

Laughter That Heals

The great thing about the history of black America and the methods African American leadership has used to seek full equality and acceptance in this country is that there have been many roads to that goal. Yes, the great social, political, legal and even military movements that have been conducted to free African Americans from slavery and achieve full citizenship were crucial. And the great black leadership of dynamic personalities like Martin Luther King and George Washington Carver have made things possible that would never have been possible otherwise.

But not all of the gains in society have been achieved through tears and anger. In fact, some great black leadership can be found in a place one never would think to look. It can be found in the stand up comedy night clubs and on forward thinking television shows as black comedians helped everybody, black and white, laugh together at the differences in the races rather than cry separately.

Some of the most revered figures in comedy in the last thirty years were from the African American community. There are many notable names that spring immediately to mind that have used the "podium" of a comedy microphone and stage to talk about issues of race, color, discrimination and race relations in a way that all can appreciate their thoughts and achieve a common understanding. The names of Bill Cosby, Richard Pryor, Eddie Murphy and many more stand out as both very funny entertainers and people who have represented the African American community with pride and intelligence that all can admire.

Many an African American child took hope from the idea of rising up out of poverty and difficulty to reach greatness because they saw these black entertainers do it. Just by using their success to show the youth of black America that they too can be successful and that with hard work, intelligence, and the willingness to try they too can be somebody to their families and to their community. This is truly the role of a great role model and these men have given much hope to youth to make something of themselves and make a difference.

Sometimes it was hard for these entertainers to achieve equality. When Sammy Davis Junior first was recruited to make his valuable contribution to Frank Sinatra's team, many in that society did not think it was appropriate that a black man could perform with equality with his white contemporaries. We can be grateful too for the openness of others in the entertainment community that they would not stand to see racism keep talent such as Sammy's down. It was Sinatra himself that made sure that Sammy Davis could perform with the "Rat Pack" and in

doing so, another door of racism was blown down in this country.

Stories like this are frequent. The Hollywood establishment always has been forward thinking in presenting entertainers based on their talent and not on the color of their skin or other artificial divisions. It has been television as well that has broken barriers and open the discussion of race and color for all of us to engage. By making it "ok" to talk about race relations, it also makes it ok to see those relations healed and clear the way for reconciliation and healing.

Many times when a black comedian is making his crowd laugh, he might say "the important thing is we talk about these things and laugh about them together". And that is the important thing. We can be grateful we have had such outstanding leadership in entertainment to bring black and white together in a way that eliminates hatred and hostility. Because it is hard to hate your brother when you are busy laughing together with him.

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