



YOUTH DAY (YOUTH AND HEALTH)

CULTURAL RESOURCES

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Tera W. Hunter, Guest Lectionary Cultural Resource Commentator

Professor of History and African-American Studies, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ

I. Historical Background

The vitality of health among youth has been a key to survival since the dawning of the African slave trade. Traders targeted young people in their prime who were hearty enough to endure the rough Middle Passage and harsh conditions of forced labor in the Americas. As a result, young people made up a substantial portion of those forcibly taken as slaves.

The same qualities that made youth good prospects as slave labor also gave them the extra will to withstand and overcome oppression. Most slave masters fed their slaves and took care of their health only to the minimal degree necessary to protect their monetary investments. Slaves were typically allotted fatback, cornmeal, salt, and molasses; hardly enough to create nutritious meals. Slave families took initiatives to feed themselves to

make up for the deficits. Youth helped their families grow vegetables in gardens, fished, raised poultry, hunted for wild game and gathered wild berries and plants—with or without their masters' permission. Yet these efforts were not always sufficient to prevent malnutrition and other diseases.

After slavery ended, African Americans began to have access to better and more diverse foods. As they migrated from the rural South to cities in large numbers, they carried their food traditions with them, but their diets and habits changed. They grew and made less of what they ate, and relied more on store-bought, packaged, canned, and frozen foods. But, they continued to incorporate many traditional foods like fresh okra, collard greens, green beans, black eye peas, sweet potatoes, turnips, and corn into their meals.

II. Advertising Unhealthiness

Despite the importance of fresh produce in African-American diets in the past, this is not necessarily the case today. Fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean meats are better for healthy living but less available, while fast foods (high in fat, sugar, and salt) are more accessible and cheaper in poor neighborhoods. Young people spend less time doing physical activities than in the past. Parents and caretakers often do not make nutritious meals because of work schedules, other demands, and priorities. As a result, too many youth are suffering the consequences of unprecedented rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, asthma, etc.

Ironically, the U.S. is one of the wealthiest nations in the world, but food insecurity is an underestimated problem. Many families struggle to consistently provide adequate meals. Hunger can cause young people to be anxious about where their next meals are coming from, which leads them to overeat when food is available.¹ It also affects physical health and can lead to mental health problems and poor academic performance.

Youth need to be aware of factors that influence what and how much they eat. But they will not become knowledgeable unless adults educate them. Television is a major problem. African-American youth watch more TV than others. Many food and drink companies use this to their advantage to promote their products. According to one report, although “youth are encouraged to watch what they eat, many youth seem to eat what they watch.”² Advertisements for fast food chains, candy, sweet drinks and sugared cereals are over-represented on shows and networks (such as BET and the WB) that appeal to black youth.³ These ads not only reinforce unhealthy eating habits, time spent in front of the small screen takes away from participation in physical exercise which is essential to young adult development.

Young people should be taught to assess the role of black culture in ethnic targeting by food corporations more critically. We have all heard catchy commercial jingles with jazzy music, R&B, or gospel beats. We have seen the attractive depictions of beautiful family reunions and hand-clapping churchgoers as well. Some think of these as positive messages, but they come at a heavy price of encouraging the consumption of high-fat,

supersized, high-sodium foods that contribute to increasing health disparities for African Americans.

Youth can do their part to be mindful of these influences by watching less television, becoming involved in physical fitness and becoming more educated about how the choices they make about eating and drinking can have long-term consequences for the quality of their lives. But parents and other adults must do even more! We must demand policies from the federal government down to local government which address all of the factors that lead to persistent class and racial inequalities in health and life expectancy. Adults should demand more responsibility from food corporations, just as was done with the tobacco industry to limit the enticement of young consumers. Ultimately, the larger underlying socio-economic forces, such as poverty, that make it less feasible for people to choose healthy behaviors must be addressed at the governmental and corporate levels.

III. Illustrations

Growing food in community gardens is one small way of taking greater control over what we eat and drink. This trend has spread across the nation, including the inner cities. In Durham, North Carolina, a group called DIG (Durham Inner-city Gardeners) is led by youth. They are taught organic gardening, healthy food choices and other issues related to running a business. They sell the fruits, vegetables, flowers, herbs and mushrooms they grow at the local farmer's market, for which they receive a small stipend.⁴

Food from the 'Hood (FFTH) is another youth garden project that was initiated by students at Crenshaw High in South Central Los Angeles after the riots there in 1992. The program began with just six students and two adults using an abandoned lot behind the school. Students sold and donated food that they grew. The project has grown into a substantial non-profit business that makes salad dressings, using half the proceeds to give scholarships to the student managers after graduation from high school (over \$250,000 raised so far) and the other half goes back to running the business. This is an inspiring group that shows how a little can go a long way in fostering self-sufficiency, business and community development. Learn more about this project online from the following video.⁵

Watch Video: http://www.certnyc.org/QT_FFTH.html

IV. Audio Visual Aids

These resources may be available at your local library or video store.

(1) “Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?” (Distributed by California News Reel.) This is an outstanding seven part series on racial and socio-economic disparities in health. The website for the series also includes many related resources. Online location: <http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/> accessed 3 March 2010

(2) “Food, Inc.” (2008) Robert Kenner, producer/director. (Magnolia Home Entertainment.) This is an eye-opening documentary film on the food industry that

reveals how the production of food has been transferred from farms that once dominated the land to factories controlled by a few corporate conglomerates. It deals with health disparities and the politics behind food that misleads the public to believe in cheap food, without disclosing the long-term damage that is done to human health, animals, and the environment in the interests of profits. Online location: <http://www.foodincmovie.com/> accessed 3 March 2010

(3) **“Supersize Me”** (2004) Robin Spurlock, director. (Sony Pictures.) Spurlock spent thirty days eating food strictly from McDonald’s to see how fast food affects the body. He became fat, his cholesterol skyrocketed, he developed headaches, mood swings, and other ailments. His doctors advised him to quit the project but he persisted. He also examined how fast foods get into school lunches and influences the taste and desires of youth.

(4) **“Sweating in the Spirit”** is series of workout videos by Donna Richardson-Joyner using gospel music. Online location: <http://www.donnarichardson.com/> accessed 3 March 2010

V. Other Resources

Center for Minority Health, University of Pittsburgh
Online location: <http://www.cmh.pitt.edu/>

Children’s Defense Fund
Online location: <http://www.childrensdefense.org/>

Black women’s Health Imperative
Online location:
<http://www.blackwomenshealth.org/site/c.eeJIIWOCIrH/b.3082485/k.BEBA/Home.htm>

Books

Bower, Anne L., ed. African American Foodways: Explorations of History and Culture. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008.

Byrd, W. Michael. An American Health Dilemma, Volume One: A Medical History of African Americans and the Problem of Race: Beginnings to 1900. New York, NY: Routledge, 2000.

Jones, Wilbert. The New Soul Food Cookbook: Healthier Recipes for Traditional Favorites. New York, NY: Birch Lane Press and Carol Publishing Group, 1996.

LaVeist, Thomas A., ed. Race, Ethnicity, and Health: A Public Health Reader. Indianapolis, IN: Jossey-Bass, 2002.

Pincus, Harold Alan, et al. Improving Maternal And Child Health Care: A Blueprint For Community Action In the Pittsburgh Region. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2005.

Roberts, Dorothy. Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty. New York, NY: Pantheon, 1997.

Terry, Bryant. Vegan Soul Kitchen: Fresh, Healthy, and Creative African-American Cuisine. New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 2009.

VI. Songs that Speak to the Moment

“This Body is A Temple (for the Holy Spirit)” is a song which, along with its accompanying video, reminds teens what they put in their bodies and how they treat their bodies matters to God. The body is a temple of God, therefore it should be cared for and not abused. You should respect your body and demand that others do too.

Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=et6Rtlqvkmk>

This Body is A Temple (for the Holy Spirit)

This body is a temple
For the Holy Spirit
It is not accepted
For you to do what you want with it

(Solo)

This body is the temple for the Holy Spirit. God the father lives within me.
No it is not accepted for you to do whatever you want with my body. This is God’s temple.

Every time I take for granted the air I breathe I remember the almighty resides within me. Inside me my organs are sustained with blood and oxygen that flows to my heart and my veins. He finds you worthy of eternal life but I’m so grateful for the sacrifice of Christ. God is within me I got to live right. I’m a vessel and temple of the father, spirit, and Christ.

Repeat Chorus

(Solo)

No. You can’t say or do what you want to me ‘cause my body houses excellency. My past decisions haven’t always been right but I’m learning daily as I walk in the light. The verses say I’m a child of the King. I’m working hard to live the message I bring. He’s not just in me he’s inside you too. Take time and connect to the greatness inside of you.

Repeat Chorus

Solo

Don't you know you're the temple of the Holy Ghost. His spirit dwells in you. By grace you're saved. The impossible is possible. Greater is he in you.

Repeat Chorus

Don't you know that your body is a temple, a temple of the Holy Spirit. (x 5)

(Solo)

I am free cause Jesus lives in me. Yea. You have no authority I'm God's Property. Cause the holy, the Holy Spirit. I can feel it. I can feel you. Yea, Yea, Yea. I thank you Lord. The Holy Spirit.

Kirk Franklin's, "He'll Take the Pain Away," encourages teens to remember that whatever struggles they encounter God will help them get through the pain. If the struggles are related to excessive eating, drinking, emotional depression, physical abuse or whatever they may be, this is a song to reinforce one's spiritual faith.⁶

He'll Take The Pain Away

He'll take the pain away, I know
He'll take the pain away (X2)

Though you been searching
For such a long time,
Searching for hope
And some peace of mind,
There's a friend
who will step in on time,
He'll take the pain away

Chorus

(Solo)

You've been searching all of here and all of there and all God can take the pain away.
And I tried him for myself, and ooooo I'm a living witness that God will take the pain away.

He'll take the pain away, I know.

He'll take the pain away (x2)

Hold on don't give up

If any man be in Jesus, He'll take the pain away. If any man be in Jesus brand new, He'll take the pain away (x2)

Chorus:

He'll take the pain away, I know
He'll take the pain away (x8)
He'll take the pain away (x4)

OoOooOoOoOo (x4)

He'll take the pain away. (x5)⁷

The song “Glory and Glory” gives glory and honor to God as a healer. Teens are reminded that God is the basis of their strength when confronting worldly stresses on their bodies, minds, and spirits.

Glory and Honor

Glory and honor is due him [repeat]

He's the source of strength for me
Healer of all disease
I run to him and I am saved
He's so worthy of praise [x2]

[Vamp:]
Lord we love you
We adore you
Worship and bow before you
All the glory
All the praise
It is due your name
Lift your hands
Lift your voice
We will sing
And rejoice
All the glory
And the praise
It is due your name

YES [x4]
All the Glory
All the praise
It is due your name.⁸

Notes

1. Casey, Patrick H., et al. “Child Health-Related Quality of Life and Household Food Security.” Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine. 159 (January 2005): 51-56.

2. Wiecha, Jean L., et al. "When Children Eat What They Watch: Impact of Television Viewing on Dietary Intake in Youth." Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine. 160 (April 2006): 441.
3. Outley, Corlis Wilson and Abdissa Taddese. "Content Analysis of Health and Physical Activity Messages Marketed to African-American Children During After-School Television Programming." Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine. 160 (April 2006): 432-435.
4. See SEEDS (South Eastern Efforts Developing Sustainable Spaces, Inc.). Online location: <http://www.seedsnc.org/dig.htm> accessed 3 March 2010
5. See Food From the Hood. Online location: <http://www.cerfnyc.org/ffth.html> accessed 3 March 2010
6. MelSoulTree. "This Body Is a Temple (for the Holy Spirit)." New York, NY: Soul Quest Records, 2008.
7. Franklin, Kirk. "He'll Take the Pain Away." Kirk Franklin Presents Songs for the Storm: Volume 1. Inglewood, CA: Fo Yo Soul Entertainment/Gospo Centric/Zomba, 2006.
8. Youthful Praise featuring J.J. Hairston. "Glory and Honor." Exalted—Live in Baltimore. Nashville, TN: Evidence Gospel, 2007.