to each room to get a different portion of your meal, from appetizers, soups, and salads; to assorted meats, fish, and vegetables; as well as the breads and desserts. And at each food station they had a black person, dressed in black and white servant costumes. The men were dressed as butlers, and the women were dressed as maids (both reflective of the ante-Bellum South), serving the portions, which were extremely generous, at least in my instance.

My 31st birthday had passed on February 24th, and I hadn't even celebrated it in any special way, which was odd, particularly given the 'success' I was enjoying. I was working too hard to stop and enjoy anything.

But at that moment, in that party, I decided that Gail and I would host a party at our home in Lawnside, and duplicate what we experienced that night, with one exception, I would have **white people**, dressed in black and white costumes, at every station, **servicing black people**. White people, dressed as butlers and maids, served my family and friends for 6 hours. In my mind, I literally 'turned the tables', at least for one evening.

It also represented my most overt act as a racist. But there was a difference, my white employees were not free labor, I paid them I cash.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Al Wellington, my next-door neighbor and I sat on my rear deck, overlooking the 14th hole of Tavistock, and watched the sun come up the next morning. Al had heard about a ‘brother’ building homes for middle income black folk in the Historic Black Town of Lawnside, New Jersey, and if true, wanted one for himself, his wife Mary, and their daughter Tawn.

He was still in Graduate School at U of P (The Wharton School) and working at Scott Paper Company as an intern. When I explained my vision for Warwick Hills, he said he wanted in.

“And I want to live next door to you brother”.

That was the beginning of our relationship. Al was destined to be the next D. Park Gibson, the author of the book, **The 30 Billion Dollar Negro**, and ‘the’ authority on black consumer buying habits. Al was completely fascinated by the fact that black folks in America spent over \$30,000,000,000 buying goods and services that we did not produce for ourselves.

That purchasing power, in Al’s mind, and substantiated by fact, would have made black Americans the 9th largest nation on Earth, when measured in Gross National Income (GNI). Al wanted to redirect that purchasing power into an opportunity for black folk to produce and distribute their own goods and services.

When he heard why I had joined NOI back in 1970, and what NOI represented to me, our relationship took off meteorically. I was no longer in NOI, but the dream of a ‘nation of our own’ never died. Al had never been to, or heard of a party where white folks served black folk, and in a house that most black folk never dreamed of living in.

My reading was expanding and when I read the book **How Europe Underdeveloped Africa**, (1975), by Walter Rodney, my juices began to flow again. Living in Princeton provided the stark truth to his assessment.

“It is a common myth within capitalism that the individual through drive and hard work can become a capitalist. In the USA it is usual to refer to an individual like John D. Rockefeller, SR as someone who rose from ‘rags to riches. To complete the moral of the Rockefeller success story it would be necessary to fill in the details on all of the millions of people who had to be exploited in order for one man to become a multi-billionaire. The acquisition of wealth is not due to hard work alone, or the African working as slaves in America and the West Indies would have been the

wealthiest group in the world. The individualism of the capitalist must be seen against the hard and unrewarded work of the masses.”

And the Postscript by A.M. Babu drove the point further into my brain.

“After reading the harrowing accounts of the brutality of slavery, of subjugation, of deprivation and humiliation, when whole civilizations were crushed in order to serve the imperialist interests of the West: when settled societies were disintegrated by force of imperialist arms so the plantation owners of the ‘new world’ could get their uprooted, and therefore permanent labor force to build what is now the most advanced capitalist economy, it becomes absolutely clear that the only way out of our current impasse is through a revolutionary path – a complete break from the system which is responsible for all of our past and present miseries.”

We had completed the last section of Warwick Hills, I had a 100-unit Senior Citizens Housing Development and a signed Agreement of Sale with Michaels Development Company to purchase the project once the municipal and county approvals were completed, and we had just signed the Agreement with Princeton University to design, develop, and build 600 house units on their Forrestal Campus, on Route #1, America’s highway. Wein, Lane, and Malkin were my attorneys, Harold Sarshik was my partner, a true partnership it was, Chemical Bank was now my bank, and with me as Harold’s partner, Heritage Bank was also.

I had a beautiful wife who was enrolled at Rutgers-Camden to complete her degree in Economics, three beautiful children (Tariq, Tamida, and Khalif), and I couldn’t think of anything material that I could ask for in life. My parents were good, and Curtis was playing football in Canada with the Toronto Argonauts.

Paul Firstenberg, in addition to being a Princeton VP, was also on the Board of the Public Broadcasting Corporation (PBS). Once, before one of our monthly meetings started, Paul asked me about my children and how old they were? When I told him their ages (at that time Tariq was 7, Tamida was 5, and Khalif was 3), he invited me to have my children go to New York and be guests for the filming of an episode of **“Sesame Street”**. I was now a hero with my children. Tariq, Tamida, and Khalif had a chance to see their favorite television characters live and in action.

The Honorable Elijah Muhammad had defined ‘heaven’ as **“having money, a good home, and friendships in all walks of life”**. I was experiencing ‘heaven’ while I lived, not some “pie up in the sky when I die”.

Right after the party, Dennis Kirkland, a reporter for the Philadelphia Daily News who would also become a lifelong friend, suggested that I host a reception for the newly formed National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) at my home with the idea that I would get good media coverage to sell the last 14 homes in Warwick Hills, as well as receive good PR for my company, Fidelity First Corporation.

The reception was outstanding. The black journalists were equally impressed with the subdivision and the quality of the homes, and I was now in the media spotlight. Chuck Stone, a well-known black journalist, and I became friends, and through our discussions, he knew of my interest in growing and expanding my business, so he suggested that I buy the stock of Arvell Jones, a retiring employee of the black owned newspaper, **The Philadelphia Tribune**.

Chuck had clerked for the Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, JR, Congressman, the most noted black politician of the day, and dreamed of owning his own newspaper, and his first step was convincing me, his friend, to buy Arvell Jones' stock in the paper. Oscar Brown Jr., once declared, "you cannot have 'freedom of the press' unless you own your own 'press'." Owning an interest in a black newspaper was an opportunity that I could not resist, and so I wrote a check and became the largest individual shareholder in the **Philadelphia Tribune**.

From that point forward I was determined that I would find a way, even among all of the real estate related expansion that I was presently focused on, to control my own newspaper, which I saw as a direct voice to my people. It also represented the opportunity to reach 30,000,000 black people. With over 30 billion dollars of purchasing power, it was a market that, if I was successful, added financial incentive and made the idea more valuable.

That potential, coupled with my growing belief that unless we had our own organ, other folk would continue to prescribe the tune our folk danced to made the decision really easy. Now I had to figure out what to do with my new investment, and how I could parlay it into a national effort to command the revenue that it could generate. I was now caught up in the 'rat race', believing I could find a way to earn money to provide for me and mine, while dealing with the 'devil'.

All of this was bumping up against my desire to 'do for self'; to be free in a nation of our own. I had found my way to Chancellor Williams, **The Destruction of Black Civilization** (1974).

“The outlook is grim. For the Black people of the world there is no bright tomorrow. The Blacks continue to live in their dream world of singing, dancing, marching, praying, and hoping - still trusting in the ultimate justice of the white man, but a thousand years hence their decedents will be substantially where the race was a thousand years before. For the white people, still masters of the world, are not about to yield. They still own and control

the wealth of Africa, directly and indirectly, and from it, along with that from other areas of the world, they have developed technologies and a world commerce that assure them of continued white supremacy. This phenomenal success, this unquestionable position of strength, derived from their conquests of others and their wealth, has led them to believe that they are, as a matter of fact, the superior people and therefore, the rightful rulers of this planet. Why then should they be expected to yield? ‘Human Rights’? ‘Equal Rights’? What are these but narcotic slogans for the masses – even the white masses – which are quickly conceded as ‘ideals’ and ‘principles everywhere.’

But with our Princeton development on the immediate horizon, I somehow was able to put the issue aside. My newspaper idea would have to be a dream deferred.

Harold and I believed we had a winner with our Forrestal Village project. In the summer of 1977, on a Friday evening, we hosted a Wine and Cheese party at the Nassau Inn, in the heart of Princeton, and judging by the turnout, it was confirmed. The thousands of people that daily traversed U.S. Highway #1 observed the construction that was underway and stopped by for more information on what was being built. We developed a list of those interested, which led us to hosting the event.

The evening of our soiree, Harold served as the Master of Ceremonies, made introductory comments, and then introduced our architect, who explained his firm’s concept for the 100-acre tract, including the amenities, the vehicular and pedestrian circulation patterns, and the Open Space Plan that allowed each house, though attached, to feel as if it was a free-standing detached home, all under my direction, as an owner.

I was next on the agenda. Harold was so overwhelmed by the turnout that during his introduction of me he was overcome with emotion and told the audience that I was like the son he never had. That meant a lot to me.

It was my job, since I had designed them, to explain the concept behind the floor plans with first floor atriums, and to sell Forrestal Village as their new residence to the prospective buyers in the audience. We had 68 homes for sale in the first phase, with 72 more planned for the second phase of the for-sale houses. As much as I want to believe that I am a great salesman, the market was so strong that when the evening was over, of the 120 invited guests, who were told to bring their checkbook with them, just in case they liked what they saw and heard; 68 of them gave us a \$10,000 deposit.

Another 10 asked us to take their deposit just in case any of the first 68 in line could not follow through and qualify for a mortgage, and at the very least, put them in line as the first potential buyers for the next 72 homes.

The sales prices for the homes ranged from \$269,900 to \$329,900, easily 80% of the median sale price for homes selling in Princeton Township and the immediate environs. Assuming an average sales price of \$300,000, we had just sold \$20,400,000 worth of houses in one night, with inventory for an additional \$3,000,000 as back-up. And we did receive two deposits from black folk that night.

Harold and I proudly went to Princeton Bank and Trust the following Monday morning and deposited \$780,000 in our account. If just 5% dropped down to the bottom line, we had just earned a million dollars in one night (and that didn't include the money that S&E Construction would make building the houses, which was at least another 5%).

My dad was really proud of the Princeton deal, and asked me if he could, since he was now retired, do something related to the project, that could earn him some extra income. Because of the Social Security regulations regarding income, he could only work 20 hours a week. I broached the subject with Harold, and he came up with the idea of my dad being our labor foreman. My dad would not have allowed me to just give him a weekly allowance, so he took the job.

Dad was supposed to start at 8:00 am to get the laborers (my cousins), who were on our construction payroll started, and then make sure they understood what was expected of them for the remainder of the day, once he left the job after lunch. He always arrived by 7:30 am to see if they had followed his directives, and always had lunch on the job to make sure they were headed in the right direction after lunch, before he headed home.

I was elated at Harold's suggestion. It meant I would see my dad every day. Gail and I had separated, so I had moved to Princeton and lived in one of the three houses on the 100-acre parcel that now belonged to Harold and me. Five days a week dad was great company.

I was, at least on paper, a millionaire, and I lived in a beautiful home on an exclusive 100-acre tract of ground on the Princeton University Campus. It was a far cry from 29-C Aqueduct Alley, Newark, NJ, the glass, and rubble-strewn public housing project I lived in before my parents moved to East Orange. It was razed in 1954 to accommodate William Zeckendorf's Colonnade Apartments, Newark's first Urban Renewal project.

With all that I believed I had, I didn't feel, deep down inside, a sense of happiness. I knew that all I was doing was playing a game of cat and mouse, and I always seemed to be the mouse. Toward the end of 1977, Brother Ralph called to tell me that Louis Farrakhan had left Warith Deen Muhammad, and was trying to re-build NOI, based on the Teachings of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad.

For four years I had been immersed in white America, and I was not happy because I wasn't 'free'. I had all of the physical creature comforts a man could want, but as it is said, "Money can't buy happiness". You can add to that, "Money can't buy freedom". I was still searching for 'freedom', the only true happiness one can experience. I was just looking for freedom in all the wrong places.

A passage in Chancellor's book had raised a question that I wanted answered.

"Which way then you still enshackled blacks? I have said, reading from the pages of 6,000 years of history, that the whites are the implacable foe, the traditional and everlasting enemy of the blacks. There will be a beginning of wisdom and a possible solution to the problem when – and only when blacks fully realize this central fact in their lives – the white man is the bitter enemy. This is not the ranting of wild-eyed militancy, but the calm and unmistakable verdict of several thousand years of documented history...Facing this reality does not call for increasing hatred or screaming and uttering futile denunciations. Far from it. For all these shouting, emotional outbursts by blacks are in themselves indications of weakness, because they becloud the mind and prevent the calm and clear thinking that is absolutely required for planning if the race is to be saved from final destruction.

Destruction is not too strong a term here. Only fools will be unable to see that the race is again being hemmed in, surrounded by tis enemies, and cannot survive forever under what might be called a gradual siege. Those 'Negroes' who are still pleading with the whites for brotherhood through integration are so deaf, dumb and blind that they are unable to get the white man's message, the white man's reply to these frantic pleas for acceptance through integration."

With all of that said, Chancellor went on to say,

"The obstacles to unity are so great that the outlook is both discouraging and frightening to all but the strong with the will to both survive and overcome.

The very first major obstacle to be overcome involves the mental revolution out of which black America faces the stark reality that white America as a whole, is its enemy, that blacks will only be recognized in a subordinate role, that the scattering of black office-holders, high and low, really means nothing to the race as a whole, that there are two sets of laws as administered – one for whites and one for blacks, just as there are two sets of wages and prices; and finally, that the blacks' loyalty and devotion to the whites, in spite of all they have done and still do against them, mystifies the whites themselves and confirms anew their belief that such humble-dog attitudes indicate inferiority independently of everything else. Until black Americans are quite clear in their own minds about their real situation in this country, all talk about unity and achieving equal justice will be just that,

useless talk. But with a clear understanding of reality, the specific studies and planning for a broad program for securing racial unity can begin.”

So, the news of Farrakhan re-building NOI rekindled and re-fueled my desire to have our own nation. I wasn't free in America. As it is said, "Until all of us are free, none of us are free." That's how I felt. I could have selfishly run off into the sunset by living in the sterile western cultural Princeton with plenty of money in my pocket or take my chance that we could be of help to Farrakhan, who was still advocating the 'do for self' teachings of the Messenger.

Ralph and I met, and we decided to contact Minister Farrakhan, someone Ralph knew from his days at Temple #7 in NYC, right after he left Yale Law School. We met Louis in Newark, where he had a speaking engagement, and afterward, I invited him to come down to Forrestal Village, but his schedule did not permit the visit.

In the early part of 1978, while on another East Coast speaking engagement, before he went back to Chicago, Minister Farrakhan came down to Princeton to see what I was doing. A few months later, when he was in New Jersey again, he stayed as a guest at my home in Forrestal Village. He told me that my place reminded him of the farm Muhammad Ali had in Benton Harbor, Michigan.

I told him I was ready to sell everything and move to Chicago to help him in his efforts to rebuild NOI. I don't know how to describe the enthusiasm that I felt at the just the idea that we could rebuild NOI. All of the former National Laborers of the Messenger were with Warith Deen Muhammad, so Ralph and I figured we had a shot at creating the opportunity that both of us saw when we first joined NOI by working with Farrakhan.

I know he must have thought I was crazy to give up what I had there in Princeton and move to Chicago. The few people that I approached with the idea also thought I had gone completely mad. I will give Louis credit though, because he told me directly, that I should not sell my interest in Forrestal Village. I just didn't listen to him. He told me that Forrestal Village would be a nice haven when he needed a retreat.

My dad actually offered no opinion one way or the other, and I didn't press him. My mom and dad had met Farrakhan and they liked him. I also think my dad knew how important NOI was to me, and I think he was also hopeful that NOI could be the vehicle to freedom, something he had longed for as well. His political and economic consciousness was never dulled.

In 1963, my dad actually closed his barber shop Friday and Saturday, the two busiest days for a barber shop, and took off work from Ford Motor Company and went to Washington, DC that August to listen to Dr. Martin Luther King, JR speak. As I said, my dad never let money affect

decisions related to freedom. He never discussed with me why he went, or what was his reaction to the March? I had no political consciousness at the time. Remember, I didn't even know what a Jew was.

Somewhere in the deep recesses of my mind, I wanted our own nation. I believed it was the only place where I could and would find freedom; and I was willing to sacrifice whatever was necessary to get it. I believed that our **righteous** desire to seek freedom would produce our desired goal. My naivety was still in place.

As Tina Turner said in her song, "What's love got to do with it?" There were times when I have said, but no longer say, "What's righteousness got to do with it?" We will leave the concept of 'right' to another day, and another book.

CHAPTER NINE

Ten years after our wedding, Gail and I had separated and filed for divorce. I considered myself a bachelor. And I was a bachelor with enough cash to live any lifestyle I wanted. Harold and I trained at the Jewish Community Center in Cherry Hill, and both of us had competed in the 1978 Philadelphia Marathon, so needless to say, I was in excellent shape. But with the loss of my wife and my children, I was not happy.

How could I be happy? I reminded myself of one of the most important lessons taught to me by the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. He taught us that the white man kidnapped our forefathers from Africa and brought them to America, and as a prerequisite for control, separated parents from their children, and children from their brothers and sisters, deliberately knowing that they were cutting us off from ever having a knowledge of self and kind.

We were never taught the proper role between male and female (husband and wife), nor were we taught the proper role of parents to children (child-rearing). How can there be love when you are deliberately separated from those who love you? How do you come to know love unless you are taught love, or you have experienced love? Neither of those two options existed for black people during our 400 years of Chattel Slavery in America. Experience is a ‘bitch’.

Ralph knew I was dissatisfied with the life I was leading, and whenever we talked, he didn’t let the opportunity pass to remind me. He and I were of the same opinion that if black folk in America were to be free, it would have to be in a Nation of Our Own. At that time, we believed that the Nation of Islam represented the only option to achieve that objective.

I felt that I was now financially in a position to return to my one true passion, my quest for freedom, which I believed could only come from a separation away from white people. At that moment, I believed NOI represented the best and only chance to have a nation of our own; where black people could do for self, without us having to depend on the ‘slave master’ for our food, clothing, shelter, health care, education, transportation, and communications needs.

In August of 1979 I took a lease on a 3 Bedroom Newport Condominium, located at 4800 South Lake Shore Drive, at that time, probably the most exclusive lake view living on the South Shore, in the Hyde Park section of Chicago, where the ‘successful’ black folk lived. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad had been its most famous resident.

Farrakhan was actually glad that I hadn’t heeded his advice not to sell my interest in Princeton and move to Chicago to help him. He was ready to start the **Final Call Newspaper** and since I was now NOI’s National Business Manager, he expected me to develop a plan of distribution

that would make the paper prosperous. Previously, **Muhammad Speaks**, the weekly newspaper produced by the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, was distributed by the Fruit of Islam (FOI), on the street corners of major cities around the country.

I envisioned the **Final Call** being a national black newspaper reaching all black consumers, thereby generating enough advertising revenue for a good cash flow for NOI. I believed there was enough 'good will' NOI still had left in the black community that would allow us to ask \$10.00 for a year's subscription to the weekly newspaper.

I believed that we could arrange a speaking tour across the country with Minister Farrakhan asking the audience to buy a \$10 subscription to the **Final Call** newspaper. With his oratorical skills, we believed we would receive tremendous support from the black community.

While I was living in Princeton, before moving to Chicago, Farrakhan had started Study Groups as a way to begin spreading the 'teachings', particularly since we didn't have any permanent meeting places across the country. I had organized one in Lawnside and travelled back and forth from Princeton to attend. We had six dynamic brothers that Ralph and I felt could be of tremendous assistance in the rebuilding effort.

Al Wellington, an expert concerning the buying habits and patterns of the black consumer market had been my next-door neighbor in Lawnside. From Al's perspective, NOI represented the doorway to the entire African American market. Sam Foley, a newly minted U of P lawyer, with an MBA from the Wharton School of Business, who had also bought a home in Warwick Hills, only lived three houses up the street from me and Al.

Assume Bakari, a computer programmer, and his wife Ashe, a medical student, were Sam's neighbor. Sam's wife Luella was a linguist who, in addition to English, spoke French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian and taught the first two at Cherry Hill East High School.

Everyone had a professional skill, including Greg, my friend, partner, and general counsel, Dr. Byron 'the Blade' Raysor, who had just been released from the Army after his last tour, and Groove, an Economics major whose home I built in Warwick Hills. Our Study Group met weekly, and we were all enthused with the idea of building our own nation.

Ralph and I were comfortable that our Study Group could develop a marketing plan to achieve national distribution of the **Final Call**. We quickly moved beyond the distribution of the **Final Call** newspaper and re-visited the ideas our Study Group had been dealing with.

The idea of advertising the products produced on our own NOI farms, which would be sold in our own supermarkets, and advertised in our own nationally distributed newspaper, was one of

the ideas that we thought Farrakhan would truly appreciate because it was a plan of the Messenger to increase NOI's land ownership and continue to grow our own food for our people.

Our talks also centered on clothing, real estate, banking & insurance, and transportation for the distribution of our products to our people. NOI's 'fish program' had been a huge success before the Messenger passed, as was the bank the Messenger purchased. And we welcomed the opportunity to expand the concept of importing what we didn't produce and exporting any surplus that we did produce. That would also put us in the business of shipping, something Marcus Garvey had attempted with the Black Star line over 50 years earlier.

The only question was how were we going to generate enough capital to pull this off? We spent just one Study Group meeting discussing this because the answer was simple. I remember Ralph telling me the story of the Messenger and a conversation he had with Master Fard Muhammad.

One day the Messenger went to Master Fard Muhammad and told him (the man who the Honorable Elijah Muhammad believed to be God in Person) that he needed money to pay the bills for the Temple. Master Fard Muhammad's response was, "Go ask the Believers." For without the support of the Believers, NOI could not, and would not succeed.

It immediately brought to my mind the saying, "God helps those who help themselves". Both expressions made it clear to me that there was/is no "spook god" who would magically make money, or anything else, appear out of 'thin air'. Ralph and I mutually understood that it meant creating believers to our cause, and asking them to fund our effort, but with a big difference. We felt that anyone contributing to NOI's growth should be given a return on their contribution(s).

We felt shares should be sold in the NOI businesses, with NOI holding the majority stock (51%), and therefore control of our businesses. The shareholders would also become great costumers for our businesses because all human beings are consumers, and who better to buy from than a company in which you are a part owner.

The fast pace of economic growth in America was fueled by the formation of stock companies and mutual (cooperative) societies in the 1800's. The fractional banking concept of the Federal Reserve Bank was not yet formed and so the capitalists required the nickels, dimes, and dollars of their workers.

Ralph and I agreed that selling an equity interest in businesses formed by NOI as a result of our efforts, would also allow the very people who contribute to this plan to consume our products. We believed they should become the beneficiaries of their investment. We knew firsthand that previously we were asking people to contribute to a cause, where their contribution could not be

measured, and where they did not directly benefit financially, in the long-term success of the business.

The Catholic Church seemed to have grown in the same way, but when forensically examined, it is clear to see how the Popes, who were initially military generals in the Papacy's infancy, had built their wealth on plunder and murder. The Papal Bulls the Popes issued are proof. This is just one example.

Papal Bull Dum Diversas

Pope Nicholas V

18 June 1452

“...As we indeed understand from your pious and Christian desire, you intend to subjugate the enemies of Christ, namely the Saracens, and bring [them] back, with powerful arm, to the faith of Christ

...we grant to you full and free power, through the Apostolic authority by this edict, to invade, conquer, fight, subjugate the Saracens and Pagans, and other infidels and the enemies of Christ

...and to lead their persons in perpetual servitude, and to apply and appropriate realms, duchies, royal palaces, principalities and other dominions, possessions, and goods of this kind to you and your use and your successors the kings of Portugal

...we grant, by the power of your sacrifice, a plenary forgiveness of all individual sins, crimes, trespasses, and digressions which you and they have confessed with contrite heart and by mouth, to you and to them who accompanying you, as often as you and they happen to go to war against the mentioned infidels.”

Issued to Alfonse, King of Portugal in 1452

The Papal Bull of 1493, issued by Pope Alexander VI, the first of the ‘Borghia’ popes is another example that would provide great insight into the political machinations of those times. The Catholic Church had its adherents contribute money as tithing, but the wealth of the Catholic Church, was stolen wealth, acquired through the slavery, suffering, and death of people of color.

Ralph and I decided we needed to sit down with Farrakhan and the other National Laborers to discuss all of these ideas. Ralph was the National Secretary, so he and I (National Business Manager) were 2 of the National Laborers, with Akbar Muhammad, Khalid Muhammad, Jabril Muhammad, and our Supreme Captain rounding out what were then the National Officers of NOI, with Farrakhan being our Commander-in- Chief.

In early September, I agreed to pay the expenses for our Lawnside Study Group to fly to Chicago and stay three days for the meeting with Farrakhan and the National Laborers, which, for security purposes, was held at my place.

In the opinion of our Study Group, properly directed, we had a 30,000,000 people market, spending \$30,000,000,000 year. And enough of them were dissatisfied with their lives and their living conditions in America to begin redirecting their purchasing power to their own people.

I felt our professional skills, coupled with the talent and credibility that the National Laborers enjoyed with NOI, was more than enough to raise the initial \$5,000,000 that we estimated we would need to jumpstart our own 'economy'. The Organizational Chart had Minister Farrakhan as the Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer (CEO), with Ralph as the Vice Chairman, and with me as the President and Chief Operating Officer (COO).

After I finished my presentation regarding taking NOI public, Farrakhan thanked me for inviting the brothers from New Jersey to come to Chicago, and thanked them for offering their assistance to help rebuild NOI. He then said the idea of selling an equity interest in NOI businesses was not something the Honorable Elijah Muhammad had ever done, had never discussed; and something he would never do. With that, our idea was dead.

My motive was to build a 'business' that was truly reflective of a 'nation'. In the end, the business agenda conflicted with the religious agenda for the future of NOI, so I abandoned the idea and moved on.

Later, upon reflection, I believe that it did not take Brother Minister Farrakhan long to process that having publicly owned companies meant that even though control over the operations remained in the hands of the majority owner (NOI), the financial reporting to stockholders and the Security Exchange Commission (SEC) was not something he would allow NOI's businesses be subject to, for so many reasons, but most importantly because the Messenger never allowed any 'outside' ownership of NOI.

I was crushed and hurt. I had just given up major cash that I would have earned if Harold and I had continued in business together. There was significant cheap, vacant land all along the Route #1 corridor that Harold and I were looking to purchase to continue our real estate development operations in the Princeton area market. My deep-rooted desire to be free had me sell my interest in an incredible business opportunity. And now I was back at 'square one'.

Be clear that when Harold paid me a \$1,000,000 for my interests, he was probably paying me less than \$.50 on the \$1.00. I truly believed I had demonstrated my commitment to the cause

that we were all wedded to, and now, from my perspective, NOI was no longer a viable option to build a Nation of Our Own.

Two days later, I was back at Farrakhan's house, as if nothing had happened. And the ideas that were discussed that night were never mentioned again. Aside from a bruised ego, I was only out the \$4000 in expenses associated with the cost of bringing the Study group to Chicago, so I moved on. With the plan to take NOI national through a public stock offering quashed, and no other financial resources available to us, I decided that it was time for me to leave Chicago once again. And this time no one had to tell me to leave.

My birthday was months away and I was now trying to decide where to go for a break from Chicago, which turns into a tundra in winter. For whatever reason, I chose St. Croix, a US Virgin Island, and had my travel agent book a room at the Buccaneer Hotel. Surrounded by sprawling, lavish gardens, it was a beachfront resort dating back to the 17th century.

The flight to St. Croix was non-stop, with continuing service to St. Thomas. On the plane ride back to the States, good fortune was with me once again. I sat next to an attorney. He asked me what team I played for because initially he thought I was a professional athlete. In those days what young African American man had the money to fly back and forth to the Caribbean, in first class?

It was now March, and I knew my days in Chicago were running short. I had locked into the idea of a national black newspaper, and I wasn't about to get off that dime and so I mentioned my newspaper idea to the attorney.

"I have a client who just purchased a large interest in the Washington Post. Maybe you should meet him. He is always looking to invest, and he may like your idea". The attorney told me his client was Warren Buffett, and he would call Warren to arrange a visit. Buffett was in Omaha, Nebraska, which was maybe an hour flight from Chicago, so it was fine with me. I called the attorney when I landed back in Chicago. A week later I was on my way to Omaha.

Warren Buffett wasn't a household name in 1980 as he is today, but he was still a very wealthy well-known investor with the trust and respect of the little old ladies in Omaha who entrusted their life savings to Buffet in Berkshire Hathaway. His ability to make money for his investors was astounding, but not legendary at that point. But true to the legend he now holds, I met him in the office that he and his wife shared together for many years. It blew my mind that a billionaire like him didn't have his own private office (men, at some point, tell their wives everything anyway, so why not?).

After an exchange of pleasantries, I explained my idea for a national black newspaper, including the demographics of my market, and its purchasing power. When I finished, Warren then explained that he wanted to meet me, not to invest in a newspaper, but because he thought that there was an incredible opportunity to be exploited by starting a supermarket chain in the black community.

Since this was one of the things our Lawnside Study Group had explored, I agreed with him that such an opportunity existed. Buffett knew of the success that Bruce Llewellyn (General Colin Powell's cousin) had before selling Fedco Foods and thought that if done on the scale of a national chain, with the right management, would be an absolute winner. The big supermarket chains had fled the inner cities because of the significant financial losses they suffered due to theft.

When I told him of my success with Your Brothers Natural and Organic Food Center, the venture I started back in 1971, Warren believed he had found the right partner who understood black people well enough to develop a security plan to abate the theft problem. (I did not disclose my NOI experience, which would have solved the theft problem.) Buffett also believed that with the black pride sweeping America, black folk would be proud of a majority-owned black supermarket chain in their community and would do what they could to enable and enhance its growth.

He was right on every issue he put forward. I was 34 years old, and I had enough successful business experience that Warren was willing to finance such a venture with, from his perspective, a young black man who was capable of starting and managing such a venture. Obviously, I could have accepted his offer, but my mind was on the newspaper business. I was still in racist mode. I truly believed that black folk needed our own national newspaper, and I was determined to make it happen.

In hindsight, I should have put my idea on hold, and easily started a business venture that we both knew had every reason to succeed if we joined forces. I couldn't see the forest because the trees were in the way, meaning my racist ideas. We thanked each other for the other's time and agreed that if either of us changed our positions, we would be in touch.

I had already been crushed by the dismissal of the idea to take NOI to another level of business development, but that meeting with Buffett inspired me regarding my newspaper. Buffet had just invested in the industry (**The Washington Post**), so I believed it portended a signal that I was on the right track. I now had to decide my next 'move'.

At that point in my life, I was clearly not motivated by money, or I would have accepted Buffet's offer, or never had sold my Princeton project. One could consider either instance as an 'error' in

judgment on my part, but that is based on one's value system. I was still trying to regulate mine. I finally decided that I would try to walk the narrow path of doing business with my folk, but 'religion' wouldn't factor into the equation.

By the time I arrived back in Chicago, I was on the phone to Herman Russell. In my business judgment, I was settled on moving to Atlanta, an American city where black folk were in the majority and had a thriving business community. Ultimately, it was in my best interest, as has all events in my life, whether I realized and understood them at the time, or not. My experience in Chicago, and my subsequent move to Atlanta provided me the opportunity to meet the love of my life.

Segregation in the South had forced black folk to 'do for self'. Because the white folk didn't want black people in their restaurants, clothing stores, grocery stores, doctors' offices, and other commercial establishments; black folk in the South, during the period of segregation, developed their own businesses, and they were nearly 100% supported by the black community.

Black Atlanta had its own banks, insurance companies, newspapers, funeral homes, and its own night clubs, bars, and motels. Black doctors, dentists, and attorneys never wanted for clients, because the white professionals, fearing the loss of their own clientele, did not want black folk in their establishments. And last but not least, Atlanta was the home to five Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), including the renowned Morehouse College (Men) and Spelman College (Women).

I called to tell Herman Russell that I was taking the "*Midnight Train to Georgia*".

CHAPTER TEN

I arrived in Atlanta on April 1, 1980, and settled into my townhouse rental, located at 22 Arpege Way, off of West Paces Ferry Road in Northwest Atlanta. It was ideal, located in a Golf Course Community that, in addition to for sales single family homes and condominiums, offered market-rate rental townhomes and apartments.

After I got settled, I met with Herman to get his advice. What area of business did he think I should pursue? I was almost tapped out of my savings from my stay in Chicago, so I didn't have the money to finance myself in real estate development, and besides, the cost to borrow money was prohibitive.

Lynn Whatley was the second person I called when I arrived in Atlanta. Lynn and I renewed our friendship from our days at RU. Lynn was two years behind me but lived in the apartment over us at Pine Grove Manor. He was born and raised in Atlanta. His dad and two uncles had owned the largest black general contracting company in Atlanta. During the Whatley brothers' heyday, Herman's dad's business was just a plastering company and one of their subcontractors. The Whatley brother's sons had all graduated from the best 'white' universities in America, and as such, had no interest in being involved in their fathers' business.

The era of "Integration" was alive and growing. Just about every Amer-African wanted to be a part of America, and fulfill the 'dream' that, by then, I knew wasn't possible. The Whatley brothers' children wanted to be part of that America, but, at the same time, they appreciated and were attached to their African roots. Atlanta provided both for them, as well as a respite for me.

After graduating from Rutgers, Lynn went to Cal-Berkeley for his law degree and returned home to marry his childhood sweetheart. Anita, an artist teaching at Morris Brown University loved the field of performing arts for black folks. Since Anita was in the inner circle of the black performing arts community, I asked her to hook me up with some of her girlfriends and introduce me in the Atlanta social scene.

In less than 3 months, I was clear that the woman of my dreams did not live in Atlanta. One night, while Lynn, Anita and I were out having dinner, I voiced my assessment with them.

"Come on Anita, you've got to know someone that you can hook me up with".

"Hmmm, based on the kind of person you are looking for, I only know one person who might interest you, but she lives in New York City."

Lynn then said, “Yeah, Anita, if it’s who I think you are talking about, she is who Ernest is looking for”.

Anita said her name was Renee, and Anita promised me she would call Renee to see if she was interested in meeting someone new. I don’t know what Anita said to Renee, but it was strong enough that Renee said, “Give him my number so I can talk to him first.”

And that is how our relationship began. Monday, we talked on the phone for an hour. Tuesday, we talked for two hours. Wednesday, we talked for three hours. Thursday, we talked for four hours. I was leaving at 11 pm Friday night for my drive north to pick up my children to take them to Disney World, so we agreed not to get on the phone Friday, least I never leave Atlanta. Since I would be driving all night, I also wanted a nap before I got on the road.

Neither Anita nor Lynn would give me a physical description of Renee, and so all I had to go on was her voice. And oh, what a voice Renee had. She was actually doing voice-over radio commercials. She was also in the process of a divorce. Renee had met Richard Johnson while he was at Colgate, and she was at Oswego State. After Richard’s graduation from Harvard Law, they moved to NYC because Richard landed a job with a Park Avenue law firm.

I had read many books on ‘the power of positive thinking’ and so I was now imploring my mind to deliver to me the woman of my dreams. I knew how tall I wanted her to be, how much I wanted to her to weigh, how beautiful I wanted her to look, but most importantly, how intelligent I wanted her to be.

The 10 hours on the phone had already given me what I was looking for in the way of intelligence. There wasn’t a subject that we discussed that I was disinterested in. When she told me that she had read Chancellor Williams’ book, “**The Destruction of Black Civilizations**” and then told me her opinion, I was sold on her mind and her ‘spirit’. Her voice was so beautiful that if she looked one-tenth of what she sounded like; I would be a very lucky man.

When I pulled into the circular drive of the Lenox Terrace Apartments at 40 West 135th Street, I saw a woman that was so astoundingly beautiful that I knew it couldn’t be Renee, because if so, I was now, absolutely, the luckiest man on the planet Earth.

As she approached the car she said, “Hello Ernest Edwards.” She was wearing a pair of light khaki-colored pressed linen pants, a silk blouse, a silk scarf tied around her head that fluttered in the wind, and a pair of off-white high-heel sandals that matched her blouse. The scarf possessed both colors, and also contained some green and gold in a floral pattern that rested on her head like a crown.

As it turned out, Anita would be in New Jersey to see her sister, so we all planned to have lunch that following Monday in NYC and I agreed to pick Renee up at her apartment. After lunch, Anita went in one direction, and Renee and I were headed downtown to the Village. Renee was the most beautiful woman I had ever personally met, then and since. I am so glad I passed her horoscope test.

For me, it was love at first sight, even though I had already fallen in love with her during the course of our telephone marathon. Renee was proof to me that the human mind is a very powerful instrument. I visualized what I wanted a woman to be like, physically, intellectually, and spiritually, and I was now with her, live and in living color. And I was blessed to get to know her and fall in love with her ‘mind’ and her ‘spirit’, long before I saw her in person.

I attribute my wish becoming a reality to the power of my mind and the “power of positive thinking”. As Mark (9:23) says, “All things are possible for him that believeth”. The real issue for human beings is for them to understand the meaning-content of the word ‘belief’ and in ‘whom’ to believe.

When I got back from my trip to Disney World with my children, I called Renee and asked her to fly down to Atlanta. I was running in the July 4th 10-K Peachtree Road Race, and I wanted her to come down to Atlanta and watch me run. Two weeks later, while she was still visiting, Minister Farrakhan was in town for a speaking engagement, and since I had left Chicago on what I thought were good terms, I invited him over to my place for dinner. He and his wife were dinner guests and seemed to always enjoy my cooking when I lived in Chicago, so he accepted.

Less than a month after we had met, Renee was helping me host my illustrious guest. Renee still remembers the Minister telling her that she reminded him of Muhammad Ali’s wife, Veronica Porsche, tall, statuesque, and beautiful. And it was a nice compliment, but in my mind, I thought Renee looked better.

I don’t know if Minister Farrakhan mentioned to Kenny Gamble about stopping by my place in Atlanta or not, but the next week Kenny called me in Atlanta. He told me that Rudolph Ali, the best Bean Pie baker in America, had contacted him. Rudolph, the baker when I managed Temple #12’s bakery had moved down the road to Wilmington, DE, and wanted to build a bakery that would allow him to go after the market that I had identified years earlier.

When Rudolph told Kenny about the plan that I had developed for selling the Bean Pie to a larger market, including the supermarkets, ARA Food Services, and the Philadelphia School System; and the potential for a national market for the bean pie, which included selling the pie to all Americans, he was excited.

Back in 1975, Minister Jeremiah Shabazz had introduced me to Gamble, the Chairman of Philadelphia International Records, and Kenny and I became friends. So, when Rudolph approached Kenny about investing in the bean pie business all Kenny needed to know was whether I was still available and if I had an interest to reprise the plan.

Having meet Renee, and in need of a business opportunity that didn't seem available in Atlanta because of my limited financial resources, I welcomed the opportunity to go back to Philly and make something happen. Kenny said he would put up the money, Rudolph would supply his talent for making his famous 'custard' bean pie, and I would handle the sales and marketing to get the pie sold, but most importantly, he said we would, the three of us, be equal partners.

For the record, Renee did not want to leave Atlanta, but she understood and accepted that my love for my children compelled me to find a way to be able to spend more time with them. When I told Herman that I would be leaving Atlanta in September to move back to New Jersey, he asked me to stay and become President of H J Russell and Company. I asked him if he would he give me an equity stock interest in the company.

"Ernest, I inherited this company from my dad, and I intend handing it down to my sons Jerome and Michael". If Herman had offered me just 1% of his company, I would probably have accepted and found a way for Gail and the kids to move to Atlanta. I was too young and full of ego to realize that with my work effort, Herman, just like Harold Sarshik, would have made me a partner once he saw what I could do for HJ Russell & Company.

When I mentioned Herman's offer to Renee, she thought I was crazy not to accept it. The offer was coming from the most successful black businessman in America, even though John Johnson of Ebony and Jet Magazines was close on his heels. But she accepted my decision because she knew how much my children meant to me. I also saw the move back to Philly as my chance to develop and sell a product to the general public.

I had been in business in the early 'seventies', abandoned it to join NOI, left NOI to go back into the 'world', and then rejoined NOI a second time, and left a second time. I was back trying to figure out how I would earn a living for my family, maintain my value system, and do it without restricting myself to just one market (something I had tried twice, each time with success and without success).

The lure of a potential business relationship with Kenny and Rudolph, and the chance to be near my children, as well as Herman's refusal, totally understandable, to give me an equity interest in HJ Russell & Company, led me to pack up what I had, and Renee and I moved to 17 Bartram Lane in Cherry Hill, NJ, in September of 1980. Renee took turns with me to drive a 26', stick-

shift truck, loaded with our belongings, El Dorado in tow, up the Atlantic Coast from Georgia to New Jersey; and she was prepared to stand by me as I started a new life with her by my side.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I was there in the Delivery Room on March 7, 1983, when Zaki was born at 7:35 am that morning. My focus had been totally on the birth of my 3rd son, but once I heard him cry, my thoughts went to my 12 noon luncheon with City Councilman John Anderson and Union Boss Sam Staten, Business Manager of Laborers Local 332 in Philadelphia.

The bean pie venture with Kenny never took off due to a lack of funding, so I had to decide what to do to support my growing second family and attempt to financially help my first family. I was clear that I would never be involved in NOI again, and I was now clear that I wouldn't sell out to Capitalism. But I also knew I would have to deal with the 'system' at least one more time to make the money I needed for my family.

I now had another mouth to feed. Qamara was 2; having been born on July 3, 1981, and this meeting was important because both men were leaders in the black Philadelphia community. John wanted me to meet Sam because, being successful in the construction business in Philadelphia required the cooperation of the construction unions, and Sam headed the only predominantly black union in the construction trades. I came to find out, over the course of our meal that Sam knew me because I had built his predecessor's home in my Warwick Hills subdivision in Lawnside.

John had chosen a fancy French restaurant for lunch, mainly because it had excellent French food and an extensive wine list held in a hand-engraved leather-bound jacket. It didn't take long for me to find out Sam Staten was a very serious man who didn't deal with 'minor' details.

As John perused the Wine List, he asked Sam if he preferred a white wine or a red wine, and whether he wanted wine from France, California, or Australia. Sam looked up from the food menu he was reviewing and said, "Brother, as long as it has alcohol in it, I don't care what color it is, or where it comes from" (a thought we should have toward all human beings).

Sam was at the meeting for business, and neither food nor drink was important to him. Sam was a man after my own heart. We got along great, and I considered him my friend until the day he passed.

Two years earlier, Beverly Harper and her friend and attorney, Rotan Lee, had gone to Washington, D.C. for the annual Congressional Black Caucus Weekend and came back to Philadelphia with the idea of creating a 'black' Brain Trust for the City of Philadelphia. So, when I decided to leave Jersey and move back to Philadelphia to make some money, I joined in the effort.

Beverly, Rotan, and her friend Earl Pace were determined to create legislation in Philadelphia to reverse the centuries-long “old boy network” of business that excluded people of color. The Brain Trust took up the mantle and emerged as the voice of the black business community.

Beverly was elected the Chairman of the Board and President, and my dear friend Wayne Leevy was elected Vice President. My friends Earl Pace and Bob Archie along with Ira Davis and my good friend George Burrell’s wife Doris and I were on the Board of Directors, with me being elected as the Vice Chairman.

Rotan, who also became a life-long friend until his passing, was our chief political strategist, and with some help from inside the Green Administration, we determined a strategy to get a City Council Bill passed to ensure Minority Business participation in all City contracting opportunities. And we succeeded. The only problem was Mayor William Green. He vetoed the Bill to create a Minority Business Enterprise Council. Its direct goal was to ensure that 25% of all City contracts were awarded to certified and qualified minority and women owned businesses. In order to win our battle as black owned businesses, we included women-owned businesses as well.

That effort led to me being involved in the ‘system’ again, this time in ‘their’ politics. Black folk and white women were the majority voters in the city. So, when Mayor Green vetoed our legislation, we went to City Council, and they unanimously overrode Bill Green’s veto 16-0 and it became Law. Beverly, Earl, Rotan, and me each had chosen 4 Council people who we were responsible for contacting, and for persuading them to vote our position.

When the results were in, we were seen as the movers and shakers in our business community, while the white business community saw us as folk they would have to contend with, on some level. Some of them stood to lose up to 25% of their city government work which totaled in the hundreds of millions of dollars. That legislation created contract opportunities for black folk and white women.

I teamed with the successful lowest responsible bidder and was the ‘minority’ partner of the Stofflet and Tillotson (S&T)/Uniland Joint Venture. The company was awarded the \$25,000,000 construction contract to build the Gallery II Shopping Mall/J.C. Penney Department Store.

The Stofflet and Tillotson/Uniland Joint Venture contract award was challenged in Court by The Shoemaker Construction Company and Artis Ore, a black general contractor. They claimed that my joint venture agreement with Stofflet and Tillotson was bogus. They said their bid was a true joint venture and that our contract should be voided and awarded to them.

I will never forget the Judge who heard the case. Bernard Goodheart, Esq. was his name. And true to his name, he found that my joint venture agreement was valid, and that the Plaintiff's Agreement was, in fact, invalid. I may have made the decision to re-enter American business and deal with white people, but I would still hold to certain principles, one of which was to never lie or deceive anyone, about anything. My parents taught me that.

But I had now gotten into something I had promised myself I would not do, which is to 'suck off the Government tit'. Getting involved in 'politics' even on a local level was also something I had foresworn.

I was now more concerned about making money to provide a 'nice' lifestyle' for my family. I believed that I could play the game of capitalism and not get ensnared in its trap. I had done it before and escaped. And I also saw the opportunities as a way to earn the money I needed to finance my continued quest for freedom.

My joint venture agreement called for me to receive 15% of the profits derived from the contract. So, when Ralph and I decided to go to Ghana, I went to Jack Frost, the President of S&T, honestly, honestly, his real name, and asked for a \$30,000 advance against our future profits.

He seemed incredulous. "Ernest, when I need money, I go to my bank. Us Irish, as well as Jews and Italians, have a bank we can go to when we need money. Don't your black people have the same thing"?

"No, we don't Jack, and I need the money now".

I really struggled with The Uniland Corporation, but not from a business perspective on how to make money. My struggle was with the idea that I would have to get back involved in a business world that was an anathema to me. The idea of a nation of our own still resonated in my brain. Both needed investment capital, and I didn't have any.

As I built The Uniland Corporation, I actually got lost in the moment and believed that I could work within the 'system' to earn enough money to finance my 'Africentric' goals of doing for self, in a nation of our own.

At least my Gallery II/J.C. Penney contract did provide some venture capital to try out the next idea that Ralph and I thought made sense. We believed that with the awesome natural resources of Ghana, coupled with the educational/intellectual resources of our folk in America, we could develop a "Model City" in Ghana, with our proposed University of Africa as the foundation. It would bring together both resources and demonstrate to our people that we could build a world for ourselves, without having to beg or ask white people for anything.

It was our opinion that we could never raise the capital necessary for our project in America. That's why I needed the \$30,000. Ralph and I flew to Accra with high hopes. We both agreed that Land + Labor = Capital. We believed that if we could marry Ghana's Land with American Labor (Body and Mind) we could produce all of the Capital we needed to jump-start the **"Reconstruction of Black Civilization"**.

I am thankful that it only took two weeks for me to see that that idea wouldn't work. Ralph had made the appointment with Ghana's Minister of Finance, Kwesi Botchway, someone he knew from his days at Yale Law School before we left America. We went to his offices each day, for one week straight, day after day, making another appointment for the next day. We never saw him the entire time we were in Accra.

It never dawned on me that the CIA had a dossier on me, and it could have played a part in the matter (Kwesi was educated at Yale). And to add insult to injury, on my second day in Accra, a group of children playing along the road, saw me, and called me a 'white' man because I wasn't as richly melaninated as them. Here I was, willing to offer everything I had as a sacrifice to see the rise and success of Africans everywhere, and yet I wasn't seen as an African in Africa. I was perceived, by my own people (even though they were children), that I was a white man, solely because of the lighter color of my skin.

I now had to deal with the possibility of never achieving my goal of a 'nation of our own'. NOI was out, Africa was out, at least based on my first impressions. When Ralph and I returned from my first journey into African culture, I wrapped myself back up in Philadelphia politics and business and was able to regain the business momentum I had prior to the trip to Accra.

Perception, as Henry Feinberg taught me, is everything. The Uniland Corporation's name, as a Joint Venture Partner in the construction of the \$25,000,000 Gallery II Shopping Mall and J.C. Penney Department Store, was on signs on street corners in an 8 square block area of Center City Philadelphia, seen by thousands of people every day.

And I was determined to exploit the perception of my success and grow my company into a larger real estate development and general contracting firm than the one I had in Princeton when I sold my interest in Sarshik and Edwards and S & E Construction Company years earlier.

But I was now, once again, starting back into business, by myself, without any business partners, black or white.

In January of 1984, Wilson Goode was coming up on his first full one year in office, and the black business community was beginning to benefit from the formation of MBEC. Kenny Gamble had donated the building materials and a part of the 1st Floor of Philadelphia

International Records, located at the corner of Broad and Locust, across from the Double Tree Suites Hotel, for the headquarters of Wilson's Mayoral Campaign, and Uniland donated the labor.

Philadelphia was now 45% Amer-African, and with the alliance of white women that helped secure the override of Bill Green's veto on the MBEC legislation, black folk were the majority in elected office, including the mayor, the majority of City Council, Sheriff John Green, and the Judges in the Municipal and Traffic Courts.

I was falling asleep again. For a 'hot minute', I believed that black folk had a shot at freedom, justice, and equality of opportunity if we could aggregate and be in the majority. And to further that belief, at the end of January 1984, I watched the Super Bowl game at Renee's uncle's house in Pomona, California.

We were there because Renee had heard that "The Family Feud" TV game show, at the time the most popular TV Game Show in America, was conducting a 2-day interview for contestants in the Philadelphia market. Renee knew my mom was a huge fan of "Family Feud", so I had to go to the audition. Of the 300 families they interviewed, we were one of the 10 families chosen for the Show, and only one of the two that were black. My mom already loved Renee, but now she had etched her name in my mom's 'heart' (the center of her brain).

Our team consisted of my brother Fareed and his beautiful wife Barbara (mixed race), our mom, and Renee and I, with me being the most 'tan'. We didn't win our contest, but my mom picked the 'black' stem lollipop to win some cash, and she got to kiss Richard Dawson, the Show's Popular Host. I was all up in 'Americana'. Being on National Television helped to keep me rocked asleep.

When we returned from our LA family outing, I had a wakeup call. A meeting that was previously scheduled with John Smith, the Chairman and CEO of Provident Mutual Life Insurance Company provided the opportunity. I had heard they were planning to leave the City of Philadelphia and move to a suburban location outside of Wilmington, DE. My interest was in their present location.

Provident Mutual's headquarters was in the heart of West Philadelphia, which was Lucien Blackwell's Council District. This magnificent colonial structure, with over 100,000 square feet of office space, was a smaller replica of the Congressional Building in Washington, DC.

It sat on a beautifully landscaped 20-acre campus bounded by Market Street on the East and Haverford Avenue on the West, and from 44th Street on the south to 48th street on the north. The

outdoor property had passive and active recreation areas, including athletic fields, for the huge corporate staff.

My vision was to create “the” corporate office park for the black community. Jim Wade would need headquarters in the community for Wade Cable Vision. As the vice chairman of the Brain Trust, I knew the number of black owned businesses that were scattered all over the City of Philadelphia

There wasn’t a black owned corporate office park in America. Philadelphia didn’t even have a black-owned office building. The synergy I envisioned that would be created with black owned businesses aggregated on one campus sent chills down my spine.

I shared my vision with Jack, as he asked me to call him. He said he would talk to his board and get back to me with a price because they definitely needed to rid themselves of a building they wouldn’t need since they were building a new Corporate Headquarters right outside of Wilmington, DE.

When I met Jack 3 weeks later, I learned two things. Jack started the meeting by saying, “Ernest, let me ask you something. Why is it that in the black community, all of your leaders are clergy and men of the cloth? In our community, our leaders are businesspeople, not pastors, priests, and reverends”.

The answer was, and is, simple. Religion was, and is a tool that was used, and is still used to keep our folk thinking of a “pie up in the sky” waiting for us when we die. Pastors, priests, and reverends fit the bill because it meant having someone of our own teaching and preaching a false narrative about life and its meaning.

At that second meeting I came to the sad realization that the leaders in the black community were clergy and the only place they were leading our folk was to a ‘heaven’ that I did not believe existed after death. I knew we would not solve the economic conditions that existed in our community through that route.

I believed that religion (an extremely divisive tool) would only keep us dependent on the ‘devil’. As long as black folk thought their grievances would be addressed in ‘Heaven’, after they were dead, they would continue to suffer the ‘Hell’ they experienced every day in America.

Secondly, it was clear that these white folks, the ruling elite, wouldn’t do anything for black people, even if it meant not maximizing their own financial gain, which is their ‘god’. I guess Jack must have shared my vision with his Board because he gave me a lame excuse as to why

they decided to donate the building for charitable purposes rather than sell the property. He knew that I knew it was BS, so I moved on.

Jack's Board, members of the Philadelphia 'ruling elite', believed they needed black slaves, not black joint venture partners and black business associates. They wouldn't even sell us land. I wasn't asking for a gift. I just wanted to buy some of this Earth that we black business folk could call our own, where we could 'do for self'. The Messenger's teachings were still in my head.

Initially, my inability to buy the property disheartened me, but it wasn't enough to deter me from earning the capital to finance my deep-seated desire for a 'nation of our own'.

The Reading Company was moving forward with their plans to build a New Philadelphia Convention Center in Center City at the Train Shed that was the terminus of the old Reading Railroad. The idea was for the Reading Company, as a private developer, to build the new Convention Center and lease it to the City of Philadelphia and the State of Pennsylvania, both of whom would sign and guarantee a 30-year lease, with the option to buy the facility at the end of the lease.

Neither the City of Philadelphia nor the State of Pennsylvania would have to use any public monies for the construction of the project. And with The Reading Company, having already been a major factor in the Philadelphia business community over the last century, as well as owning the land (site control), made the project a no-brainer for everyone. Because the City was signing a 30-year lease, the proposed project required minority business participation.

William 'Bill' Hankowsky, an up and comer at The Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation, was the one who drafted the State Legislation that paved the way for the New Philadelphia Convention Center, which eventually opened in 1993. Bill knew the Convention Center deal, with a projected cost of \$200,000,000, would need to include 15% Minority Business Participation, and 10% Women-owned Business Participation.

Hankowski suggested to the Reading Company that they issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) from minority and women owned businesses. From their perspective, it was easier to have a joint venture partner than to go through the trouble of documenting that 25% of all of the subcontract opportunities went to minorities and women. Years later that voluminous paperwork was one of the issues that led to MBEC's demise.

The numbers jumped at me. The 15% minority share would mean a volume of \$30,000,000, with the hope that 10%, or \$3,000,000 would fall to the bottom line as profit. I wanted and was determined to be the Reading Company's Joint Venture Minority Partner.

To strengthen my development team, I asked my accountant Wayne Leevy, who has been a lifelong friend, and Beverly Harper to be my partners. With them, I would only have 5% of the overall deal, but 5% of something is better than 100% of nothing. Wayne had merged his accounting practice with Donald Redcross in December of 1975 and Leevy, Redcross & Company were, 9 years later 'the' accounting firm to the black business community in Philadelphia and Vicinity.

Beverly, in addition to her acclaim for forming the Brain Trust, and leading the fight for MBEC, was a successful businesswoman heading Portfolio Associates, one of the few minorities' woman-owned professional service businesses in Philadelphia.

We were selected to be The Reading Company's 15% joint venture partner. And the deal was really much sweeter because we were to also build a Hyatt Hotel as a part of the deal, which would give us a 15% equity interest in the hotel as well. I was on a roll, and it seemed as if the money that I thought could 'buy' freedom was only 'right around the corner'.

And when I turned the corner, I was 'knocked for a loop.'

CHAPTER TWELVE

Since it would be at least two to three years before any cash would begin to flow from the Philadelphia Convention Center project, I needed more income to fuel the company I wanted to build. I had also been named the developer for 34th and Chestnut Streets (a market rate 200-unit apartment complex), on the U of P campus, directly across the street from Penn's Law School. It was a \$40,000,000 development that I owned 100%, but that development deal was also two-three years away from producing positive cash flow.

That's what brought me to Atlantic City in mid-1984. Casino construction was booming, and Casinos required minority business participation because they were licensed by the State of New Jersey. New Jersey had adopted a Minority-owned and Women-owned Business Participation Program similar to the City of Philadelphia's Goals.

In order to be licensed as a General Contractor to do business in Atlantic City, I had to take a General Contractor's Test. This was another example of the racism that prevented black people from participating in business opportunities. The only people who could pass that test were Architects, Engineers, and Landscape Architects. I was the first black man in AC with a general contractor's license, and with my license in hand, I formed Ebony Construction Company with Oscar Harris and Bobby McCurdy, two-well known and well-respected brothers from AC, and was now ready to approach the casinos for some of their contracting work.

The New Jersey Casino Control Commission (CCC) had hired a black man, Warner McBride, to be their Compliance Officer. He was responsible for ensuring that the Casinos met their contracting goals regarding minorities and women. When I met with Warner, I was surprised to see that I already knew him. Warner used to come to Cherry Hill's Pop Warner Football League's games. I coached one of the teams.

After our divorce, Gail had moved to Cherry Hill, NJ. I wanted to remain active in my children's lives, so I coached their teams in football and baseball, with Tamida being on Khalif's softball team. Warner's son Jason and my son Khalif played for the team that I coached. We had never gotten into any discussion about what either one of us did for a living, but it was certainly a pleasant surprise to see that he was the Compliance Officer for the CCC. It was another example of my good fortune.

Warner introduced me to Kenny Wynn, and I was awarded a \$1,000,000 contract to build a 30,000 square foot warehouse for The Golden Nugget Casino on Delilah Road, in Egg Harbor Township, NJ, the casino then owned by his brother Steve Wynn. We finished the job in the 30-day time frame, and within the budget, with no change orders. That was my first chance to bring

Tariq, who was 14, onto a construction project. I hired him to be my on-site manager as his summer job. I just wanted Tariq to see what I did for a living, with the hope that he, along with his siblings, would one day take over the family-owned company that I intended to build. H.J. Russell & Company was my model.

I was also awarded a subcontract for all of the masonry work on Harrah's Marina Resort Hotel and Casino extension. The business I was now doing in AC required a place for me to crash on the nights when I didn't have the energy to drive back to Philadelphia. Mike Levitt, a business associate had recently bought the Ocean Manor Apartments, a high-rise apartment building overlooking the Atlantic Ocean at the northern end of the famous Atlantic City Boardwalk in the Inlet area of the city, so I asked Mike to hook me up with a place in the complex.

Labor Day, which fell on September 2, in 1985, was a very big day in America, particularly for those involved in American's Labor Movement. Since we stayed at Ocean Manor as our summer home, I decided to rent the roof top floor, an open-air space with incredible panoramic views of the Atlantic Ocean and the Bay.

The event was catered, and I think everyone had a good time. We were involved in serious work, arising from the attack on MOVE. The MOVE headquarters that had been so viciously bombed was at 6221 Osage Avenue, and we had started the Osage-Pine Reconstruction Project on July 5th. I wanted to invite some of my key employees and their families to join me and my family at the shore for the end of summer holiday.

The events of the preceding week had taken a heavy toll on me, my family, and my employees, some of which were family and personal friends. The bombing of 6221 Osage Avenue was no small matter. It was an international incident. Never before, or since, in American history, has a national, state, or municipal government bombed its own citizens (actually, the Philadelphia Police never saw the MOVE members as human beings, much less citizens of Philadelphia).

Mayor Wilson Goode felt a deep sense of responsibility to make things right for the residents. His biggest mistake was promising the residents they would be back in their homes by Christmas, just 7 months away.

The City had issued an RFP soliciting proposals from interested developers immediately after the incident occurred. My ego, and my pride as a black man, had me believe that I was the only one who should be involved in rebuilding the homes destroyed by the 'devil'. Once I sorted through the details of the events, I became outraged that 11 black people, including 5 children had been murdered by white people.

And the irony is that while everyone was looking for, and expecting the ‘authorities’ to take responsibility, the ‘authorities’ were cooking up a plan to place the blame on MOVE and Ramona Africa (blame the ‘product’, with the belief that it will exonerate the ‘producer’ of the product). Ramona escaped the burning inferno and took little Birdie Africa with her. The other 11 MOVE members decided to remain in their house once they saw the police shooting at Ramona as she and Birdie fled.

The RFP asked that interested developers tender a price to build the prototypical townhome that was a part of the RFP package. It was the same townhouse I had built for the Philadelphia Housing Authority just months earlier. These suckers were intending to replace market rate housing with public housing. That only made me more determined to be named the developer. I had personally done the estimating for the Cecil B. Moore Homes contract and with actual costs in hand, I knew no one could bid the job lower than me.

This job would be a Davis-Bacon prevailing wage rate job because Federal Funds would be expended, which also meant Union labor would be involved in all of the construction trades. My friend Sam Staten was invaluable in that regard. The city could only ask us to submit a cost for a prototypical unit because the units that we were to be build had not yet been designed. I had asked Beverly to partner with me, and Edwards and Harper, our joint venture, was the lowest responsible bidder, and awarded the contract.

Right after we had been named developer in June, Willard Rouse, a major real estate developer in Philadelphia, sent a message that he wanted to come in and partner with Beverly and me to get the homes built. The profile in this project was so great that everyone in development and construction wanted in on the deal. Dan Keating, JR had also approached me to be our General Contractor. Daniel J. Keating, Inc., was the largest building contractor in Philadelphia.

Beverly and I were now the developer. If Rouse wanted to joint-venture, why didn’t he propose that before we were named the developer? He had bid and lost. I informed Beverly of Rouse’s offer, and she agreed. I arrogantly sent a message back, “Kiss my black ass.”

I was still too naïve to understand that I had just rejected business offers from two of the biggest movers and shakers in Philadelphia real estate development and construction. At that point in my life, I was really fed up with white folk. They had just murdered 11 of my people and now wanted to make money off of their ‘dirty work’.

I had just witnessed the powerless of an elected official, and to top it off, it was insulting, and condescending, to imply that I needed their help to do what they do. They had inherited wealth and family connections to build the businesses they were running, a far cry from my beginnings.

But in reality, I was more blessed, because I had my mom and dad's love for me driving my ambition.

We actually started construction in July, with the goal of completing the homes by December. Unfortunately, the design process was cumbersome. No design decision could be made without the RDA design team getting approval from RDA's Executive Director, and the residents' architect getting approval from their committee, which had to get approval from the majority of the residents. Instead of the design process taking a week, it took over three months. Once we received a final sign-off from both the city and the residents' committee we worked in earnest to move the project forward.

Unfortunately for me, early on in the construction phase, my brother Fareed, my Project Manager, had gotten into a fight with Renee, my Business Manager, and neither would back down. Renee definitely had heart because she was right in Fareed's face. I have no idea what precipitated the argument, but by the time I was notified and returned to our Construction Office on Cobbs Creek Parkway, I couldn't get either one to back off. So, I had to fire both of them.

I can't possibly describe the pain that I felt at having to make that decision. I knew I could count on either of them to have my back, even if it meant their death could be an outcome. I felt the same about both of them.

And to this day, they are still the only two people alive that I know who would throw down with me at any time. I certainly couldn't fire one and keep the other, and I also knew that I couldn't keep both of them on the job until a compromise was reached.

I fired them with the belief that I could talk both of them into coming back to work when they had both calmed down. Cooler heads did not prevail. They both refused to come back to work if the other were in the office. And I couldn't hire one without the other, so I was now without 'anyone to watch my back'.

Days later, two freelance photographers, supposedly on assignment from the **New York Times** came to my construction office and asked for permission to go onto the site, which was fenced in and guarded. They wanted to take pictures for the newspaper. I told them no, the site was off limits to the entire public, per the City's request. I had already denied Gerald Rivers (Geraldo Rivera) of FOX News access to the site the day before.

Twenty minutes later one of my foremen came to the trailer to ask me if I had given permission for photographers to enter the site and take pictures. The foreman knew the policy and was checking to see if these guys were an exception. When I told the brother that I explicitly told the photographers no, he said, "okay boss, I got this".

When the police arrived, one of the photographers, Daniel S. Miller, told the police that I hit him in the stomach and told my men to take their cameras. The 'devil' is always lying. At the trial the photographer says I hit him, but one of the DA's witnesses said that I didn't hit the man, but that I did tell my men to beat him up and take their cameras. Both were lies, but I was arrested and charged.

I produced three witnesses that said I wasn't on site when the incident occurred. The police interviewed me and asked me where the cameras were. I told them my foreman told me the cameras were thrown into Cobbs Creek. The equipment was found later that day in the creek.

I can proudly say that until this day, I have never raised my fist(s) at anyone since my last fight with my friend GG in 1963, much less hit anyone with my fists. I do accept responsibility for what my men did, even though without any direction from me. Most of my laborers were FOI, as was the case with most of the laborers in Local 332.

I didn't have to say anything to them. They knew those folks weren't supposed to be on the site, and when the foreman confirmed that I had said no to their request, he considered the photographers to be in 'violation'. I certainly should have jumped up on the spot to resolve the issue rather than take the 10 minutes I did in getting up and over to the site the minute the incident was reported.

Ron Castille, a Republican Vietnam War Veteran was the newly elected Philly DA. Castille was a wheelchair bound paraplegic who was wounded in action in Vietnam. I do believe his bitterness, as a result of his misfortune in Vietnam, blinded his ability to do his job justly. My trial was by judge, at the recommendation of my lawyer, and I was found guilty.

My witnesses were totally disregarded as they all said that I wasn't there when the incident occurred, and that I did not strike anyone or direct my men to strike anyone or direct my men to take the photographers equipment. They made it very clear to the judge that I was not present when the photographers had their cameras taken from them.

At the time of the Photographer(s) incident I was involved in City of Philadelphia projects totaling over \$250,000,000. But my arrest for the photographer fiasco was something the city didn't want or need. The city asked me to step down on the Convention Center Project and my apartment project on RDA land at 34th and Chestnut Streets. The attorney for the RDA assured me that by relinquishing my development rights, it would not prevent me from re-bidding either project once my court matter regarding the photographers was cleared up in my favor.

The trial had been scheduled for July 1986, but the city didn't want any more bad press during the months leading up to my trial. I believed the matter would be resolved in my favor and I

would be back on top of things by the end of the summer of 1986 so I signed the agreement allowing me to continue at Osage, which I thought was a project that I should complete; and I relinquished my rights on the other two projects.

I am still at a loss as to why I believed what those white folks told me. Only later, after re-reading Black Skin, White Masks, Dr. Franz Fanon supplied me with an accurate analysis of what colonization and slavery can do to a human being. Even though I was wearing my 'White Mask' over my Black Skin, I was still suffering from my respect for white people, 'the children of 'God'', something that was drilled into my head, and the head of every black child who attends elementary school in America during the week, and Sunday School on Sunday morning.

As soon as the ink was dry on the signed documents, the city began withholding payments for construction. The change orders that Wilson had agreed to promptly process and pay were also being held up. G & V, my black general contractor, also suffered from the action and asked Wilson to expedite the late payments so they could pay their subcontractors, of which I was the largest.

When the City didn't pay Edwards & Harper, the Developer, who then couldn't pay G & V Contractors, who then couldn't pay Premier Construction (my subcontracting firm that I had formed), I had to do something. I had over 100 men on my payroll. I told Wilson that he had to make good on his promises to approve the change orders so G&V could be paid. Ultimately, G & V successfully sued the City of Philadelphia and was awarded over \$10,000,000.

When Wilson said his hands were tied, I had my men walk off the job. Why would I have them continue to work without me getting money to pay them? With the job shut down, Wilson was not a happy camper. I explained to him that I needed to pay my men. It was too late for me to seek bank financing for the project, the photographers' accusations had closed that door. Wilson reiterated his position that his hands were tied; and my men remained off the job.

Two days later he called Councilmen Lucian Blackwell and John Street into his office and the three of them begged me to have my men return to the job. The three of them promised me that I would not be hurt financially. I had trusted white folk with their word, and now I trusted black folk and their word. Neither they nor I knew at the time that the hold-up of the money was a plan to drive me out of business. I acquiesced to their pleas and had my men back on the job the next day.

A week later my contract with RDA was cancelled and I was thrown off the job. Just that quickly, within the space of 8 months, I lost all of that development work and I had to now figure out what I was going to do next. And the sad part of it all was that I was warned by both Renee and Ralph. Renee was upset that I even bid on Osage.

She said, “Ernest, that ground you want to build those houses on is consecrated ground that still bears the blood of eleven black people, including 5 black children. Please stay away from that project.”

I waved off her comment because I had just built 30 homes for PHA; I was a home builder, and I felt a sense of responsibility to the black community to make sure the homes were built with the quality that our people deserved.

In addition to its being the most highly visible construction project in the City (and probably the country), it was going to be a contract worth over \$5,000,000. I was still caught up in something that I had vowed I would never do. I was willing to suck off the government tit to make a dime.

Brother Ralph and I had lost touch, but in June of 1985, while crossing Broad Street at Locust Street, we passed each other and he said, “Ernest, I see you’re still messing with the ‘devil’.”

I did not listen to my wife and my friend because the pursuit of money had made me deaf, dumb, and blind. I believed a righteous end justified the means. And I would quickly come to know that that euphemism wasn’t always operable.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

“Osage Avenue Builder to Publish a Newspaper”

That was the headline story in **The Philadelphia Inquirer** on April 26, 1986. I had finally realized my dream to publish my own newspaper. **The Philadelphia Sunday Press** was to be directly aimed at the 9th largest Consumer Market in the World, based on Gross National Income.

The story began by saying,

“Ernest A. Edwards Jr., the controversial developer of Osage Avenue is no longer in the home-building business. He is on the verge of becoming Philadelphia’s newest newspaper publisher. Since February, Edwards has been preparing to launch the Philadelphia Sunday Press, a weekly paper aimed at the black community. His first edition is scheduled to roll off the presses in two weeks and be distributed on May 11.”

I am certainly not a fan or believer in the ‘media’, print or broadcast, but sometimes they actually present some true facts. The story went on to say,

*“Though he has made his living as a home builder, Edwards played an indirect role in local publishing circles as a stockholder for seven years in the **Philadelphia Tribune**, the country’s oldest black newspaper.*

*...Though Edwards will serve as publisher of the **Sunday Press**, he has no intention of editing the paper himself...Edwards sees his role as an entrepreneur who will attend to the business side of the operation and leave the writing and editing to professional journalists.*

*... “Established newspapers continue to pour out a diet of news that is unfavorable to blacks”, he said. “**The Sunday Press** will ‘talk about the positive growth and development of our community’. The paper will contain ‘no blood or guts or gore,” he said. There will be no bad news.*

*If the Philadelphia venture succeeds, he wants to expand the concept by publishing local versions of the **Sunday Press** in Washington, Atlanta, and other cities.”*

“The black press in America is almost dead”, he said. “We’re about to bring it back to life”.

I was removed as the developer of Osage on February 24th, my 40th birthday. And on that very same day I decided I was going to publish my own newspaper; with what money I had left. It

had to have been sheer will power to begin the effort because I certainly didn't have the financial wherewithal to start a newspaper publishing venture.

I felt comfortable in bringing the different, seemingly disparate parts together because of my experience in real estate. Both kinds of businesses have dozens of moving parts and require the mastery of both financial and logistical details, as well as strategic management of people and resources.

I didn't see the complexity of publishing as being any different. As the publisher, I would need to seamlessly bind the editors, writers, and art director; as well as the production means and distribution channels on the one hand, and on the other hand, the advertising sales that generated the revenue with the marketing of the paper itself to achieve the distribution and circulation that we were promising to the advertisers.

I found a building in the Wynnfield section of Philadelphia and moved in March. It was an old, but beautiful stone colonial mansion, circa 1895 that had been converted to an office structure with the addition of 6,000 square feet modern attached two-story building connected to the old mansion. There was no doubt that this building was made for the **Philadelphia Sunday Press**.

My first order of business was to find someone who was going to print the paper for me because I certainly didn't have the money to purchase our own printing press.

I was already in violation of the first law of publishing.

As fate would have it, I would find good fortune again. Gannett newspapers had launched **USA Today** on September 15, 1982. Al Neuharth had conceived of the idea of a national daily newspaper aimed at the middle-American Market. The only other newspaper in daily national circulation was **The Wall Street Journal**, which serviced the business community across America.

Neuharth's problem with building circulation for **USA Today** was not so easily overcome. The large local newspapers were making it difficult and downright impossible for him to get his national newspaper on the local newsstands in the major cities. **USA Today** eventually went to selling its papers in locked boxes in local markets across the county.

In Philadelphia the United News Agency was the distributor who supplied all retail outlets and newsstands with their publications. There was no other distributor, and they had only one rule, no matter who you were. Whatever the retail price of the publication, they got 50%. If you sold your publication for one dollar, they got 50 cents. If you really want a dollar, then you needed to sell your publication for \$2.00. Neuharth started selling **USA Today** for 25 cents, and had

refused to give the distributors half, so he was cut out of the national network distribution system.

I reasoned that since **USA Today** was only in circulation Monday through Friday, my Sunday newspaper was not in competition with them, and we served two different markets. When I met with the Gannett representatives from the **Landsdale Reporter**, located in Montgomery County, PA, I was pleasantly surprised that they were indeed interested in printing my paper for me.

The Philadelphia Sunday Press was an idea that had been in my head for years. I felt it was consistent with do for self, and certainly would provide the positive images of black people that didn't exist in the white press. My experience selling **Muhammad Speaks** newspapers, my ownership interest in the **Philadelphia Tribune**, and my desire to make sure our community had a voice that would speak truth to power; propelled me forward. We would also be the first and only broadsheet Sunday Amer African newspaper in the county; and it was printed in color, something that even the white **Philadelphia Inquirer** couldn't do.

I had reasoned that the largest day of advertising appeared in the Sunday newspapers across the county. Since advertising revenue would make us or break us, I chose Sunday as the day we would distribute the paper.

Sunday was also chosen as the date of distribution because it is the one day of the week where I thought I would find 70+% of all black people in America. I knew Sunday Church Services was a tradition in the black community and one adhered to by most black folk, whether they were true believers or not. It had become a cultural tradition to get dressed (in your Sunday best) and go to church on Sunday morning, and a big family Sunday dinner afterward.

I decided that I would give the distribution fee (50% of \$1) to the church, rather than to United News Agency. I planned to sign up 300 churches in Philadelphia and Vicinity to sell 100 newspapers each. Reverend Lorenzo Marshall Sheppard, Pastor of Mt. Olivet Tabernacle Baptist Church, located at 42nd and Wallace Streets, loved the idea of the paper, and as head of the Black Clergy of Philadelphia Clergy and Vicinity, agreed to sell the idea to his members.

The black churches would have the opportunity to add \$50 to their coffers each week, receive a free advertisement in the 'Religious' classifieds, and support an effort to provide much needed positive information to their African American members.

Only later did my dad point up the flaw in that idea. "Junior, do you understand that for every dollar a church member spends buying your newspaper that is one dollar less that can go into the Pastor's Offering Plate, which is passed twice every Sunday morning. And even though you plan to give 50 cents back, the pastor is out of the 50 cents that you get. Why would the pastor

want to support your effort by giving away money that right now belongs to him 100%?" My dad was right, once again.

My next task was to figure out exactly what we would be selling in the way of our newspaper. Since Sunday was our day of distribution, it had to look like the broadsheet Sunday paper people were used to seeing on Sunday morning. I decided on 8 Sections as a start, with each Section being a minimum of 8 pages.

The first Section would be Local and National News, with Section B containing World News, which included Third World News and U.N. Update. Section C contained Local and Regional Sports, from Little League, High School, College, to the Professional level. Section D was the Business and Real Estate, featuring Personal Finance, Professional Profiles, Corporate News, Entrepreneurs, and Economic News.

Section E was called Leisure, and featured Jazz Notes, Culture, Movies, Arts, Theater, and Celebrity Profiles. Section F was devoted to Religion and Education; Section G was Lifestyle and showcased Travel, Society, and Fashion; and Section H dealt with Food and Health.

We also developed a Comics section, and I am very proud that we gave Syndicated Cartoonist Rob Armstrong his first break by publishing his cartoons (in color) in the last few weeks of our newspaper.

My racism had never developed to the point that I hated white people. I will admit that I was angry, but anger doesn't always produce hatred. And now I certainly didn't intend to fight the 'establishment'. My sense of powerlessness as an Amer African ignorantly caused me to concede, and I decided to 'go along', to 'earn some money' so the paper could survive.

We were able to get the first edition out on May 11, 1986, two days before the first anniversary of the Police/MOVE confrontation. In less than 3 months post Osage, I had a newspaper on the streets of Philadelphia.

But with all of the advertising support that was coming in, the revenue didn't put a dent into the cash flowing out the door as we grew. We had a staff of over 25 full and part time people, and the cost of operating our wonderful offices was no small matter. I knew I needed more money. I had to address the financial bleeding.

With a published newspaper in hand, I believed I could now approach Newspaper Organizations about investing in **The Philadelphia Sunday Press**. This was no longer an idea. Someone could see, feel, and read my concept for the paper.

I had designed the paper with expansion in mind. Four Sections of the paper would remain the same in each market, and four sections would have a local staff to handle the news gathering and the advertising solicitation in that local market.

It was now time for me to really focus on who had the money to invest, who understood the value of successfully reaching the over \$100 billion black consumer market in America and was in the newspaper business themselves. I went to D.C. to speak to Alan Spoon, the VP and Chief Financial Officer at the **Washington Post**, but there was only one company that fit my assessment of a potential partner. And that was the **Wall Street Journal**.

In 1998 Kenneth L. Burenga retired as President and Chief Operating Officer of Dow, Jones and Company, a position he rose to in 1991. In an interview after his retirement, he had this to say regarding 'wealth'.

"...I never worked for the sake of money. The satisfaction of getting things done was far more motivating to me than my compensation".

"...My observation is that most of those who were preoccupied with money, or the pursuit of it, too often changed them in character. Ditto for those obsessed with power".

When I called the **Journal's** offices in New York to inquire as to whom I should speak to regarding Dow, Jones investing in my company, I was directed to Ken Burenga's office. At the time, Ken was a Senior Vice President and Chief Financial Officer for the company. We talked on the phone, and I told him about the **Sunday Press** and asked if I could send him a copy of my paper for his review, along with a Business Plan that included Cash Flow Projections for the next 5 years.

I followed up with a call to Ken to confirm that he received the package. He said he had, and he wanted me to come up to his office to discuss his initial interest in the **Sunday Press**. I knew I only had a small window of time to raise the \$5,000,000 that I needed to not just survive, but to grow the company. So, when he asked, "When do you want to meet"? "Yesterday" was my reply.

Ken had invited the top folk in Dow, Jones to the meeting with us as well. Senior Vice President James H. Ottaway, JR of the Ottaway Group (a national chain of local newspapers) was there, as was Laurence O'Donnell from the Editorial Board. Peter Kahn, the heir apparent to become Chairman of Dow Jones once Warren Phillips retired was also scheduled to attend but a last-minute emergency prevented him from being in attendance.

The only problem in the entire meeting was when they said that because of what the name Dow, Jones & Company meant in the business and publishing industry, they would want to have editorial control of the **Sunday Press**. And they asked me to think about that and let them know if I could live with that condition.

I never discussed the idea of giving the **Wall Street Journal** editorial control of the **Philadelphia Sunday Press** with anyone. I didn't have a business partner. I owned the newspaper 100%, not that it was worth anything at the moment. I had talked to John Johnson, the publisher of **Ebony** and **Jet**, who bought a year's subscription to support me. He told me the story of when he was young and caught a cold, his mother would always put Castor Oil in a glass of orange juice, just to make it more acceptable to drink.

He said that the content of the **Philadelphia Sunday Press** was necessary to cure the sickness black folk were suffering from, but it needed to be placed in some orange juice to make it more palatable to our folk. And I did try to 'sweeten' the bitter, cold truth of the reality that black folk endured in America. I was still angry at the continued misery of black folk economically and politically, both administered by white folk, so I decided to assume the mantle of truth bearer, no matter how difficult the truth was to swallow. I was determined to spoon it out, orange juice or not, so it was understandable that Dow Jones wanted editorial control.

I was still reeling from losing the Convention Center deal, my 34th and Chestnut Apartment Complex, and the Osage-Pine Reconstruction project, which was only 6 months earlier. I called Ken the next day to tell him that for the sake of the integrity of the newspaper, and the trust of the black community, I couldn't relinquish my responsibility to determine what was printed.

Ironically, they were concerned about what I might say in the paper, and I was concerned about what articles they would want in the paper that would be contrary to my beliefs as an African-centered man. I could 'sweeten' my content, but I would have no control of what they would want to editorialize. There was no way to reconcile the issue and so Dow, Jones & Company passed.

I ran into Laurence O'Donnell a few years later and he told me that they really wanted to invest, and the only hang-up was their fear of my 'militancy', which is why they wanted the ability to say "no" to any articles that I might publish that threatened the status quo. He assured me the **Journal** had no interest in taking over the publication's editorial staff. Laurence wanted to know why I didn't trust them. I asked him the same question relative to me. Why didn't the **Journal** trust me?

I was not able to secure financing to keep the newspaper going. After 10 issues that began on May 11, 1986, and ended on July 13, 1986, I shut everything down and walked away. I still feel

a deep sense of gratitude for the people who gave 4 months of their lives to help me with my dream of building a communications network for our community, both locally and nationally. No one ever received a salary. The Philadelphia Sunday Press was an incredible example of people working together toward a common objective. We attempted to make history, and we did not fail for the lack of talent, knowledge, and desire.

In fact, we didn't fail. It was only another step in the process toward freedom. I learned that I was 'between a rock and a hard place'. I had gone back and forth in the white and black worlds at least three times, all to no avail in my quest for freedom. Neither one worked for me. Why?

I couldn't find freedom in their world because their world doesn't allow freedom. The 'ruling elite', 1/10 of 1% of the world's population, via capitalism, democracy, and religion, control 90% of the world's resources. They have the planet locked down. I am not white, nor am I among the 'ruling elite'.

The black world, having suffered the stark reality of Dr. Fanon's analysis, is still subject to the rule of the 'slave master', via the same capitalism, democracy, and religion that underpins Caucasian rule. Being black in America, I suffered the same fate because the 'brainwashing' and indoctrination that comes with those ideologies controls the life of black people. I was fortunate enough to ultimately break free from capitalism, democracy, and religion.

My ignorance of White Supremacy made me a racist, and the knowledge of its origin brought me back to sanity.

The **Philadelphia Sunday Press** experience illuminated those two realities for me. But now it was time to move on. I had to pick myself back up off the ground and get ready for the next play. I just didn't know the next play required me to tackle an 800-pound gorilla.

How else do I describe the next event?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

“Edwards is Charged a 2nd Time - D.A. Reinstates Osage Theft Case” screamed the headline in the **Philadelphia Inquirer** on July 28, 1987. You cannot imagine how I felt when I was rearrested on charges that were just dismissed less than 10 days earlier.

Judge J. Earl Simmons, a white Republican judge, with a white Republican D.A. in office, had thrown out 42 of 44 counts against me on July 17th. The system is set up to give a D.A. “two bites at the apple”. I did not know that when a person is arraigned before a judge on criminal charges, and the charges are dismissed, the D.A. has (10) days to re-file the charges before a different judge. And that is what Ron Castile did. And this time, they made sure they had the right judge hear their case.

Judge Levy Anderson was a retired judge who had been recalled to the bench because 17 of Philadelphia’s judges had been removed from the bench in a scandal involving the Philadelphia Roofer’s Union. My attorney had asked Judge Anderson to recuse himself from the case because he had served as Solicitor for the City of Philadelphia, and as such, he should remove himself from the case, *“The City of Philadelphia v. Ernest Edwards”*. Levy Anderson ruled that even though he had worked for the City of Philadelphia as its attorney, he could, and would be impartial in hearing my case. That was the beginning of an end.

Within 45 days of my dismissal from the Osage-Pine Reconstruction Project as Edwards & Harper and Premier Construction Company, and within the same time frame announcing my intent to start the **Philadelphia Sunday Press**, I was subpoenaed to appear before a Philadelphia Grand Jury that was impaneled to investigate me regarding Osage-Pine.

Do you think that was coincidental? Had I left Philadelphia, as had been suggested; I am sure those allegations would never have surfaced.

I thought nothing more of the questions that I was asked by the Grand Jury that I sat before on April 4, 1986. 13 months later, on May 5, 1987, the Grand Jury presented charges against me, and a Preliminary Hearing was scheduled for July 17, 1987. That’s when Judge Simmons threw out 42 of 44 counts against me.

And the only reason he didn’t dismiss the count of perjury and theft relating to the alleged kickback scheme was because Louis Dolente was saying one thing, and I was saying another. That was enough for the judge to bind that matter over for a trial, which was set for August 7th.

In an **Inquirer** article written by Cynthia Burton on July 18, 1987, she said,

“If Ernest Edwards was taking kickbacks from a concrete contractor, as the prosecution has charged, he may have missed something.

Edwards the developer charged with stealing \$208,112 from the MOVE rebuilding project, and contractor Louis Dolente made a deal to split the spoils on the cost of putting in sewers at the site, Dolente said at Edwards’ preliminary hearing yesterday.

Dolente, a cement contractor, was one of several subcontractors hired to help rebuild 61 West Philadelphia houses that were destroyed in May 1985 when the city bombed MOVE headquarters, killing 11 people.

Testifying under a grant of immunity, Dolente said he and Edwards agreed that Dolente would inflate by \$9,000 his bid for the sewer job and split the excess.

But Dolente didn’t do the work, he said. He got another contractor to do the job for \$12,000 – a savings of \$7,000 on his initial bid of \$19,000. Dolente didn’t say what he did with the \$7,000 or the \$4,500 he got from his share of the alleged bid-rigging scheme.

Sources said Dolente had been referred to Edwards by Lee Casper, one of the directors of the city Redevelopment Authority, which helped select the developer on the project.

According to the grand jury presentment, Dolente told Edwards that he won the sewer job an hour before Edwards was informed by the Redevelopment Authority that he had won it. District Attorney Ronald D. Castille has said there was no evidence of bid-rigging”.

Two things need be said regarding this issue, which was the only count held over for trial, with the exception of the perjury charge which was related to the bid-rigging charge.

First, since Judge Earl Simmons, a white Republican threw out the other charges because he refused to participate in the modern day ‘lynching’ of a black man, I will not dignify those 42 counts with a response. My racism had me still see the white man as the devil, meaning evil, unrighteous, unjust, and corrupt and my case was, to me, a prime example of the degree to which white people would steep to persecute an innocent black man.

Secondly, I was astonished that Judge Simmons was astonished. He was astonished when Dolente took the witness stand and admitted that he had hired someone else to do the sewer work for \$12,000, which meant that Dolente either lied to me about the cost of the work, and therefore our supposed split, or he was lying about the entire incident.

Dolente had no response for the judge when he asked him, “If your agreed split was for half of the cost savings between the cost and the bid amount, why did you only give Edwards \$4,500 instead of \$8,000, which was his alleged share of the difference in savings from the bid price of \$28,000 and the cost to you of \$12,000? Either you lied to Edwards, or you are now lying to me about this alleged deal between the two of you. But that is a matter for a jury of your peers to decide.”

DA Ron Castile had stated for the record that there was no evidence of bid-rigging, nor was I ever charged with ‘bid-rigging’, which is what the count implies.

And most importantly, the contract for the sewer work was not a contract with me. It was for a change order issued by the Redevelopment Authority. The RDA chose the successful bidder for the work, not me. So, unless I was charged with bid-rigging, how could I have influence, or cut a deal with anyone, on a contract that was decided by Lee Casper and his cronies, along with Joe Gaudet, the City’s representative on the project.

Judge Simmons, in rendering his ruling, also noted that \$820,000 had been authorized and disbursed before a contract was even signed between the City and Edwards & Harper. He also pointed up the fact that 17 payments over a 34-week period were authorized and approved by everyone, the RDA; the Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD), through ULDC, its’ lending arm created to finance Osage-Pine, and the City’s Construction Manager Joseph Gaudet, of Gaudet, Barclay, White.

He said it was ludicrous for the District Attorney to come into his courtroom over a year later and say Edwards stole something from the City of Philadelphia. Judge Simmons said, “according to my calculations, since the cost of the project has risen to over \$9,000,000, and Edwards’ contract, even with the approved change orders, only amounts to \$7,500,000, the only person who should be in my courtroom with a grievance is Ernest Edwards.” Judge Simmons went on to say, “It looks like Edwards is out \$1,500,000.”

I was absolutely pleased with Judge Simmons’ ruling, including his characterization of Dolente’s testimony, which I presumed my attorney Hugh Clark would handle at the next hearing. On August 20, 1987, 3 months after the **Philadelphia Sunday Press** hit the streets of Philadelphia, at the next preliminary hearing, this one presided by Levy Anderson, the DA’s ‘ducks’ were in order. They had the right man to engineer their desired result, which was to get me before a judge and jury in Philadelphia Common Pleas Court.

As I was exiting the courtroom after my trial before Judge Anderson, Juan Gonzales, then a **Philadelphia Daily News** reporter asked me how a judge could say what he had just heard pronounced? Judge Levy Anderson, just before announcing his ruling that all charges previously

thrown out by Judge Simmons were now being reinstated, said, “My goodness Edwards, why did you have to drive a Jaguar? Why wouldn’t a Ford or Chevy do?”

I was guilty of the car I drove. But the City didn’t care about the truth. I was a black man who refused to be used by the ruling elite of Philadelphia, and I would pay for that ‘sin’.

I was reminded of the “Henry Fineberg’ rule, perception is everything. White folk perceived me as the 8th grader that Smeltz saw. My confidence had transformed into arrogance, and it showed in my attitude toward the white ‘ruling elite’ in Philadelphia. Renee had asked me why I, a follower of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad (I was not longer in NOI, but I still followed the Messenger’s teachings in certain matters, one of which was the white man being the devil), thought I would get a fair trial.

It certainly wasn’t in my calculations regarding the arrest because I stupidly believed I would receive justice in America. I guess I was still of the belief that being right mattered. I actually believed that because I was innocent, I would be exonerated at trial. My naiveté was still intact.

I don’t know how or why they got Dolente to say what he said, but his testimony was not as damaging as the D.A.’s office finding James A. Walls, the jury foreman, to sit on my jury. James Walls was a bookie controlled by the D.A.’s office. It was information I only found out during my trial.

It turned out that Walls, plying his trade as a bookie, had stiffed one of his bettors and didn’t pay the man when he won. The guy called my attorney and relayed the story as to why he was calling and wanted us to know that Walls shouldn’t have even been on the jury in the first place because he lived in Montgomery County, not Philadelphia County.

I hired my dear friend Big Rob Murray, a FOI Lieutenant back in the day, to do the investigation into the allegation. Big Rob established testimony from both the mailman and the phone company that James A. Walls had telephone service in his name at that Montgomery County address, and that the mailman had been delivering mail to Walls at that address for over 18 months.

Additionally, Rob spoke to Walls’ wife at the Philadelphia address listed as his personal residence. She said her ex had moved out almost two years earlier. They had just received their divorce decree.

Divorce decrees are public information, and Big Rob was on it. In the affidavit accompanying the petition for divorce, was a signed statement from James A. Walls testifying that he had been living at the Montgomery County address for over 18 months.

When my attorney presented the information to Judge Angelo A. Guarino in the form of a motion to have Walls dismissed from the jury for lying about his residence and not being a Philadelphia resident, a requirement for jury selection in Philadelphia County, Guarino said, “That’s some useful information Mr. Clark, but you need to save it for your Appeal”. James A. Walls remained the jury foreman for my trial.

My dad, with his ‘third grade’ education, was a Town Councilman in Aberdeen Township, NJ, formerly known as Matawan Township. He was also very active in the Monmouth County Democratic Party and my dad had gotten to know many of the civic and business leaders in the county, including the president of a New Jersey Bank.

I was now financially broke, and I had gone to my parents for a loan to hire a lawyer. Getting the second mortgage from the banker was not the problem. My parents had excellent credit and they had never been late with a mortgage payment in over 20 years. The problem was my dad. He reminded me that he had already warned me about my revolutionary ideas of ‘freedom for the black man’.

He also reminded me that he had forewarned my arrest if I continued my desire to change things in America. My dad was telling me the same thing Maya Angelou said succinctly.

If you find something you don’t like, change it, if you can’t change it, change your attitude.”

Maya Angelou

I was too arrogant to listen to the wisdom that he was giving me. Dad went on to say, “Son, you’re lucky. 50 years ago, they would’ve hung a black man like you. We don’t need to waste money for you to get a lawyer. They are going to find you guilty, whether you did something or not, and I do trust that you didn’t steal anything, from anybody. Your mother and I taught you better.”

I assured my mom and dad that I didn’t steal anything from anyone, much less from white people; folks I still didn’t want to have anything to do with. I can honestly say that I never wished I was white. Why would I want to be the ‘devil’? As a child, when I played ‘cowboys and Indians’, I was always an Indian.

As soon as my dad was finished reminding me of his advice my mom said, “Junie, leave the application on the table and come back tomorrow morning to pick it up”. I don’t know how my mom convinced my dad to sign the mortgage loan application, but when I returned the next morning, the application was signed and ready to be submitted for the loan.

Gil Abramson, a former law partner of Councilman John Anderson, was one of the best criminal defense attorneys in the city. He told me he needed \$25,000 to handle my case which is where I got the figure for the loan I needed from my parents.

When I told Hugh Clark of Gil's fee, Hugh said he would do it for \$10,000. So, Hugh's fee, coupled with my belief that I needed a 'brother' in my corner had me go with Hugh, and Renee and I used the \$15,000 balance to live on.

My dad said that 50 years ago they would have killed a black man like me, but that conviction was pretty close to death in that they killed me financially. The rigged jury found me guilty on 6 counts. I was now scheduled to spend at least 6 years in jail, even with 'good behavior', for something I wasn't guilty of.

You may not believe it, but I did whatever my mother asked since I can remember. Her wish was my command. And now she was gone. She had died 3 months before I was sentenced. I am thankful she didn't ever have to come and visit me behind bars. That would have hurt her more than her loss to me. That's how much I knew my mother loved me.

After her funeral services at the cemetery were over, I sat alone for over an hour. They were kind enough to not lower the casket into the ground. As I stared at my mom's casket, I realized that I was now without my best friend in life. I used to call my mom every Saturday morning, no matter where I was on the planet. And now I would never be able to do that again.

She would tell me what was happening with her, my dad, and my siblings, and she always wanted to know how I was doing. She had great advice on issues that I faced in my social life from the time I was 16, until the day she died. Her loss was the greatest loss I have ever suffered, and I am thankful to know it has ultimately made me a stronger and better person. To a good degree, I am still pushed to succeed, just so my mom can be proud of me.

Gil Abramson contacted me after the trial and volunteered to represent me on appeal. He knew I didn't have any money and said he would do it pro bono because he knew I had been set up. He said he regretted not doing my case pro bono from the beginning. Gil took my case all the way to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court and in the end; it was the same as the first appellate hearing before a panel of three judges.

At my first Appeals Court appearance, I sat there watching Gil present my appeal to three sleeping men. Gil actually turned around to see if I was witnessing the same thing as him. When we got outside the courtroom, he asked me the same thing that City Councilman John White, JR, had asked me years earlier, "Ernie, who the hell did you piss off?"

Gil continued, “Those guys weren’t paying any attention to me, and they didn’t hear a word I said. I guess it was good that you didn’t pay me \$25,000. You had no shot at winning and you need to get yourself an attorney who can present your appeal in the Federal Courts. You may have a chance of overturning this political nonsense, but only in the Federal Court. After what I just witnessed, you don’t stand a chance in Pennsylvania.” Little did I know that the Federal Court was no better than the local and state court systems.

With that conviction and sentence, the Philadelphia ‘ruling elite’ had gotten rid me in one fell swoop.

I am thankful and grateful to the Messenger for the most significant of his teachings,

“Self-preservation is the Duty of each and every living organism.”

It is the only explanation that I have to understand how my instinctive need to, not just survive but to thrive, jumped into gear. I had been sentenced to 6-12 years in the Pennsylvania Correctional System. I was going to jail. But I never gave up on my dream of freedom, with the ultimate irony being that I was now about to experience a total loss of freedom.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

On February 4, 1992, Renee, her sister Dana, and our three children, Qamara 10, Zaki 8, and Akima, who had just turned 7 two weeks earlier all loaded into the car and Renee drove me to Newport News, VA, where I boarded a train to Philadelphia to turn myself in and begin serving my 6-12-year prison term.

The gravity and weight of the thought that I would not be with my family again for at least 6 years was crushing. I was able to handle it was because I knew I was not guilty. I kept the faith that everything that has ever happened to me, has always been in my best interest, whether I realized it or not at the time of the incident.

I had used the bail money that was posted by Kenny Gamble to hire an attorney who would appeal my case in the Federal Court System. Based on some of the things he would be appealing, including the use of *Batson v.*, I actually thought I might succeed.

The *Batson* case noted that if a prosecutor used his/her challenges during *voire dire*, to exclude black jurors without cause, a re-trial was in order because the person on trial was unable to be tried by a group of their peers because of racial bias. My new counsel thought that Hugh Clark had not challenged Assistant DA Janet Houser on some of her dismissals of prospective black jurors from the jury pool. I only had 3 jurors who were black, when Philadelphia County (which is also the City of Philadelphia) was 48% black.

I received word that my last appeal to the Federal Court had been denied, so I arrived to Graterford, State Correctional Institution at 9 am on the morning of February 6th, after spending two nights at Holmesburg, the Philadelphia County Jail that was the way station for those on their way to Graterford, the State Penitentiary in Skippack Township, Montgomery County.

If I thought America was a prison denying me my freedom, that perspective changed immediately upon my arrival inside Holmesburg Prison. I was now in a more physically confining prison.

Holmesburg Prison was worse than a dungeon. The only reason I slept the second night was because when the Warden came in the morning after I arrived, he saw his roster of new arrivals and noticed where I had been assigned the night before. He ordered that I immediately be brought up to a cell block that had individual cells that were clean, which was in stark contrast to the filthy, roach and rat-infested 4-man cell that made it mandatory that I remain awake all night. At the time, I was at a loss as to why he did what he did, but I really appreciated the transfer. Once I was upstairs and out of the dungeon, the Warden stopped by my cell, apologized for the

horrendous conditions of his prison, and where I had been placed the previous night. He assured me that I would be processed immediately, and out of what he described as a “hell hole” and on the first bus to Graterford, another “hell hole”, the next day. He was also kind enough to ask if I had been fed, and when I told him I received a bologna sandwich, but since I didn’t eat meat, I hadn’t eaten in 48 hours.

Do you eat fish?”

“Yes sir, I do.”

I can still remember the food tray that the Warden must have demanded. The cook had placed 2 fried fish patties, 2 mounds of macaroni and cheese, a nook of stewed tomatoes, and some cornbread, with butter on the side. I also got a slice of apple pie and milk, along with two glasses of apple juice.

I now know that this ‘white’ man had a conscience. It was the beginning of my experience with white folk, who were born and raised in the rural poor Allegheny Mountains, extending along the Appalachia Trail. I was now up close and personal with white folk like them, and how they dealt with black people.

The Black Muslims in America had split into two factions after the death of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad in 1975, with one faction holding strictly to his Teachings, and the other one guided by Warith Deen Muhammad, a son, and the heir to his father’s throne.

Warith Deen Muhammad deviated from his father’s Teachings and had asked his followers to convert to Islam, as practiced by Muslims worldwide. And even though the beliefs of each group were now divergent, there was still enough in common, as Amer Africans, to jointly rule the inmate side of the prison system in Pennsylvania.

SCI-Graterford was Pennsylvania’s largest maximum-security facility, which opened on October 25, 1929. It held about 3,600 inmates and was situated on a 62-acre compound, surrounded by a 1,700-acre farm. The prison was confined by 30-foot-high walls surmounted by nine gun-manned towers.

I was housed in the new section, an \$80 million construction program completed in 1989, which added a new Administration Building, 372 additional beds, and a 28-bed infirmary. I had been there before on several occasions, most of the time as an Assistant Minister to provide Sunday Service for the followers of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. That was back in the 70’s, as Assistant Minister of NOI in Temple #12.

But I had gone back in the 80's to see Amin Jabbar (Robert 'Nudie' Mims) at the request of Al Wellington. Jabbar had developed a board game. It was a brilliant concept, based on the popular board game named Monopoly, but differed in that the real estate was in the Ghetto, and one had to deal with all of the problems fraught with that experience. The game presented black life in the ghetto in its rawest form, and America had enough problems without having black children being reminded, via a 'board game', of their wretched conditions.

I had contacted Jeremiah Shabazz for advice on my pending trip to Graterford. When I went to meet him, Brother Milton, an Assistant Minister, was also in attendance. The meeting didn't last 5 minutes. Milton reminded me that I knew Jabbar and that Jabbar ran Graterford, as well as every other State Prison in PA. That was welcome news because I didn't know what to expect; but over the years, life continued to unfold.

I had dealt with white folk on the 'outside', and now I had to deal with them again on the 'inside', but strictly on their terms and conditions. I was now behind 'bars. Physical freedom no longer existed. And since I was considered a high-profile prisoner, the scrutiny was even more intense, but I managed to survive.

There were a number of events during my incarceration that reaffirmed my view of the 'devil', but concurrently, I was looking at America up closely, and in person. Those 5 years, 3 months and 2 days of incarceration provided another experience. It gave me the opportunity to see that white people, who I never grew up with, had experienced a similar life of slavery, poverty, and death. The seven months I spent in Processing, before being sent on to the next facility to serve my term, was relatively uneventful, with two exceptions.

The first one involved a young white kid who was 25 years old at best. He got smart with me one day during our Dayroom time. We were allowed out of our cells twice a day for recreation, but it was restricted to two hours in the Day Room on each block. I never experienced fresh air for 7 months, which is how long it took to complete the profiling process to determine which prison I would be sent to.

Within a month after my arrival to my cell block, I had to deal with this arrogant white kid who thought he was hot shit. He told me that I was going to regret that I disrespected him by telling him to go fuck himself. He repeated, "You don't know who I am", at least 5 times while he was walking away.

Our cell block was completely isolated from the General Population (Gen Pop), but with two exceptions. There was only one Infirmary (newly built) that both served Gen Pop and the new arrivals waiting to be processed. The white kid saw me sign up for sick call and signed up as

well. Sick call was announced, and we were marshaled down corridors, turning left and right for at least 5 minutes.

Once seated in the Infirmary, the white kid goes over to an Italian Mafioso, points to me and says, "That's the guy I want you to deal with. He's the one who insulted me." The Italian guy looks at me and asks the kid, "Are you talking about Mr. Edwards"? The kid says, "Yeah, that's him". The Italian guy says. "You go over and apologize to Mr. Edwards right now. And don't you ever disrespect him again."

Jabbar's nephew was in the cell next to me and I had asked him to let his uncle know that I had arrived at Gratesford. Jabbar sent word back that he was working on a way for us to get together, even though I was in 'quarantine'. We dressed in blue uniforms while Gen Pop dressed in browns. So, it was easy for the guards to see us if we tried to sneak into Gen Pop for any reason. Even though we hadn't met yet, my infirmary incident let me know that Jabbar had already put out the word on our relationship.

I was fine with the guards, 50/50 black and white, who worked the cell block, but I also had a run in with a 'brother', something I didn't expect. He was simultaneously a 'negro' and a 'nigga', and the combination was ugly. He was more of an enemy to me than the white kid. He, like the young white boy, felt the need to establish dominance on our cell block.

Tony was a young black guy in his mid-30 who claimed that he was a PA State Golden Gloves Champion and that I should check out his "jacket" so that I would know who I was dealing with. His 'jacket' contained his criminal record, which included murder charges. That certainly didn't bother me because he may have had a gun on the 'outside', but not 'inside'.

To prove he was a tough guy, he robbed my cell while I was away. It didn't take much for me to find out who did it. I had set up a store for my cell block. If you wanted or needed commissary and couldn't wait for our once a month visit to the jail store, you could buy from me on credit, but with a big 'vig'. I got 2 for1, and sometimes 3 for1, depending on supply and demand.

I got paid back when our next monthly commissary rolled around. You would be surprised at how one can convert food, personal care items, and tobacco for the things that made prison life a little smoother. Tony was never a customer; his jealousy wouldn't allow it.

The library was the only other place where inmates in blues were allowed. The only inmates in browns at the library were the library workers. Fortunately for me, one of the library workers was an NOI lieutenant. I told him about Tony robbing my cell and my brother said he would handle the problem.

When Lieutenant Charles saw Tony go into the library bathroom, he followed Tony in and body beat him for a few minutes, making sure Tony understood to never go near me again. Just as I was getting accustomed to and adjusting to prison life at Gratesford, I was issued my browns and told that I was going to SCI-Smithfield.

Jabbar had arranged for us to meet in Reverend Dorothy Bailey's office. She was the Prison Chaplain, and as such, could call inmates to her office for counseling whenever she saw fit to do so. Reverend Bailey had been a contributing editor for the Sunday Press years earlier, so I was pleasantly surprised to see her again.

Jabbar and I had two such conversations before I was shipped out. Immediately after our second meeting, I was transferred the next day. Prison transfers usually occurred every Tuesday, but I left on Monday. I am sure the prison administration didn't want me and Jabbar, representing the two most powerful factions in prison, to work in unity.

We had discussed ways to make money and keep our brothers from both sides of the Messenger's Teachings at peace with each other. Jabbar, even though one of the Messenger's bodyguards back in the day (our paths had initially crossed in 1972 when Ralph and I were in Chicago), was now with Warith Deen. He did though, make it clear to me of his respect for the Messenger, and that we could and should work together to insure our future common interests.

SCI-Smithfield was a Closed-Security prison located on the grounds of SCI-Huntingdon, near Huntingdon, PA in the Allegheny Mountains. Only 5 years old when I arrived, it seemed to have been well maintained. The experience was a real eye-opener for me regarding my knowledge of white people. My stay at SCI-Smithfield was a short seven months, the same length of time as my stay at Graterford. I had two jobs while at Smithfield. The first one was in the kitchen. I started out scrubbing and mopping floors, but within a month I was in the kitchen working as a Diet Cook.

Two months later, when a job opened up in the Education Department, I jumped at the opportunity. Mr. Paul Slovak, the head of the department, welcomed me with open arms. I initially taught inmates how to read, after first teaching them the alphabet.

You may not believe this, but the prison was 70% black, and yet only two of my 10 students were black. There were also four Hispanics. The other four were white. I was dumbstruck to find illiterate white people, who didn't even know the 26 letters of the alphabet, but I was in the mountains of PA. That's when it dawned on me that the ruling elite had fucked with the lives of a lot of white folks too.

Because I played chess and Scrabble, I got to know some of the white nationalists. They wanted to show their intellectual prowess as proof that white folks were smarter than black folk. You know that I accepted the challenge to prove that black folk were smarter than white folk, and I did win the Chess Championship while at Smithfield (the other finalist was also a brother). We shared our views regarding economics, politics, and religion; and concluded that we had a common enemy in the ruling elite, even if they were for different reasons (but really for the same reason because we both wanted freedom).

SCI-Smithfield was okay, but when I heard about SCI-Coal Township, a new facility opening in April of 1993, I asked for, and received a transfer. So, in May of 1993, I was moved to the new Medium Security facility in Northumberland County, PA, near Shamokin, PA.

For the next 30 months I was the Minister and leader of the NOI. I would write a book, become a 'jailhouse lawyer', and spend 59 days in the 'hole' just for being me. I also worked in the library, which gave me the chance to order the musical cassette tapes that inmates borrowed, the opportunity to order new books, and to also have books from other prisons sent to Coal Township on loan. I read an incredible number of books while there, most of it research for my book, which has never been published. With the title "A Nation of Our Own", hopefully you can understand why.

I had already had one incident of consequence at SCI-Coal Township. The Warden refused to allow NOI services. The Warden had approved religious services for Warith Deen's followers but had steadfastly denied services for NOI. Chief Deputy Warden Shutt said, "Mr. Edwards, if NOI was just teaching religion we wouldn't have a problem. Our problem is that you are teaching 'black history' which could lead to other problems with population control."

As a part of working in the Library, I became familiar with the law while helping inmates handle their own appeals. So, it was easy for me to write an appeal requesting separate services for NOI. The Warden was pissed when we won and started having our own separate services. The FOI really appreciated my effort to get us our own services, but in the process, I was now the Warden's 'public enemy #1'. The Warden never forgot his defeat. And his opportunity for revenge would come soon.

The other incident occurred during yard one evening. Two older brothers stopped me to complain that the guard on the track had made them move each time he walked past them. The inmates walked clockwise, and the guards would walk counterclockwise on the yard's track.

I was in my late 40's, but these brothers are my 'old heads', one in his 60's, and one in his 70's. Who knows what went on in my mind at that moment, but I decided that if I was to be respected when I became an 'old head', I needed to show respect for my old heads at that moment in time?

I asked them to point out the guard, who was another arrogant young beefy white boy in his late 20's, maybe early 30's. I was 6'3" and weighed 240, all muscle.

I walked the next lap with my 'old heads' and as the guard approached, I turned my head and started talking to the brothers. I acted as if I didn't see the guard as I lowered my shoulder and buried it in his chest. I turned around in complete amazement and offered my apologies for not seeing him. That guard had to make an immediate decision regarding the incident, and he chose to accept my apology, notwithstanding my feigned ignorance.

He could have deemed it intentional, but by the time help arrived, he couldn't be saved. Luckily for the both of us he made the right call and said, "Mr. Edwards, please pay attention when you are walking on the track". I thanked him for his understanding and said, "I apologize, I wasn't paying attention. If I can ever be of help to you, don't hesitate to let me know".

I can't believe how quickly word of the incident spread throughout the jail. I was being hailed a hero for sticking up for the old heads. Why I risked the 'hole' for banging into a guard was a thought that never crossed my mind. I just wanted to correct an injustice for my brothers. All I had left was my sense of self respect, and I acted instinctively. Fear is never involved when you believe you are doing the right thing. Something I guess I inherited and learned from my dad.

But the most significant event of my incarceration occurred on August 14th, 1995. A riot developed at SCI-Cole Township. An inmate had asked another inmate could he have the uneaten bread on his tray. A guard saw the bread being passed from one 4-person table to the next 4-person table, which was against Dining Hall regulations.

When the guard told the inmate to pass the bread back, the inmate refused and cursed the guard, who called for assistance to remove the inmate from the Dining Hall. There were no 'body bags' as a result of the incident, but at least 25 inmates and 7 guards were hospitalized.

Once the riot broke out, the Warden declared a 'State of Emergency'. He then had 'police powers' to 'restore order'. I never did get to have lunch that day. A week later we had still not left our cells for any reason, including showers. I survived on corn flakes and cabbage sandwiches with mustard and mayonnaise. I traded the turkey ham on my tray for my cellmate's cabbage. As I was wolfing down my second cabbage sandwich, which was served for both lunch and dinner, I heard the Cell Block Door open and in came the storm troopers.

I couldn't figure out why they would be on our block, looking to lock up participants in the riot. No one on our cellblock was out of their cell during the outbreak. But it was clear they were on my block to perform a cell extraction on someone.

A cell extraction is when guards equipped in black riot gear and armed with pepper spray and electro-shock weapons forcibly enter a cell in order to overwhelm a prisoner, place them in hand and leg restraints, and move them to another cell by force. I was on the second tier, and as they moved up the stairs, I was still trying to figure out who they were coming for. Needless to say, when the lead guard said, “Edwards, move to the back of your cell, place your hands against the wall with your back to us, and spread your legs”, I knew.

When I asked why, I was told, “Remain silent, or you will be silenced”. I certainly had no intention of giving the ‘Gestapo’ a chance to beat on me, so I complied. When I arrived at the ‘hole’, where I spent 59 days without a ‘write up’, which meant there were no charges brought against me, my intake was done by the Major of the Guards, with his trusted Captain by his side. He actually said, “Edwards, I know the NOI had nothing to do with the riot, if for no other reason than the fact that there were no body bags carried out of here”.

The Major and I had dealt with each other sparingly, but we did respect each other. When I first got to Coal Township, the Major brought me in for a chat when he heard that I refused to take the TB vaccination. I said I didn’t want live TB injected into my system in order to create the antibodies that would ward off the disease. Once word spread that I had refused the vaccine, most of the inmates (including some Hispanic and white) refused as well.

The Major was calm and cool, which was why he was the head security officer. He pointed out to me one of the statutes governing prison life; it contained a section that said I could be taken to the ‘hole’, and forcibly injected with the virus, which is something he wanted to avoid.

I weighed the options and took the vaccine injection. He did thank me for helping him do his job. So, I thought it was okay for me to ask him why I was in the ‘hole’ if NOI had nothing to do with the riot. He said, “The Warden said you fucked with him regarding NOI services, and now it is his turn to fuck with you.”

I lost 49 pounds in the 59 days I was in the ‘hole’. Ten pounds of the loss came during the first five days I was in the hole. I told the Major and the Captain that I was going on a hunger strike and would not eat until they returned me to Gen Pop because I hadn’t broken any prison law or directive.

On the fifth day of my fast, Deputy Shutt came to visit me in the ‘hole’. He was the Major’s boss, with the Warden being his boss. Shutt came armed with another part of the penal code that said that if an inmate was considered insane, they had the authority to place him in a padded cell, restrain him with a strait jacket, and inject him with medication (Prozac and Thorazine). How could I win?

Shutt said that he, like the Major, wouldn't want to subject me to that treatment and that if I would end my hunger strike, he would help me get back into Gen Pop. The truth was that they didn't want my hunger strike to 'go public'.

After Deputy Shutt left, my next-door cell mate told me that he had experienced that treatment, and it wasn't what anyone would want to go through. First of all, there is no toilet in the cell for fear that one could commit suicide by cracking one's head against its side. Not that one could use a toilet anyway because one was constrained in a straitjacket for 23 hours a day, Monday through Friday, and 24 hours on Saturday and Sunday.

I ended my fast the next morning, but it took me writing a brief to the Pennsylvania Commissioner of Corrections to get released from "solitary" and returned to Gen Pop. The Order also contained a requirement that I be reclassified as a Level 1 inmate and sent to SCI-Waynesburg, the only facility in PA without a wall or fence. 54 days after Shutt had come to see me, I was released from the 'hole'.

While I was in the 'hole', two significant events occurred. Fortunately, I was kept informed on a daily basis by the white guards (there were no black guards at Cole Township). Farrakhan had organized the Million Man March, which took place on October 16th, 4 days before I was released from the 'hole'. O. J. Simpson had been found not guilty on October 3. I wonder if O.J. ever consciously thanked Farrakhan for his acquittal.

The thought of 1,000,000 black men being in Washington, DC two weeks later certainly had an impact on the jurors thinking. If black people would riot in Los Angeles over the injustice done to Rodney King three years earlier, what would 1,000,000 black men do in Washington, DC while demanding freedom, justice, and equality of opportunity, if they found OJ guilty?

The events caused me to pen the following on October 30, 1995:

OUR REALITY

**Amer Africans.
It's Time
To Wake Up
And Realize,**

**America
Has been our House**

**NOT Our Home,
And,**

**We have been
Under House Arrest,**

**For the Last
400 years.**

Kojo Lumumba Bandele

The Warden at Coal Township called me down for a talk the day before my transfer to Waynesburg. He didn't sound apologetic when he repeated, "Edwards, you fucked with me, and that's why I fucked with you. If you want to use some of those brains you have, then when you get to Waynesburg, be a fly on the wall and stay out of everything, including 'jailhouse' law."

It was advice I followed because I wanted to be with Renee and all of my children. I was on target to be released in 6 months to a halfway house in Philly, as long as I could avoid any trouble, which I had managed during my entire incarceration.

When I arrived at SCI-Waynesburg I was feeling pretty good about being released on my minimum sentence of 6-12 years. I still remember the promise that I had made on my way home from Accra, via Libya in 1990, my second foray to Africa trying to establish the University of Africa as the core of our new model city Umaxia (maximum unity), on the Continent.

I totally believed that the problem that Ralph and I had was not our idea, which Chancellor Williams would have called 'grandiose'. I felt the real reason we didn't get any traction with the countries involved was because, other than a 5-page treatment, we had nothing in writing that we could leave with folk for their reading and review. We didn't have a business plan for 'A Nation of Our Own'.

That's when I said to myself that if I had a roof over my head, one meal a day (I still followed the Messenger's teachings of eating once a day), and a warm place to sleep at night, I would write out the details of exactly how we, Amer Africans, could build our own nation, without the help of white people. I just didn't know my wish would be granted via a Pennsylvania prison term.

I was two months away from finishing the work when Waynesburg added me to their list of inmates. I always had in my mind that I would be released at the earliest possible time if I finished writing what I had promised to deliver. Brother Mustapha, the FOI Captain when I

arrived at Waynesburg, was a good brother and we hit it off immediately. I asked him to read my manuscript and offer his opinion.

“Brother Minister Kojo (I started using my African name at SCI-Coal Township), you have laid out why we need a nation of our own, and how our new nation will function. What I don’t see is how and where do we acquire the resources that we need to make this happen”? Mustapha was right. I hadn’t detailed what specific resources we needed to jump start our nation and where they would come from.

Mustapha’s observation enabled me to sustain the blow that I wasn’t leaving as I had thought. But six months later I finished the part that Mustapha had so astutely noticed was missing. The day was Thursday, April 10, 1997. I remember it so well because it was the start of the Master’s Golf Tournament in Augusta, GA, then the bastion of southern white supremacy. I wanted a confirmation that now that I had reduced to writing the document I promised, I would be released.

My son Khalif had graduated from both high school and college without me being there for him because of my incarceration. It is a hurt that will never abate.

He had made the football team as a walk-on in his sophomore year, so I watched the Stanford – Notre Dame Game on TV in the Day Room. I can’t possibly describe the pride, and pain, that simultaneously surged through my body when I saw #10 on the sidelines as the captains walked to the center of the field for the coin toss. My pride was based on all that he was able to accomplish without me being there for him. And the pain was due to my love for him, sitting in jail, without any way to express it.

Khalif had graduated the year before, but the Master’s Tournament in 1997, with Tiger Wood as an entrant, was World News. Tiger, himself a Stanford alumna, was about to make history. I told myself that if Tiger wins this tournament, it will be my sign that I am being released ASAP.

Tiger set 20 records, and tied 7 others, including winning his first start as a professional, twelve strokes ahead of Tom Kite, the runner-up. Tiger also became the youngest (21) and the first non-white player to win at Augusta. Woods’ victory set television records for golf, and the final round broadcast that Sunday in April was seen by an estimated 44 million viewers.

I was one of them, and as a black man, I was so proud, and loud, that for the final round on Sunday, I had the Day Room all to myself as I watched Tiger crush the field, ensuring my release, which notice came the next day, Monday, April 14, 1997. I silently thanked Tiger. ☺

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Renee borrowed her mom's car to pick me up in Waynesburg and we arrived at the Halfway House on Cecil B. Moore Boulevard and 16th Street, in the heart of North Philly, on a chilly afternoon in early May. My son Tariq met me when Renee and I arrived, and he literally gave me the coat off his back so that I could be warm.

I really didn't have a plan on what I would do upon my release. I had been away from the 'world' for 5 years, 3 months, and 2 days. Where would I begin, and how would I begin to form a new life and provide for my family?

My first Probation Officer was a stone-cold Negro, now a derogatory name, who told me that I had two conditions that I had to meet. I needed to get a job and I needed to find a place to serve my Community Service, which would last until I was released from the halfway house. He recommended that I try McDonald's Restaurant for a job, and maybe the American Red Cross or Salvation Army for my Community Service. I silently laughed at this confused and ignorant 'negro' who was, from my perspective, thoroughly brainwashed.

He also told me that I would never be allowed to go back into real estate development and construction management ever again. That's how much self-hatred that 'negro' possessed. He was expressing his own feelings of jealousy and envy. I was lucky I only had to deal with him for two months.

After him, I was assigned to a sister who was cool. She followed the book but had liberty to give me the space I needed to function as a human being. She encouraged me to get my own place and said she would allow me to go there on weekends as long I didn't violate my parole terms. That way my family could come up from Virginia on weekends and I could spend some time with them (5 people in a 1-bedroom studio apartment), and we were grateful.

My last P.O. was white. He said he had always wanted to be a Landscape Architect, but settled for his job as a P.O., and still owned a small landscape contracting company on the side. Needless to say, we hit it off immediately and my relationship with him helped me to really see, once again, that not all white people were the 'devil'. He actually allowed me to go to Accra, Ghana on a cultural trip, and vacation in St. Croix, USVI while I was on parole.

At that point in my life, it was a safe bet that I wasn't leaving my family to never return to America. I still wasn't sure of which way to go in life, meaning, how would I continue my search for freedom while making sure I could provide for my family, which I hadn't done in over

6 years? My time in Pennsylvania Correctional Institutions only exacerbated my desire to unshackle myself in every way.

The first thing that I knew I had to do was find a way to earn some money to take care of my family. Between the financial support of some of the old FOI, and some business associates, I was able survive while I decided my next move. I needed to find a business opportunity that would be a foundation that I could build on in my temporary return to the 'rat race'.

I was now feeling a new sense of freedom, but only because I was no longer behind bars. I had always maintained a positive mental attitude and I was confident that I would find a business opportunity that would allow me to provide for my family.

The first person on my list to contact was Sam Staten. Sam really felt guilty for testifying at my trial, which I told him I was fine with me. We had done nothing wrong. I told him to tell the truth, which he did, and we were good. My company had built the wall behind his Union Hall, and he paid my company a small fee for the effort.

The District Attorney's Office maintained my workers were City employees and should not have left the job site to go someplace else to perform work while on City of Philadelphia time, which was total bullshit (a great example of 'phishing' in its infancy). The project was based on a fixed contract price, not on a time and materials basis.

Sam, even though having been a member of NOI back in the day, didn't understand the whole thing was rigged, so my conviction really hurt him. No black man wants to be seen as 'diming' out another brother. When I called him, he asked what he could do to help me, and he did. In addition to giving me \$2,000 to stave off the foreclosure of the condo townhouse Renee had bought in Virginia Beach during my absence, he hired me as the Executive Directive of the Philadelphia Revitalization and Education Program (PREP), a program operated by the Laborers Union., which provided me an income, and a car.

My second call was to my accountant Wayne Leevy. Wayne, a true brother, was married to Laurie, a white woman. His marriage to Laurie, a woman with a true revolutionary 'spirit', was an enigma to the early days of the 'social' revolution sweeping America. When she told me, she had read **Message to the Black Man in America**, I accepted her as my friend. Wayne also offered to help.

I told him that I had found a potential real estate development deal in Lawnside and that if I couldn't raise the money to do the deal I was going to move to Atlanta. By then prison had taken a toll on me, but I was still willing to move forward and to 'persist' until I succeeded. I would earn money again, but this time, strictly for my family. My nation building days were over. I

was now clear that charity begins at home, and most importantly, that I must start with self-first and family, before I move to more ethereal goals.

Wayne said, “We can’t let you leave the City of Philadelphia brother. Let me make a few phone calls and arrange a luncheon with some people who might be willing to invest the money you need for your venture, including me”.

Wayne Bryant, and Rotan Lee, though late as usual, joined Leevy and me for lunch. For both Waynes, the investment was a no-brainer. Leevy was my accountant and would perform the yearly company audit, and Bryant would handle the closings for each home sale. They had made money with me before as professionals, and now they would be my partner and get a piece of each deal as well.

Wayne Leevy said that he would call Dr. Lomax to see if he would be interested in investing \$40,000 for the other 20% of AREDI that I was offering; I felt good about the idea. With Doc knowing that Wayne Leevy, then the Vice Chairman of Mitchell, Titus, the largest black accounting firm in America, and Wayne Bryant, a New Jersey State Senator with one of the largest black law firms in New Jersey, had both given me their checks for \$20,000 each, I figured they represented all of the credibility I needed with Doc.

I had moved my family to New Jersey in the summer of 1998, just after my stint at the halfway house had ended. The first \$40,000 was spent on my salary of \$5,000/month, as well as the architect’s retainer, and a deposit to keep the property off the market while I worked.

I also had to hire an outside counsel to represent me before Lawnside Borough Council and the Lawnside Planning Board because Wayne Bryant’s brother Mark was now the Mayor of Lawnside, while Wayne himself was a newly minted New Jersey State Senator, having risen through the political ranks, first as a Camden County Freeholder, and then as a New Jersey Assemblyman. Greg became my General Counsel again.

When John Bishop’s secretary rang the doorbell at 54 Bradford Way that Tuesday morning, the day after Labor Day, I was expecting her. She had come to deliver the final construction drawings and pick up the balance of what I owed them. I needed the drawings to submit to the bank for financing. But she said John had told her to not give me the drawings unless I gave her a check for the balance due, which was \$5,000 that I didn’t have.

Doc had met with me at Wayne Leevy’s request but had declined to invest the remaining \$40,000 that I needed to complete the deal. I was so close, and yet so far. I told Judy that I didn’t have the money. I called John and he sincerely apologized, and reminded me that if I

didn't pay him, he would be in jeopardy of closing his office, as seemed destined for me to do. I thanked him, and Judy left with the drawings that I so desperately needed to move forward.

I found a corner in the unfurnished Living Room and while sitting up with my back against the wall, I curled up into a pre-natal fetal position and asked myself, "What's next"? I had read **Think and Grow Rich, The Magic of Believing, How to Win Friends and Influence People,** and my favorite of all time, **The Greatest Salesman in the World.** I thought I had used all of the principles in those books to develop a positive mental attitude. I had remained alive and thrived in the prison world because of some of those principles.

All I could think of was Og Mandino's 2nd Scroll, which says, "I will persist until I succeed". Within 5 minutes of sitting in that position, wondering what to do next, my cell phone rings. It was Charles Lomax, one of Doc's three sons.

"Ernest, my dad has changed his mind. We want to invest. We have a check here for \$40,000, how can we get it to you"?

"Wow Charles, that's great news. I'm on my way out of the door right now. I'll be at your office in an hour." My blessings continued, and I am an atheist.

On January 29, 1999, less than 2 years after my release from prison, in the office of Wayne Leevy, Vice Chairman of Mitchell, Titus and Company, located on the 29th floor at One Logan Plaza, the organizational meeting of American Real Estate Development, Inc. was called to order at 1:00 pm. I chose the name to signal to the 'authorities' that I was no longer a 'revolutionary'; that I had 'come in from the cold'. But in reality, I was following the advice from Henry Feinberg, 'perception is everything'.

Dr. Lomax was elected the Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and I was elected President and Chief Operating Officer (COO). Renee was elected as Vice President, with Wayne Leevy being elected as Treasurer, and Allen (Sandy) Zeller, Wayne Bryant's law partner, as the Secretary. I felt that I was now in a position to rebuild my career. I had the three best business partners that any black man in Philadelphia, and probably the USA, could ever hope to have.

The respect the Amer African community had for Dr. Walter "Bubby" Lomax, Wayne Leevy, CPA, and Wayne Bryant, Esquire, individually, and collectively, clothed me in a garment of 'acceptance' and 'welcome back home'. I now had a lawyer, an accountant, and a medical doctor as business partners. Their investment was a clarion call to our community that I was not the thief and liar that the white establishment had portrayed.

In fact, I was fortunate when I returned home. Some folks saw me as a hero for weathering and surviving a 5-year prison term for something they knew that I wasn't guilty of. Honestly, I even had white people express their regret. One day I was in downtown Philly and an elderly white woman, while passing me on the street say she wanted to apologize to me for the 'lynching' I received by the 'City of Philadelphia'.

The first thing I did, while waiting for Doc's check to clear, was to write a check to John Bishop, the architect, and pick up the construction drawings so I could submit them to the bank for the loan approval to start "The Estates at Lion's Gate", my 51-home subdivision in Lawnside, designed and priced to attract 'first time buyers', and active adults (55+) looking to downsize and/or move out of the City of Philadelphia.

I judged the market correctly and sold out the entire subdivision within a time frame that allowed a nice profit to Doc and AREDI. I felt as if I was finally going to build the family-owned business that my children could inherit. My good fortune was still with me. Irony of all ironies was the fact that it was the same ground that I had received approval to build 100 Senior Citizens housing over 20 years earlier. The land had transferred twice, but I had bought it back with the help of Doc, Wayne, and Wayne.

While Tamida, Tariq, and Qamara handled the Estates at Lion's Gate, I jumped on the opportunity to purchase a 20-acre parcel contiguous to Lion's Gate. With the success we were having with Lion's Gate, Doc was agreeable to lending me the money to purchase the property with the agreement being that I would repay the loan for the land and find my own financing to build out the subdivision as AREDI, without his money. I readily agreed to that proviso.

I was introduced to the Community Preservation Corporation (CPC) by Yuri Kletsman, a financial broker that I had engaged, who matched lenders and "minority" developers looking for loans to provide housing for the African American market. I was now opened to dealing with anyone who could help me achieve my objectives, including white people. Even though the homes in 'The Woods at River Run', the name of our new subdivision, were initially priced from \$479,000 to \$579,000, we still qualified under CPC's guidelines.

They approved AREDI's loan. CPC's loan agreement stipulated that all shareholders owning more than 9% of the company's stock had to guarantee the Loan. It meant that Wayne, Wayne, and Doc would have to return their stock to me because none of them were willing to guarantee the \$4,100,000 line of credit that CPC had agreed to extend to AREDI. They had gotten their money back and made a profit on their investment in the Estates at Lion's Gate, so they were fine. They were happy to have helped me 'come back'.

I now had 100% ownership of my company and I had a \$4,100,000 loan to begin my next project. The Woods at River Run, a subdivision with 25 homes that all sold from \$479,000 to \$629,000, was successful. AREDI grossed over \$15,000,000 in sales over a 3-year period, while establishing a family-owned business that was ready to reach for the stars.

I had an agreement to purchase over 100 acres of ground that bounded a golf course in the Research Triangle of Chapel Hill, Raleigh, and Durham, home to UNC, NC State, and Duke Universities, a seat of prowess in College Basketball, as well as serious 'research'. The land was only 3 miles from a North Carolina State Park that supported boating and fishing. I envisioned the development for whoever could afford it. It was my sense that a diverse market was something we would achieve.

From the time I met with Tom Ganaris in late 2002 to discuss buying his 20-acre parcel of land (it would later become The Woods at River Run), until the time I closed my loan with CPC in March of 2005, over 2 ½ years had gone by. And during that period, the year 2003 was one of the best years of my life. It seemed as if the sun shined every day that summer.

The most important event that occurred that year was on Saturday, August 9th. My dad's 90th birthday was August 8th, and Renee helped me plan and execute a true 'happy' birthday party for my dad at our home on Lion's Gate Drive, in Lawnside.

It took me a long time to know my dad. I had worked at his barbershop on weekends from the time I was 8, until the time I was 15, but there was never any father/son interact, per se. Men in the barbershop would call me "little Joe Louis" because of my resemblance to the Champ. My dad would always proudly retort, "Junior is smart, and is going to go to college to get an education. He won't have to fight people or depend on 'white folk' for a job. One day he will be in business for himself". It was only after my release from my 'sabbatical' and the experience I was undergoing to re-build a business for my family that I truly appreciated my dad.

As I said, I was always a momma's boy. I loved my mom. Everything she made me do was always in my best interests, and somehow, I instinctively knew that. I didn't have any sisters, and after my brother Freddie died at the age of 8, I was 10 at the time, I only had my 3-year-old brother Fareed (Curtis back then) left as a sibling. So, it fell on me to do all of the household chores, with my mother always justifying it by saying that she was teaching me how to take care of myself, just in case I married a lazy woman, which is something she would never have allowed me to do.

My mom made sure I joined organizations like the YMCA and the Boy Scouts, and always attended my parent/teacher conferences to make sure I was a good student. My mom had only

reached the 10th grade before she dropped out of high school to join the work force to bring money into the house for her family to survive.

Both of my parents, having to leave school early, against their wishes, were determined that their children would have the opportunity that they were denied. So, it goes without saying that their first born was surely going to get an education, and that meant not just a high school diploma, but a university degree as well.

My mom had her sights set on me being a doctor, an idea probably born because some of the wealthy white families she worked for were doctor-headed households. My dad wanted me to be an engineer, probably because the engineering department at Ford Motor Company was where the top earners performed.

My mother worked as a domestic for white families, scrubbing their floors, cleaning their bathrooms, making up their beds, and washing and ironing their clothes so that I could attend high school and college in decent clothes and with food in my stomach.

When I was younger, my mom worked in ‘sweat shops’, where women sat over sewing machines in cramped hot conditions, making the clothes that would be sold to the ‘white’ folk who lived in suburbia.

The stigma of my mom being a domestic worker has never left me. Both my mom and my dad literally ‘slaved’ so that I could have a better life. By the time I got to Rutgers, I was conscious of the sacrifices that my parents had made so that my brothers and I could have a better life. I was also becoming conscious of the suffering my parents had experienced because of racism. I was determined to find a way to break that ‘chain of slavery’; and in the process, I learned the importance of sacrifice and hard work.

My dad always left for work before 5:00 am to go to work on the assembly line at Ford, and rarely returned before 6:00 pm, so the only meal I ate with my dad was on Sunday. My mom was there for my breakfast, made my lunch, and had me showered, fed, and ready for bed as my dad was coming home on most nights.

Only later, as a father myself, could I begin to understand that my dad also contributed to my growth and development as a man. But as a child, all I saw and understood was what my mother was doing for me, completely oblivious to my dad’s contributions. The bond between a mother and son, once established, is a bond that can’t be broken. I know that fact first-hand.

Fifteen years after my mom’s death, I was finally coming to grips with the simple fact that my dad deserved to be happy and enjoy his life. And if that meant my dad meeting and dealing with

another woman, I had to understand and accept that it was okay. My mom was no longer here, and he wasn't committing adultery against her.

Once I got over that hurdle, which caused me to have a deep-seated, subconscious anger toward my dad, I was able to truly love my dad for all that he gave to us as a family. I was able to forgive him for the pain and anguish he caused my mom because of his intermittent dalliances. I was just thankful that my dad had lived to be 90 years old, and he could spend a wonderful day with his family and friends.

We couldn't have asked for better weather. The sun was shining, the sky was a clear blue, the temperature was in the mid 80's, and a nice balmy breeze swayed the grove of the pine/oak stand where we placed his throne (a high-back wicker fan chair popularized by brother Huey P. Newton, the assassinated Chairman of the Black Panther Party). I say throne because that day, my dad was 'King'.

He had always been a lady's man, a tradition carried on by my brothers Fareed and Bobby. I can assure you that every woman in attendance gladly honored his request to, "come give daddy a hug and kiss". As I watched my dad on his throne, euphoric is the best word that I can use to describe my feelings as he smiled and truly enjoyed every moment of the attention he was receiving from everyone.

When the procession of folk stopping to offer their birthday greetings to my dad wound down, I had to ask my dad a burning question that had been on my mind. I sidled up to his throne, leaned to his ear, and whispered, "Daddy, with all of the alcohol you drank in your life, how did you live to be 90 years old"? My dad was a vigorous 90 and had to be one of Viagra's biggest customers, so contrary to popular belief; I didn't see how alcohol could affect anyone's libido. He looked at me and said, "Junior, I only drank good stuff".

I also took the occasion to name the cul-de-sac where our new home was to be built after my dad. Our new home address would be 9 Edwards Court.

The year 2003 was also the best because it was the year our family business, American Real Estate Development, Inc. (AREDI) was in full bloom. I had been out of everyone's life for at least 6 years. And now I was reunited with them in a big way. Tamida was the COO (Chief Operating Officer), Tariq was CCO (Chief Construction Officer), and Qamara was CMO (Chief Marketing Officer). They all built new homes for themselves.

My brother Bobby was also working with us. Khalif, recently back from the West Coast, was at Columbia University in NYC working on his MBA, with an emphasis on Real Estate and Finance. He worked for AREDI as a laborer during his summer at Columbia. Zaki was at Old

Dominion University in Norfolk, VA, and Akima was at Stanford University, in Palo Alto, CA. Hafeeza lived with us a short while during her matriculation at LaSalle University, where she received her MBA degree. I couldn't have been prouder of my family.

Gail, my first wife, was a successful banker who had served on Rutgers-the State University's Board of Governors, and Renee had just received her New Jersey Real Estate Broker's License. We had family dinners that included all of my children, and Renee was gracious enough to suggest that Gail join us as well.

In Og Mandino's book, **The Greatest Salesman in the World**, there is a passage that says, "*True wealth is of the heart, not of the purse.*" There can be no greater feeling of wealth for any man than to see his family together, happy and smiling, without any financial constraint shackling them. The tranquility didn't last forever, but for the next five years we bathed in the warm waters of success that AREDI provided.

With all that I had been through, I had finally achieved my goal of a family-owned business. It was a business that sold a product to the Amer African market, something I felt I could live with. I was still in America. And even though it only lasted 5 years before the Great Recession of 2007-2008, the success we enjoyed was enough to fill my memory with a happiness that will last the rest of my life.

EPILOGUE

My dad died on Father's Day, June 18, 2006, at the age of 93. I had been there with him in the hospice for over a week and I intended to stay by his side until he passed. He insisted that I go home to New Jersey and be with my children for Father's Day. When I told him that I needed to be with him, he gave me a direct order and told me to go home and be with my wife and children.

I had never disobeyed a direct order from him, the consequences were too dire, so I left that Saturday morning, and I told him that I would be back Monday afternoon. I'm sure that my dad didn't want me there with him to witness his passing, probably because he knew the pain his death would cause me if I were there.

Fareed's children, as well as mine, all attended his funeral in Ocala, FL. One month later, Renee and I were at the Ritz-Carlton in Marina Del Rey, CA for Khalif and Vicky's wedding. I was once again with all of my children in one setting. I had found out back in 2000 that Khalif was dating white women, but I had never thought, for one minute, that one of my children would fall in love with and marry a white person. It was unfathomable.

But there we were, on August 25, 2006, among a crowd of 100 invited guests for the nuptials. Vicky's dad, Palle Mathiesen, born and raised in Denmark but living in Southern California, was a no-show. There may have been other reasons, but racism was one of them. Vicky's mother and uncle, her mother's brother who flew in from Denmark, escorted her down the aisle.

To my knowledge, my grandsons Brayden and Kalen have never met their grandfather Palle. I can only hope that someday hearts will be softened, for Brayden and Kalen's benefit. I can only presume Palle would want that too, but he and I have never spoken, so I don't know.

In the fall of 2001, I found out that Zaki was also dating a white girl. Renee and I were on our way to our townhouse in Virginia Beach for the weekend. We intended to spend some time with her mom and dad in Portsmouth, as well as visit our son Zaki at Old Dominion, in Norfolk, VA where he chose to matriculate. Zaki told me that if he wasn't in his dorm room, check with his girlfriend Kira, two doors down the hall from his room.

I only knew of black Kiras: I didn't know Kira was a big-time Irish name. So, when Kira opened the door, I asked if Kira was available. She said, "I'm Kira." Who knows what expression my face bore; but I have to believe it bordered on shock? I hope I recovered enough to be respectful.

And two years after Khalif and Vicky's wedding, Qamara brings her boyfriend Mike Weinrich over to the house to meet me and Renee. By then I knew that Qamara dated white guys, but now she was bringing over someone she wanted us to meet, which could only have meant one thing. They have been together ever since.

Zaki and Kira were married on October 1, 2011, five years after Khalif and Vicky, in our home in Lawnside, a far different setting than the Ritz Carlton in Marina Del Rey. But both scenes portrayed the same message. This time it was both of Kira's parents who didn't attend.

Greg and Kim Frisby are Republicans who voted for Donald J. Trump and only see their grandsons when Zaki and Kira take them to her mom and dad's house. When Zaki and Kira started dating, Kim Frisby actually told her daughter that she was making the greatest mistake of her life to hook up with a black man. I am thankful that my son Zaki no longer tries to prove her wrong. His success in life is proof.

I never raised my children with 'religion'. I felt that I didn't need to pour anything into those innocent vessels, particularly something that I didn't believe in anymore. I wanted them to decide for themselves, once they were grown, what their 'theism' or 'atheism' would be.

I never told my children to hate white people; but as many times as I called the white man the 'devil', I am sure they drew the conclusion that that is how I felt about white people. Hatred is an emotion I have never felt, nor preached, so I am 'blessed'.

I can honestly say that I have also been blessed because I have never felt jealousy or envy regarding any human being. The pride my dad instilled in me was sufficient to overcome that ugly human affliction.

Over seven years had passed, and a lot had changed in my business life, and personal life. The economic repercussions of the Great Recession of 2008 had not abated, and I was out of business. Renee and I had separated. My divorce from Gail, was caused by my 'mistress' NOI. Renee endured my 'mistress', "A Nation of Our Own."

I am thankful and grateful that I did not follow in my dad's footsteps regarding philandering. That may have been easier on my marriages than my search for freedom for me, my family, and my people. Khalif and Vicky, and Zaki and Kira both had two sons born during this period, so in addition to Hafeeza's son Ramsey, I now had 5 grandsons.

On November 20, 2018; my son Tariq stopped by his sister Tamida's house in Lawnside, NJ, my permanent address in the US. I had moved to Grenada in December of 2013, but I was at

Tamida's house because I had just had major spinal surgery at Mount Sinai Hospital in NYC on October 29th (my second 13-14-hour surgery in less than 16 months).

Fortunately, my neurosurgeon, Dr. Tanvir Choudhri cleared me for travel to my son Zaki's house in Chesapeake, Virginia for Thanksgiving.

Tariq, being his usual self, spoke what was on his mind, most times with anger. But this time, Tariq gleefully said,

“See, all that black stuff you talked; now you got white grandkids.”

By then, I understood why Tariq was angry; so openly I responded to him with nothing more than a smile. But inwardly, WOW!

That ‘bowed me over’ and ‘knocked me for a loop’ simultaneously. I had never considered my grandsons to be white. All I saw were my cool little guys who I loved and adored. How could I ever judge my grandchildren by the color of their skin? They are me, and I am them. Their talent, skill, and ability in life, which comes from their biochemical genetic makeup, as well as where they are raised, and the cultural influences in their environment, will determine who they are, and what they will become. And that judgment is for their parents, who are well qualified, to make.

Khalif and Vicky had flown in from California for Thanksgiving at Gail's house in Marlton, NJ and would arrive in time for an early luncheon that Hafeeza had planned at “Dave and Buster's” in Philadelphia that Wednesday. Since Qamara, Mike and I weren't leaving until mid-Wednesday afternoon to drive to Zaki's in Virginia, we all had time to meet. Hafeeza planned for us to get together because she wanted Ramsey to see his uncle, aunt, and his cousins Brayden and Kalen from LA; and also, to see his Aunt Qamara and Uncle Mike, as well his grandfather.

Words can't express my pride at seeing everyone together. I really enjoyed our get together. I watched three of my children, Khalif, Hafeeza, and Qamara, with my children-in-law Vicky and Mike, talking and laughing as one happy family; and I saw my grandsons Ramsey, Brayden, and Kalen playing together as brothers. I was with three of my grandsons, and I was on my way to see the other two later that day. Qamara drove the entire 5 hours and we arrived in Chesapeake, VA just in time for me to hug and kiss my grandsons Tyce and Cade before they were put to bed.

The five of us then played our favorite family card game, “Oh, Hell”. While we were laughing and challenging each other in the game, I saw the way Kira really loved Zaki, and the way Mike really loved Qamara. I had just seen Khalif and Vicky earlier that day, and the way they fawned over each other. It was at that point that I realized they were happy couples, and race had

nothing to do with the choice they had made for mates. I was happy that they had found someone to love, and someone who loved them equally as well.

Two of three of my children's spouses had one parent or both, who were racists; and disapproved of their daughters' marriages to black men. Fortunately, Mike's parents, born and raised in Northumberland County, PA, where I was incarcerated for 2 ½ years, were cool. Mike's dad voted for Donald Trump (as did Kira's parents), and his mom voted for Hillary Clinton. We went to a few Phillies baseball games and had a few dinners together, thoroughly enjoying ourselves, so we were fine.

And all of this was in addition to me having my experiences before prison, in prison, and after prison, with white people who were people, not racists. I am thankful and grateful that I had arrived at a position of knowing that 'good' and 'bad' can be ascribed to any human being, depending on their biochemical genetic composition, the geological and geographical environment in which they were raised, and the cultural influences that formed their lives.

It was now clear to me that melanin, a pigment of color, had nothing to do with the behavior of a human being. The racism that was directed at me and the racism of my own directed at others, was learned behavior based on false information, just good old-fashioned lies.

A light went on and I realized that I had been a victim of the false narrative of racism, a man-made construct that divided human beings. It was developed by the 'ruling elite', and it is the fundamental underpinning of their paradigm called capitalism, along with its two able-bodied assistants, democracy, and religion.

When I woke up November 22, Thanksgiving morning, at Zaki's and Kira's house I could feel Nina Simone's song, a soft gentle melodic message, moving over my body, washing me. I felt cleansed. The song now had a dual meaning because I knew how I wanted to know what freedom was; and now because I was at that point, free.

The song is titled:

I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free.

**I wish I knew how it would feel to be free
I wish I could break all the chains holding me
I wish I could say all the things I should say
Say'em loud, say'em clear
For the whole round world to hear**

**I wish I could share all the love that's in my heart
Remove all the bars that keep us apart
I wish you could know what it means to be me
Then you would see and agree
That every man should be free**

**I wish I could give all I'm longing to give
I wish I could live like I'm longing to live
I wish that I could do all the things that I can
Though I'm way overdue to be starting anew**

**Well, I wish I would be like the bird in the sky
How sweet it would be if I found I could fly
Oh, I'd soar to the sun and look down at the sea**

**And I'd sing cos I'd know that
I'd know how it feels to be free.**

I now know how it feels to be free.

Once again, there are probably as many definitions of 'freedom' as there are human beings on our home, Mother Earth. I can only offer mine.

Having been incarcerated for over 5 years, I can totally relate to the physical concept of 'being free of restraints. I lived in a 9'x6' cell, was handcuffed periodically, and was in leg-irons at least once a year; all courtesy of evil, wicked, unrighteous, immoral, unjust, and corrupt people. How dare I exercise the human desire to be free, and the entrepreneurial spirit to do for self? And don't forget that living inside a 30-foot-high walled and/or barbed wire fenced facility 'ain't' a joke.

The more important restraint that I was free from was the unshackling of my mind. Racism had done its job on me. But it is now over. I can now enjoy the freedom of deciding about another human being based on the content of their character, not the color of their skin. I am also now free of the restraints of the man-made economic, political, and religious ideologies that exist to perpetuate the 'power' of the 'ruling elite'.

Capitalism and Communism, Republican and Democrat, Christian, Muslim, and Jew have no meaning to me anymore. The only group I am a member of is the human species. I will no longer allow the artificial boxes that folk reside in to confine me or define me.

An important line in Nina's song says, "I wish you could know what it means to be me, then you would see and agree, that every man should be free." Unless you have been enslaved, detained, and/or oppressed, it is very difficult to really know the true meaning of 'liberty'.

White folk need to stop saying they understand how black people feel. It's like telling your friend that you can understand his pain at the loss of his wife, or the loss of his child. If you haven't lost a lifelong mate, or your child, then you haven't experienced, and therefore, can't understand their pain.

One of the elements of my freedom is the exhilarating feeling that I now experience because I am released from mental slavery; I am free from the detention of Capitalism and Democracy; and I am no longer oppressed by the belief that the Caucasian is "God". I am liberated from the absurd notion of Capitalism as a viable economic ideology. It is for the 'ruling elite', but not for the other 99.9% of the people on Earth. I must once again repeat the quote by Mayer Amschel Rothschild.

"Let me issue and control a nation's currency and I care not who makes the laws."

These words, uttered by Rothschild in 1790, make it abundantly clear that "Economics" governs the world. Present politics is an exercise for the masses, just to keep them occupied, mummified and dummified.

Mentally I recognize that I am my own 'authority', thereby providing myself with immunity from the arbitrary exercise of external authority via propaganda and false narratives. I have civil rights because I am a member of 'homo sapiens.'

I have exempted myself from the 'unpleasant' and 'onerous' condition called 'America'. I am no longer subject to the 'rat race, and all that that entails.

Living in a capitalist world where one has no access to 'capital' 'ain't' easy. Time does not permit me to go into the concept of the development of the "Company Town", but suffice it to say, the entire planet Earth is one "Company Town", owned and controlled by the 'ruling elite'.

And since I didn't have the requisite power to change things, I followed Maya's advice and changed my attitude. I also followed my dad's advice. I 'quit' America; I now live in Grenada.

I have found this tropical oasis to be populated by the kindest and most gentle people you will meet anywhere on this planet. 92% of Grenadians are of African descent, with the other 8% made up of British, Canadian, German, Italian, Syrian, and East Indian descent.

It is one of the few places on Earth where I have found the admonition of Dr. Martin Luther King to be a living reality. There may be other factors, such as education, income, or religious affiliation when one is judging folk here in Grenada, but race is nowhere to be found in a Grenadian's assessment of the worth of another human being. Interracial marriage is very common in Grenada and is equally mixed with spouses from all of the cultures mentioned.

I truly appreciate the fact that the temperature, on average, ranges from a low of 76 degrees at night to a high of 86 degrees during the day. We have 300 days of sunshine, because even during the Rainy Season, we still see the sun, even if only intermittently. The Caribbean Sea on the Western side of the island is so crystal clear that when I stand in water up to my shoulder (I'm 6'3" tall), and look down at my feet, I can see the fish swimming near them.

When I first arrived in Grenada, I was told that living here would add 5-10 years to my life expectancy. Eight years in, I am a true believer. And speaking of fish, the local fish market, open six days a week, sells the best fresh fish, at a small fraction of the price sold in America. Porgies, Red Snapper, Mahi-Mahi, Yellow Fin Tuna, White Albacore Tuna, and Swordfish are just a few of the fresh catch available each day. I have access to all of the Omega-3's I will ever need.

And the fruits and vegetables, also sold at a small fraction of the cost in the US, are organically grown in the richest soil found anywhere on Earth, which is why Grenada has rightfully earned the title "Spice Island". Nutmeg, cinnamon, ginger, basil, oregano, rosemary, thyme, curry, sage, turmeric, pepper, and vanilla are just a few of the wonderful spices that factor into every meal prepared here.

Second to Cuba (which has the lowest crime rate); Grenada is the safest island to live on in the Caribbean. Imagine living where 'black on black' crime is limited to domestic disputes, usually settled at a village gathering, or the civil court. But Grenada is first in hospitality, beauty, and natural resources. Additionally, being a former British territory, the national language is English.

I feel 'blessed'. There is nothing compelling that I must do each day. I don't consider 'doing for self' to be a compelling task. In fact, it is a very pleasant responsibility. I enjoy my daily walks and my weekly swims. I enjoy my meal planning, meal prep, and cooking because I know the end result will be a sumptuous, healthy, and delicious meal. The 15-20-minute cleanup is well worth the exercise. The 'labor of love' is never labor when you love what you do.

I know that I am not totally 'off the grid', but I believe that I am doing better than most at exercising my free will to do what I want, when I want, and how I want, each day, for the rest of my life.

I also have physical and mental freedom of movement. Slavery ensured that constraint. To this day it continues to stifle the growth and development of Amer Africans, notwithstanding the fact that we were born in America, and should have enjoyed the protection and the benefit of the 'law of the land'.

The "Information Age" now provides an opportunity to transmit information at a rate of speed that man is still trying to totally understand the mechanics of. There is duality (positive and negative, good, and evil, right, and wrong) in "All Existence".

I feel 'blessed' because I move about as directed by me, based on my value system, and the experiences that have led me to this point in my life. Grenada is only 140 square miles, but it provides all of the facility of movement my life requires (the fulfillment of my needs and wants).

Human beings have unrestricted use, and full access to all they need in order to take control over their own lives. But I am not naïve in that regard. I know that for this to occur worldwide, there must a mental awakening, a freeing of the mind, as well as many types of 'social' programs (health care, education, and income opportunity) in place to aid in ameliorating the hundreds, and in some instances, thousands of years of human suffering, just for the benefit of the 'few'.

Until the 'ruling elite' no longer hold sway, humans, unfortunately, will have restricted and limited access to the basic necessities of life, food, clothing, shelter, health care, education, communication, and transportation. And more importantly, until white folk are willing to share their accumulated, stolen wealth, the battle for freedom will rage on.

Thankfully, I am free to enjoy unrestricted and full use of a part of my home, Earth. But until all People are free, I accept the fact that I am still not ultimately free.

I wish I could express, in words, how I feel to know that I am a member of world citizenship. The racism that is embedded in the economics, politics and religion of this world that had separated me from my privileges of world citizenship is now dead.

What lives is the desire to better know my brothers and sisters, and to forgive them for the error of their ways, as I ask them to forgive me for the error of my ways. We have all been '**hoodwinked**', '**flimflammed**', and '**bamboozled**'.

We must get over it and move on. Life' is a continuing process, and each day, a new discovery for me.

Thank you for your time, attention, interest, and indulgence.
Peace, Love, and Blessings.

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My parents, Ernest and Johnnye Lee Edwards are first and foremost. And not just because they birthed me, but because they raised me with a love that guided, directed, and protected me as I grew to be who I am. It was, and is, their love that has allowed me to attain the freedom that I now enjoy. Since I have never lacked love, I can't say that one needs love to experience freedom, but I am clear that the love my parents had for me, and the love I have for them is the reason I am free today.

“Happiness is not a goal; it is a by-product.”

Eleanor Roosevelt

I agree with Eleanor. In fact, I would go so far as to say that my goal for freedom produced the by-product that I call happiness, with ‘love’, as the prerequisite for both.

I must also acknowledge Renee and the love she had for me, which was reciprocal. I had always wanted to do more for her because of all she had always done for me, and she did the same relative to me.

My brother Fareed, without a doubt, has had my back, and I have had his throughout our lives. Our love for each other is something no one can come between. He, along with my children, are the people who I will sacrifice my life for. That's how important they have been and continue to be in my life.

My children will never truly know my love for them as a result of the odyssey that I have been on, but my love for them is the reason this writing exists. I can only hope that they understand.

And lastly, my friend and brother, Dr. Douglas Greenberg and my friend and sister, Dr. Patricia Montgomery aided me in this writing effort. Without them and their editing skills, this book wouldn't exist. Trish helped me get started, and Doug took over and carried me to the finish line. Along the way, my son Zaki, my ex-wife Gail Powers, Lloyd ‘Didn't’ Scott and Laurie Leslie Leevy also provided invaluable assistance and support.

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