

"FROM SUPERMAN TO MAN, by Michael Lyons

After a person is arrested, sentenced and sent up state, they have to take a battery of psychological and educational test. Being ex-military, taking psychological and IQ test didn't phase me. However, at twenty-six years old, the negative results of those test did. According to my IQ test, I was stupid, literally. My readying and comprehension barely made the eighth grade level. Which begs the question, how did I make it through twelve years of schooling being stupid?

After High school, I signed up for the Airforce, took the entry exam and failed. I tried the Navy, took the same exam and passed. The Navy assigned me to an ammunition ship. A sure indicator that I didn't do so well on the test. Historically, the Navy assigned many African Americans to ammunition ships because they were an expendable source of labor and considered not fit for combat. African Americans were assigned as cooks or to a cleaning detail. In hindsight, especially during the time I enlisted in the military, had I tested high on that entry exam, I probably would have been partnered with the appropriate ship or assigned to an appropriate position.

Was I stupid because I was poor and black? Do I blame the public school system in my area for my low readying and comprehension levels? Did society play a roll in my low expectations?

While sitting in Holmesburg county prison awaiting trial. I needed something to occupy my mind between court appearances. Locked in a cell with no television or radio can wreak havoc on the mind. You're forced to think about the past, the present and not so bright future. You cry! Contemplate suicide! You fall asleep, praying that when you awaken things would be different. Books seemed my only option to sanity. My challenge, I had only read one book in my short life time, and I struggled through that.

The author, Jackie Collins was being past around in Holmesburg prison during the 80s. For a guy that couldn't read that well I

barely made it through the first chapter without getting discouraged. Once I forced myself to sit and read, I enjoyed Jackie Collins, "Lucky" series. What a welcomed reprieve from the traumatic experience of going back and forth to court knowing that I would be sent upstate to die in prison.

Ten months later, I ended up at SCI-Dallas where the inmate population was older, wiser and had nothing but time on their hands to read and study. The books they mused over and shared with each other were on another level. Jumping from Jackie Collins to cultural books written by Amos Wilson, Frantz Fanon, Van Sertima and Chancellor Williams was like diving into bloody, shark infested waters and not knowing how to swim. Jackie Collins wrote fictional, soap opera-type novels about gangsters, crime, sex and intrigue. Her narratives were entertaining but didn't require much concentration. My new authors' introduced me to great civilizations in Africa, the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow and notable African American doctors, lawyers, scientists and inventors from antiquity.

Imagine my surprise when I learned that all life derived from Africa and that the first people to inhabit the earth were black. I was running across words I didn't understand and couldn't pronounce. Words like, matriclinous, xanthochroid and ethnocentrism twisted my untrained brain into knots of frustration. After every other word, I had to stop, put the book down and look the word up in the dictionary, an endless process that took the fun out of reading. Reading books written by black people about black people kept me determined. My mind begin to open to a world I never knew existed. I didn't want to give up on such valuable, life changing information?

African Americans built thriving towns and cities, I discovered. We owned bus companies, cab companies, banks and insurance companies in the early 19th century. African Americans created inventions that changed the trajectory of American society. These things were never taught in history class, and I went to an all black school. According to the history books I read, African Americas happily picked cotton

and were slaves. Not one history book I thumbed through mentioned anything about African American war hero's, scientist, inventors and entrepreneurs. There were no great civilizations in Africa, mentioned in my history class, only jungles of wild beast and naked natives.

Learning that my people were more than slaves and savages motivated me, but my new authors were complicated and much to serious for my low intellectual expectations, so I manufactured the perfect justification to give up on those black authors. No one needed to know about history to get a job, I reasoned so why struggle to learn about events that happened a thousand years ago? Yet, whites were adamant about teaching their version of history. Were whites proud to be white because they shown positive images of who they could become? I didn't understand the value of learning history, until someone handed me a book called, "From Superman to Man" by J.A. Rogers.

"From Superman to Man" opens with a black porter named Dixon. While helping passengers on and off a train, he encounters a loud mouthed, bigoted southern Senator boarding the train, cracking raciest jokes. Dixon had faced this type of racial animosity before and knew how to handle it.

The train in motion, Dixon attends to passengers and then settles in for the evening with his favorite book. The restless Senator finds his way into the car where Dixon is readying and sits opposite him. Dixon acknowledges the Senator and continues readying, hoping that the Senator does not engage him in conversation.

Dixon is called to get a blanket for a passenger. Fascinated by the beautifully painted, impressionist picture on the cover, the Senator picks up Dixon's book and notices that the author is French. He thumbs through the pages and discovers that it is also written in French. Dixon returns and the Senator inquires about the author and whether Dixon can read a foreign language. "Yes." Dixon politely replies, and resumes reading. Negro's who pretended to be white enraged the Senator. Only white men had the mental capacity to learn and the God given right to take liberties and assume airs beyond one's station in life. Speaking on complicated subjects, the Senator attempted to assault Dixon's character and intelligence.

Dixon had travelled abroad, dined with Kings and Queens and spoke several languages, fluently. He became a porter to travel freely and experience different cultures throughout the south, yet he didn't feel the need to mention this to the bombastic politician.

Every preconception the Senator projected to Dixon about race was contradicted with facts about race and history in America. At certain points during the discussion, the Senator became angry and frustrated. How did this black person know so much? They talked for the entire journey, discussing unjust laws and policies of Jim Crow, Gregor Mendel and the social construct of race in America.

Preparing for his stop, the Senator looks at Dixon, and shakes his head, "I don't buy into everything that you said, but when I get back to my office, I'm going to look into that Gregor Mendel fellow and those Jim Crow laws and policies you claim are unfairly keeping your people in the condition that they are in." Extending his hand, the Senator concluded. "This has been one hell of an experience."

Without raising his voice or getting angry in the face of white supremacy, Dixon verbally refuted the racist nonsense the Senator pontificated about the inferiority of black people. Quoting renowned white scholars, Dixon told the Senator that for black people to have survived the brutal system of slavery, and accomplish anything under the yoke of Jim Crow and white supremacy is testament to a great and resilient people.

From Superman to Man changed my perspective on education, studying, readying and researching facts. Throughout American history, people have gotten credit for things they don't deserve. While the true hero's and shero's of American progress were erased from history.

Impressed with Dixon's elocution, I read a cross section of books by a diverse group of authors on an array of subjects. The social construct of race in America is fascinating. Studying history and

politics, outside of the classroom, slowly begin to shape my opinion on crime and punishment, poverty and race in America. Studying Sociology and Psychology, I discovered that there is no difference between the races as far as intelligence. Take any child, no matter his/her race and raise that child under favorable circumstances, with advanced educational opportunities and love, you will increase that child's chance of success. The social inequalities that we face in America today between Blacks and Whites is a "successful" sociological experiment that needs to be corrected for the betterment of America. This healing process can begin by reevaluating the truth about American history. How we became so race conscious and why? In order to be "One Nation Indivisible With Justice For All", we need to take actionable steps to teach America about the many, many contributions of African Americans in this country.

Colin Kaepernick took a knee during the National Anthem, and then criticized for being unpatriotic. Why? African Americans fought and died heroically in "every" war in America? We have proven, even when we were treated badly by our government that we love and cherish American democracy. No other race in the history of America can proudly stand before that American Flag and boast that their ancestors fought and died in every war in this country for the freedoms most Americans take for granted. Africans were in America as early as the 1600s and possibly earlier. Most Europeans' immigrated to America 200 years after African Americans stepped foot on the shores of North America.

In 2021, we need take a deep breath and seriously discuss America's deepest defects on race. "Why are we so divided in this country? Who benefits from that division?" Factual, historical, events tells us that white hatred, anger and fear against African Americans have no merit, but continues to rear it's ugly head throughout American history. Why are some whites so angry? Native Americans never stole land from white people. African Americans never got anything in this country at the expense of white progress? American history is not so flattering, if we're honest. It's ugly! I guess that's why no one

wants to talk about it. Let's confront the ugly truth, so we'll never have to talk about race again.