

Black Pearls of Wisdom

David Walker, Maria Stewart, Frederick Douglass, Henry Highland Garnet, Harriet Tubman, John M. Langston, John Brown, Abraham Lincoln, Sojourner Truth, Martin R. Delany, Benjamin "Pap" Singleton, Alexander Crummell, Anna J. Cooper, Booker T. Washington, Henry McNeal Turner, Moses Fleetwood Walker, W. E. B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, A. Philip Randolph, Marcus Garvey, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Mary McLeod Bethune, Father Divine, Charles Hamilton Houston, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., Paul Robeson, Fannie Lou Hamer, Lyndon Baines Johnson, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, Huey P. Newton, Angela Davis, Jesse Jackson, Barack Obama

Black Pearls of Wisdom

Voicing the African-American Journey for Freedom, Empowerment, and the Future

Edited by
Donald Spivey



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Preface

Martin Luther King, Jr. asked a profound question years ago that is just as important to us today: “Where do we go from here?” Today’s America is plagued with the burden of racism, sexism, classism, and other isms too numerous to mention. We have in America, and indeed in the world, an economy that has left the overwhelmingly vast majority of the people drowning in a sea of unfairness, inequity, and exploitation that speaks pointedly to an order that places profits above humanity and materialistic gain above the rights, privileges, wellness, security, and decency of life of the majority. But the solution or solutions are in “the past before us.” There is much to be learned from the wisdom of the elders, and today’s African Americans, American society in general, and much of the world would do well to heed the messages that the thirty-five visionary leaders assembled here bequeathed us.

We better heed them for we are going backward not forward. In an America where the middle class moves each day closer to complete annihilation, black America as usual is the bellwether to the storm. It is no exaggeration to state that black Americans and the so-called African-American communities are today at their lowest ebb since the end of Reconstruction and the heydays of Jim Crow and the color line. The unemployment rate of blacks in some urban communities now tops fifty percent and there is no end in sight. The future of African-American males finds that at least three in ten will either spend time in prison or have some serious run-in with the legal system. The overall educational level of black America continues to be problematic with the highest percentage of black folk failing to finish high school since the early 1960s. Our major cities are decaying relics of what they once were. And no group finds itself more downtrodden and hopeless than black Americans. African Americans and all Americans should be asking themselves: Where do we go from here? What do we do now? How do I help myself? Is there any solution to the problems we as a people face?

History is foundation and context. It is also the roadmap, the beacon that offers understanding and direction. “What is past is prologue” is an apt phrase often cited. The voices of wisdom and solutions have been with us dating back over a hundred years. The readers are urged to imbibe the warnings, insights, and courses of action of the great minds assembled in this collection. Their insights are surprisingly timeless and invaluable. We would all do well to listen and learn from the rich tapestry of opinions and analyses offered. Whether trying to figure out how the system works or what plan to embrace and implement to circumvent today’s multifaceted barriers to personal and group advancement, the elders speak and we should listen to what they have to say. They speak of freedom, social justice, and solutions to the American dilemma that range from overcoming slavery to achieving equality, from black separatism and African repatriation to building power bases and gaining economic independence, from working within the system to armed resistance against it.

White America always fares better than black, and that has never changed. But even white America is suffering under the unbridled yoke of a vicious capitalism gone wild.

Hence, blacks, browns, whites, and all groups, men and women, can benefit from a reading of the words of wisdom and guidance from the prominent historical voices brought together in this anthology, black America in particular. These powerful and thought-provoking essays, these words of wisdom from some of the greatest minds in African-American history, challenge and inspire.

Each pearl of wisdom begins with a brief background to the speaker and the document selected. Several questions are posed for the reader to consider. In each case, the reader is encouraged to interpret, contemplate, extrapolate, and to think through, on one's own terms, the ideas expressed with an eye to the past, the present, and the future. As Mary McLeod Bethune often said, "Knowledge Is Power."

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