



Maxine Powell, director of the in-house finishing school at Motown Records during the 1960's, was born in 1915 in Texarkana, Texas. By 1951, she had moved to Detroit and opened the Maxine Powell Finishing & Modeling School, where she taught grooming, poise, and social graces, eventually to the musicians of Motown Records who shaped Detroit's exploding soul scene. Describing her influence, she said:

And I opened up a finishing school within Motown, which I think is unique, because there's never been a record company even today with a finishing school. I think at that particular time there was Stevie Wonder, and The Miracles, The Marvelettes, The Velvelettes, Martha and the Vandellas, The Supremes, and later Tammi Tyrell came, and so did Marvin Gaye. They were all sitting around in a circle and I was introduced to them. Most of them knew me. I told them at that particular time that there was going to be an addition to the Motown Records. That Mr. Gordy and the Gordy Family thought that they should be polished and groomed so that they might appear in number one clubs or whatever. In other words I said to them, "you know, you're not the greatest singers in the world. We've always had great singers and dancers in our race. But the one thing that I'm going to offer you is class. I feel that class will turn the heads of kings and queens." They were just youngsters at that time. So I said, "Well, when you're 25, 30, or even 40, and you're still performing, and you're appearing in a second, third, or fourth rate club, it's going to be your fault. Because, we're going to train you for the number one clubs around the country, and also we would like to see you appear before the king and queen." And of course, those young people thought that I was just out of my mind, because what they were interested in was a hit record at that time.

In what we would now likely term "respectability politics," Powell believed that "class and style and refinement" would help her race become outstanding. Her method taught that the "Three B's" — Beauty, Brains, and Breeding — would bring success and achievement to any who practiced them; that, essentially, behavior could, or might, overcome racism.

This text, "An Evening with Queen White," is inspired both by the curriculum of Maxine Powell, and by Martine Syms' great aunt, Bernetta (known as "Bunt") Palmer. Bunt was a singular figure from Syms' childhood. An independent woman, she had a business and moved through the city of Los Angeles on her own. She advised a young Syms on how to dress, how to stand, how to move in the world. Linking the lives of Maxine Powell and Bernetta Palmer to each other, and to histories of how we construct and stage ourselves for the world, form the basis of this piece. The text served as the score from which the present segment of Syms' recent film, *Incense Sweaters & Ice*, was created. It is not directly a script; instead, it informed the words and gestures performed in the film — a gap between the score presented here and the performance captured in the film remains.

Cover: Still from Martine Syms, *Incense Sweaters & Ice* (2017)

Motivational seminar with practical tips on how to achieve success! To be successful in any career, especially in today's competitive world, we must make the most of our assets, ability, charm, and courage. Our formula for success must include cultivation of the three B's—BRAINS, BEAUTY, and BREEDING, plus warmth of personality and a genuine liking for other people. Professor Queen Esther White is a motivator, an image builder, and teacher of personal development and self-growth.

. . .

Hello beautiful people! How you doing? Are you feeling good?

Yes? Good. That's what I want.

Now, don't fight it, we are going to feel it. Do you understand? Don't fight it, we are going to feel it!

Let's get right into it. This is all about you. Everything starts with you.

Who are you?

No, that's not who you are. Someone gave you that name. So who are YOU?

Well, when your mother found out she was expecting, she and your father and maybe other relatives and friends discussed you being born, and they came up with different names that would be befitting for this beautiful, unique human being that was gonna be born into the world.

So you see someone gave you the name. You have to make the name outstanding. How do you do that? The technology I'm going to share with you now is called The Queen System. The system is about making the most of our assets, ability, charm, and courage. My formula for success includes cultivation of the three B's—BRAINS, BEAUTY, and BREEDING. I want to make sure your communication is vivacious, and that you're always connecting.

Although I was given the name Queen, I did not always act like a Queen. I had to cultivate it.

I was born in Buena Vista, Mississippi, but I was raised by my Auntie in Chicago. It was similar to today in that things were quite prejudiced. And growing up, I would listen to my Auntie and her friends. They talked all the time about the topic of the day, like Communists and prejudice and whatever. And I would listen. So at 12 years old, instead of being outside playing, I was always listening and trying to figure out how to help African Americans survive. I just didn't believe I had to stand still because the caste system said so. I went to the library, and I discovered that there's no difference in the races, see, in how they were begotten. It's a difference in how they're trained and their environment, see.

I decided that, after a while of research, that it was the caste system and society that set up the rules and regulations and dos and don'ts around the world. And then I began to think — what could change that so that we would be recognized? So, I figured that we had libraries and whatever, and we could teach ourselves and speak better and learn to be a better person. And I thought, well, now, how would we do that? And I kept searching and searching and doing research, and I found out that class, style, and refinement would turn the heads of kings and queens.

So, now, who are you?

Right now I want you to survey your body and what you're doing with it. How many of you are making yourselves smaller. How many of you are hunching, crossing your legs, wrapping your ankles. Sometimes we hold onto our arms like this (cross arms), sometimes we spread out (hold arms to side). I see you. Pay attention to what you're doing right now. If you change this you can change your entire life.

This brings us to our first B! BRAINS!

Recent discoveries in the new field of psychoneuroimmunology show that the brain is not confined within the cranium — it actually extends throughout the body. Mind and body are no longer two distinct entities. Your mind can control, directly or indirectly, the body and vice versa.

But you already knew that didn't you?

I call it the bodymind. Your bodymind shapes who you are. It controls the way you communicate to yourself and to others. The quality of your entire life comes down to the quality of how you communicate. We're going to come back to this idea later. But who is the most important person you communicate with?

Yourself!

You're all here because you want to be the greatest at what you do. You want to be powerful. How do powerful people act? You get big, you stretch out, you occupy space, you open up.

What do you do when you feel powerless? The exact opposite. Close up, wrap around ourselves, make yourself small, avoid contact.

We smile when we feel happy, but when we make ourselves smile we also feel happy. You can fake it! To be more powerful you must first change your attitude. You have to feel more powerful.

You also need to know how to enter a room. Make sure that you don't stumble or get in the door and stop. Just approach, one foot in front of the other, then STOP when you first get in the room. Let everybody know you're in it. Then move to another position.

As you cross the room walk a straight line. You lift your feet and walk a straight line, one foot in front of the other. Point your toes through your shoes and walk. Keep the hip bones forward and the position of the ears straight with your shoulder line. The torso of the body should never move, all you need to do is to lift your feet and let the action carry the body. Don't let your buttocks protrude.

You have two hip bones in the front of you, let's feel them, let's find them and push them, push these hip bones forward like you're pushing them up under your chin. You know they won't go but the more you do this it gives you correct posture. You should look graceful at all times. A lady with class can sit on a garbage pail and look good. She can even look good sitting on

a stool. It's easy! Never allow the buttocks to hang over the stool. Slide down on the base of your spine so that the hip bones push forward and you're slanted, so you're not leaning forward so much that your eyes show.

When you speak with someone talk to them directly. You'll have a better audience. Don't look around them. Never turn your back on them. You have to practice and practice and practice until it becomes a part of you.

When you feel good, you share those good feelings with others which makes them feel good, and they bounce it back to you. Soon the world is conspiring to help you!

If things aren't going your way, how do you change that?

Change the way you move! If you're not feeling the way you want to feel, change the way you move.

Your body language tells so much about you, you don't even have to say a word. Feelings are created by physiology!

I'm going to say it again: feelings are created by physiology!

Physiology is your movement, your breath, your facial expressions, your gestures. What do we do when we don't want to feel a certain way anymore? I'll say it once more: Feelings are created by physiology!

How do we want to feel?

That's right. BEAUTIFUL!

The first B is Brains. The second B is Beauty.

There are 50 muscles in your face. A slight change in any of these muscles will completely alter the way you feel. When you smile you look beautiful and you feel beautiful.

What about when you say so-and-so makes me sick and they get on my nerves and I can't stand them? These are ugly words. You're going to practice substituting pleasant words for ugly words. Just say a person is difficult. That takes care of everything. When you use a positive word, the corners of your lips go upward and it makes you smile. And negative words, the corners of your lips go down, such as "stupid" and "you're crazy" and "you make me sick" and "you get on my nerves" and you're just ... you're the ugly one.

You're going to be positive. You are a great, unique human being.

Whatever you're doing that's negative, you didn't come in the world doing that, you were helpless and innocent when you came in the world and anything that we're doing that isn't productive or negative, it's something that we have been conditioned to, it's not the real you.

We're here to find the real you.

There are nine thousand million flowers in this world. Each of you is a different flower. You might be a red Begonia or a violet Bellflower, a white Chrysanthemum or a Golden Marguerite. Regardless of the color of the flower, the size of the flower, the shape or the flower, they all have something to offer. When you purchase a flower or a plant, the first thing you think is how do I keep this plant growing beautiful.

Attitude is one part. Image is another. The way you take care of your body and anything you put on it is an important part of your image.

All parts of the body should look well groomed and polished. Paying attention to grooming demonstrates respect for yourself and for others. The hair should be clean, shiny, and well cut. The nails and cuticles trimmed. Your breath should smell fresh and so should you.

Clothes send a message about how you want others to see you. Clothes should be spotless at the start of each day; soiled or sloppy work clothing reflects poorly on you. The operative words are neat and clean.

I want you looking good and feeling better!

Physical beauty is desirable, of course, but real beauty comes from within. Everything must have a foundation. The foundation for a charming person is inner beauty. A beautiful person is one who possesses that intangible charm known as Inner Beauty. Inner Beauty has its beginning in your general outlook on life; the way you treat others; and the way you treat yourself.

This is our third and final B. Breeding.

You should engage with others warmly, as if they were most important to your world, bringing kindness and admiration.

I said this once before, but the quality of your entire life comes down to the quality of how you communicate. In fact, the quality of your life IS the quality of your communication. That's where it all starts.

When something happens to you, you decide what it means, communicate it to yourself and that dictates how you feel. For example, if someone kisses you, you might decide it means they love you and feel all warm inside. Or not, depending on who it is.

Nothing in life has any meaning except the meaning that you give it.

You disagree?

I know what you're thinking. Oh Miss White, some things are out of my control. Some things are bigger than me. All this positive thinking is nonsense.

Now if something is slow-going, remember, a delay is not a denial. A delay is not a denial. You are a flower. Flowers do not bloom overnight.

When you feel a negative emotion it's a message that you need to change. We have to learn from these emotions and utilize them.

Right now I'm going to tell you nine emotions and what they usually mean:

Fear means that you need to prepare.

Hurt tells you that you had an expectation that wasn't met.

Anger means you have a rule that's been violated.

Frustration means what you're doing isn't working and you need to change.

Disappointment means that you need to let go of something and move on.

Guilt means you've broken one of your rules and you need to ensure that you won't do it again. Keep in mind you might have totally unreasonable rules.

If you feel overwhelmed, helpless, or depressed it means you're doing too much. Sit down and prioritize.

If you feel lonely you need to connect with people.

If you feel inadequate either your standards are unreasonable or you need to commit to mastery.

I hope you were writing these down! I always take a pen and paper with me. In fact, I want you to get yourself a journal. You don't have to write in it every day, but when you get thoughts or ideas you capture it there. You'll start to accumulate a wealth of knowledge and ability and skills and resources that not only will help you, but you can help other people as well. I've been keeping journals myself now for about a dozen years. Sometimes we don't give ourselves credit for the amount that we have grown. If you keep a journal it won't be hard to see how much you're growing. You see the kind of goals you had back then, the kind of things you thought back in those days and you'll begin to see the evolution of your growth.

You'll experience a few setbacks but it's all right. Record it, review it, and adjust.

I've given you a lot of information today. I've never met anyone that I could not improve. I have never had any failures. My former students stand tall around the world.

There are only four things you need in this world and they are to develop the skill of listening, develop the skill of following positive guidelines, whether you think it will work or not. You must also be determined and consistent.

Know who you are and what makes you tick.

The only reason I'm still around is because I fought the world by myself.

It doesn't matter whether you are the cameraman or you're the producer or you're the writer or you're the singer or you're the accountant. If you have class, style, and refinement it will make you outstanding around the world.

It all starts with you. Stand tall. Take up a lot of space and make the world a bigger place.

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