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### Strong Men ... If, the Morning Comes

J. Clay Smith Jr.

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DR. J. CLAY SMITH, JR.  
COMMISSIONER, EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION  
before the  
CHURCH OF OUR SAVIOUR, BROOKLAND PARISH  
ANNUAL MEN'S DAY ADDRESS  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

June 15, 1980

STRONG MEN...IF, THE MORNING COMES

Reverend Lawson, officers and members of the Church of our Saviour.

This day is set aside in the Afro-American church community to honor the worth and the privilege of manhood. As we all know, there is a corresponding day established to honor womanhood-- Women's Day. Regardless of the day, we need to ask this question --what does it mean to be a man in the modern and progressive world in which we live? What does it mean to be a man in the third, fourth and fifth worlds? What challenges face the new man in emerging lesser developed nations? What is different and what is new upon which to build a new and better life? And, what image will Black men bequeath to generations yet unborn?

Today, young men (your sons) are growing into manhood much faster than in yesteryear. They hear, see and do as much as we ever did. These young men face great odds to grow to the level of their potential and expectations because they are what they are, "young, gifted and black." These young men are moving

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on faster and faster; yes, moving faster into lines of unemployment, and moral and political conflict. Yes, moving faster to the realization that (for some) the system may compel them "to drink muddy water and to sleep in a hollowed log."

Hence, on the first Men's Day in the decade of the 1980's, the men of this church must pause and assess how each of you feel about the role of black men in the lives of young men, who, in the future, this community will either applaud as successful and productive citizens, praise as role models for others, or be regarded as failures and be shunned as the losers of this society. Men's Day is a day for men to look at their manhood and assess their strengths and weaknesses and to ascertain whether we have the commitment to fight to shore up a world for the safeguard of our families, our schools, our freedoms. It is a day to examine our commitment and to revitalize vital personal inner tubes which may be slowly leaking air. For Black men, it is a day to establish an agenda of social concerns sufficiently effective to close out this century.

There are a few areas of concern which bear heavy on my mind this morning. One area of concern that I have involves the singular question of whether Black men are on the battlefield for race pride and cultural preservation. By race pride, I mean that we recognize and are proud of our God-given color and refuse to lower our heads, or lower our voices when persons or institutions advocate domestic or international policies

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which may have an adverse impact upon Black America. By cultural preservation, I mean that we recognize the need to promote the arts and to study the origin of our ancestry, its music, its dance and its visual majesty. Our sons, our neighbor's son, and our daughters, and our neighbor's daughters are watching us. These young people are judging the contemporary Black man to see if we shall falter in a period of double-digit inflation. How many times in recent months have those magic words, "daddy.... can I have..." "daddy, I need..." "daddy, I want..." sent your voice to octave levels? How many of you men must reassess the full worth of who you are and what you are...men, who may be slipping into a state of immobility and political sterility. Where is the manhood of the Black man?

How many Black men in this community wake to the dew of despair, walk the streets until high noon thirsting for a job and drink themselves into the midnight hour so that they can face a new day...if the morning comes. Where is the manhood of the Black man?

It is easy for the affluent to feel sorry for those in our society who are locked out of the society. However, we cannot feel the pain, the sorrow, the anguish of a father today, who is too impoverished to lift his head from under the cover to buy his children a loaf of bread. Where is the manhood of the Black man?

Black men and Black people need not despair--for despair breeds despair--we need to revitalize our identity by peeping back into our history for the blueprint of our sojourn.

Some of us have become weak because we have forgotten Toussaint L'Ouverture, who, with Dessalines and Capote, defeated the French in 1803 in the Republic of Haiti, kicking the French out of the Western hemisphere, laying the foundation for President Jefferson to purchase American land known as the Louisiana Purchase. Where is the manhood of the Black man today?

Where are the Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps of today--yes, these great poets and literary giants whose words and phrases should be the lullaby that Black men rock their babies to sleep. Where is the manhood of the Black men today?

Where are the men of our community when the NAACP calls out for help and volunteer workers to rally minorities to register to vote; when the Urban League calls out for help to fight against a piece of legislation which would decrease job opportunities and programs for the poor? Where is the manhood of the Black man?

Where are the Black men of today? We are present, yet, we are silent. The Black man needs to raise his voice and let the world know that he is committed and strong enough "to walk into Jerusalem, just like John." Our Jerusalem today is the educational system of Washington, D.C. The silence of the use

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of the word excellence by Black men has rendered the word superfluous. You must recommit yourselves to public education--even if your children are in private schools--so that the District of Columbia--a city which is predominantly Black--may continue to have a pool of talent from which to draw to lead this community.

Where are the voices of Black men against the use of drugs? We must be definite on this subject. We must tell the pharaoh--drug dealers, who walk freely through the playgrounds of our city stalking the weak and the gullible of our city-- to "let my people go."

The time has passed for the men of this community to rush home to read the evening news, pop the tops of 2 or 3 cans of cold beer, watch the game and to get into bed. There is work to be done in the community. Unfortunately, we do not have the luxury of the peace of mind of middle class values when Black elderly people are forced to trade at the jip-joint grocery stores where a loaf of white bread costs them 87 cents per loaf, and where within 10 blocks the elderly, if they had transportation, could purchase 3 loaves for a dollar at the large chain stores.

We need to be fathers setting the example of revitalizing the community, revitalizing the weary souls of men who have lost or are losing their will to fight on "until victory is won."

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On this father's day, where is the Black man today--  
Sterling A Brown's great poem, "Strong Men" is one reference  
point for the answer to this question:

They dragged you from homeland,  
They chained you in coffles,  
They huddled you spoon-fashion in filthy hatches,  
They sold you to give a few gentlemen ease.

They broke you in like oxen,  
They scourged you,  
They branded you,  
They made your women breeders,  
They swelled your numbers with bastards...  
They taught you the religion they disgraced.

You sang:

Keep a-inchin' along  
Lak a po' inch worm...

You sang:

Bye and bye  
I'm gonna lay down dis heaby load

You sang:

Walk togedder, chillen,  
Dontcha git weary...

The strong men keep a-coming' on  
The strong men git stronger...

If there is a morning, so long as strong men keep a  
coming--there will be strong fathers. Sterling Brown has  
answered the question of where are our Black men--they "keep  
a-inchin' along... The strong men...coming on. The strong  
men gittin' stronger...STRONGER..."

Men of the Church of Our Savior--  
Happy Father's and Men's Day