



THE SUNDAY
independent

dispatches

A CONTEST OF THOUGHTS

13

AUGUST
25 2013



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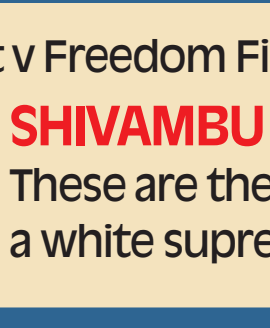
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A march for the good of men

IN 1995 Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan organised a Million Man March in Washington, DC. It was a historic mass gathering of African-American men and social activists to "convey to the world a vastly different picture of the black male".

Since then, the US has elected the first black president, Barack Obama. But, as Farrakhan observed recently, "even though we are celebrating a two-term black president, Obama has not, cannot and will not, solve the problems in the black community".

The state and image of men – black men, in particular – is one of the biggest societal challenges today. It is not an American problem, but a global issue facing the more than 3.3 billion male population.

While men lead every nation in the world – but for 12 women heads of state – they are (according to the International Centre for Prison Studies) unfortunately also the first citizens in jail, representing as much as 100 percent of convicts in San Marino, 97.6 percent in South Africa, 95.5 percent in China and 91.3 percent in the US.

The US, which has less than 5 percent of the world's population, has almost a quarter of the world's prisoners at 2.2 million, followed by China (1.6 million), Russia (686 000), Brazil (548 000), India (372 300), Thailand (273 000), Mexico (242 750), Iran (217 000) and South Africa (153 000).

In Africa, South Africa (289 for every 100 000), Swaziland (284), Morocco (220), Botswana (205) and Mauritius (202) top the list of the highest ratio of prisoners to population. While the US (11.8 million), UK (6.5 million) and Germany (6.5 million) lead all nations with the most reported crimes, South Africa leads Africa with 2.7 million.

Men, in particular black men, are doing time for myriad crimes. As a result, the failings of few have created an image of black men as innate delinquents and unrepentant, unemployed and unemployable criminals who cannot take care of their responsibilities.

On the other hand, there are many instances where the law has been unfairly overzealous with respect to black men – whether in the US and Europe, where they are a minority, or in Africa, where they are a majority.

As Virgin mogul Richard Branson observed in a recent tweet to his 3.5 million followers, "black people are six times more likely to be stopped and searched, face harsher penalties, yet use drugs less".

These statistics would seem to validate French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte's belief that "men are easily governed through their vices than through their virtues".

But while the statistics don't lie, as Scottish novelist Andrew Lang cautioned, we should not "use statistics as a drunken man uses lamp-posts – for support rather than for illumination".

The male brand should not be tarnished by a delinquent minority and the nouveau riche with fleeting money, which they use to objectify impressionable young girls and desperate women to enhance their own poor self-image or shortcomings.

But the good men have had enough. They have grown what Farrakhan calls "testicular fortitude" and are mobilising to show that there are more than few good men in society. Thus, as we close the global Women's Month, we should be inspired by the Brothers For Life National Men's Rally held yesterday to mobilise men for good – against homophobia, domestic violence, rape, and sexual transmission "in the name of men".

We should not be surprised. While women have given the incomparable gift of life, are burdened with the responsibilities of raising the estimated 47 percent of children with absent but living fathers, there is a growing number of exemplary single fathers who,

The male brand should not be tarnished by a delinquent minority and the nouveau riche with fleeting money, writes **Thebe Ikalafeng**



LOUD AND CLEAR: A group of men brandish placards at the national men's rally on gender-based violence in South Africa at the Johannesburg Stadium yesterday.

PICTURE: NICHOLAS THABO TAU

“ THE FAILINGS OF THE FEW HAVE CREATED IMAGE OF BLACK MEN AS INNATE DELINQUENT

too, are raising their children alone.

While the recent spate of illegal circumcision schools have abused culture to commit unpardonable crimes against young boys, this practice remains in many cultures a credible rite of passage and mobilisation of young men into adulthood (as well as for health, sanitary and sexual reasons).

While it is now common for male gangs organised to raid society's safety and assets, there was a time in history, as in the Battle of Isandlwana of 1879, when a regiment of about 20 000 male Zulu warriors with spears and shields mobilised to overcome well-trained and armed with modern armoury 1 800 British, to protect their territory.

Reminiscent of the Million Man March, the National Men's Rally, too, seeks to "convey to the world a vastly different picture of the black male" in South Africa. It is a step in

the right direction to show that "the choices we make today, will determine whether we see tomorrow". They are determined, as Mahatma Gandhi advised, to "be change we want to see in the world".

For the millions of young men looking for inspiration in a world blinded by statistics of the failures of black men and in a state of despair because of the quality of education, lack of jobs and opportunities, and a variety of lifestyle health challenges, need to know that there are men past, present and future who have, can and will always play a good role in society.

They need to know that 50 years ago Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda, Jomo Kenyatta, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Patrice Lumumba, Murtala Ramat Muhammed, Haile Selassie and Abubakar Tafawa Balewa inspired the vision for today's rising African.

They need to know that Chinua Achebe, Eskia Mphahlele, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Zakes Mda, Percy Qoboza and Aggrey Klaaste have shown with their words that have recorded our history and challenged our suppression, and that the pen is mightier than the sword.

They need to know that Siphos "Hotstix" Mabuse, the legendary multi-instrumentalist who got his matric at 60, has shown it is never too old to learn, and rewarded the struggle of Professor Thamsanqa Khambule, the late inspirational Soweto mathematics teacher who fought for access and quality education during the apartheid.

They need to know that long

before Zakes Bantwini, Khuli Chana, Black Coffee or Dr Malinga scorched the dance floor, Hugh Masekela, Sipho Mchunu and adopted Zulu partner, Johnny Clegg, Tsopo Tshola, Ray Phiri, Mbongeni Ngema, Chicco Twala, and before them Kippie Moeketsi, Mathlathini, among others, created the sound of change.

They need to know that growing up in a rural town of KwaZulu-Natal didn't limit Ladysmith Black Mambazo's talent and ability to earn Grammy awards.

They need to know that the Manhattan Brothers of Joe Mogotsi, Ronnie Sehume, Rufus Khoza and Nathan Mdele put the "click" in Miriam Makeba's legendary voice in Todd Matshikiza's *King Kong*, long before the Big Dudes took Brenda Fassie *Higher and Higher*.

They need to know that long before Victor Dlamini and Koto Bololo picked up a camera to elegantly capture African beauty, Alf Khumalo, Bob Kgosane and Peter Magubane used their lenses to record our history – and passions.

They need to know that Gibson Kente and Todd Matshikiza did not need the backing of Disney or Hollywood, or the magic of Apple's Final Cut Pro, to shape their stories to influence change and mesmerise all rally audiences at London's West End with *How Long and King Kong*.

They need to know that before the advent of television in 1976 in South Africa and the multimedia world of Robert Marawa, Thabiso Tema and Thomas Mlambo, Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates supremos Kaizer Motaung and Irvin

Khoza will attest that the late Dan Setshedi and Sello Phiri could bring alive the legendary rivalries of yesteryear in boxing and football.

They need to know that before Benni McCarthy, Lucas Radebe, Steven Pienaar, Makhaya Ntini and Paul Gogga Adams were recognised as equals on the world stage, Stephen Kalamazoo Mokone and Basil Lewis d'Oliveira sacrificed their oppressive citizenship to lay the foundation for black players overseas. They need to know that our beautiful women, Precious Motsepe, multi-award songstresses Simphiwe Dana and Lira, and media star Bonang Matheba rely on the keen eye and scissors of David Tlale, Sylvester Palata and Thula Sindi to complement their red-soled Christian Louboutins.

They need to know that before Velaphi Mzimba took the world by storm, Gerard Sekoto, born in the small town of Botshabelo, Middleburg, in what's now known as Mpumalanga, took his black urban art to the Paris of Picasso and Matisse in the 1960s.

They need to know that Patrice Motsepe, with an estimated net worth of R26.5 billion, pledging to give half his billions for the good of communities, is an example to the privileged few that money can be a root of all good.

They need to know that getting a good education and working hard is the reason Sizwe Nxasana of First Rand and Sim Tshabalala of Standard Bank are leading banks worth a combined market capitalisation of R300bn, Sifiso Dabengwa is leading a business that has enabled more

than 200 million people in emerging markets to connect, and Brian Molefe is leading Africa's largest bulk freight company that enables more than 80 percent of the goods that enter South Africa.

They need to know that without the sacrifices of Albert Luthuli, Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu, Robert Sobukwe, Steve Biko, Tsietshi Mashinini and Hector Peterson – and the leadership of Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki, Kgalema Motlanthe, Jacob Zuma – there wouldn't be the horizon of a better life.

They need to know that a contingent of black South African men sank with the Mendi on the morning of February 21, 1917, near the Isle of Wight, on the English Channel on their way to France to fight the war on the British side – to save the world.

They need to know that actor and Brothers for Life ambassador Patrick Shai's acknowledgement that he has changed his ways from the days when he used to abuse his wife, because he grew up watching his stepfather brutally beating his mother, shows that everyone can change to be a better man.

They need to know that, like the disciple Moses and Prophet Muhammad, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu is living proof as in Titus 2:7 that we can "in all respects be a model of good works... integrity, dignity".

They need to know that long before free anti-retrovirals that have given hope the devastation of HIV/Aids can be overcome, 12-year-old Nkosi Johnson had the maturity to remind the world: "We are all

human beings. We are normal. We have hands. We have feet. We can walk, we can talk, we have needs just like everyone else – don't be afraid of us – we are all the same."

Young black men need to know that there are more than just a few good black men who come from all walks of life, who cannot be defined by the failings of a few, but rather inspire others to leave the world a little better than they found it. They need to know that while men make mistakes, they are human and not a mistake in themselves, and many who have faulted like Patrick Shai are capable of transforming for the better.

As one of greatest men, Mandela, once said: "The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall."

These are the men who have inspired 23-year-old Mthatha-born Siyabulela Xuza, educated at St Johns in Joburg and Harvard and MIT, to shine so bright to be the only South African with a planet named after him in honour of his work in developing a record-breaking rocket and creating safer, more energy-efficient rocket fuel.

As we exit Women's Month, we must acknowledge that the National Men's Rally is a good deed by men for men – for our women, because as James Brown once sang: "This is a man's world, but it wouldn't be nothing... without a woman or a girl."

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