

Tavis Smiley's
Final Tom Joyner Morning Show Commentary
June 26, 2008

For 12 years now, I have been awed by the burden of responsibility that comes with addressing you every Tuesday and Thursday morning.

For 12 years now, I have felt, quite frankly, inadequate to the demands of addressing you every Tuesday and Thursday morning.

And yet for 12 years now, I have stepped to this microphone every Tuesday and Thursday morning hoping to somehow enlighten, encourage and empower the millions of you who tune in.

After 12 years, you all know very well by now, that I regard Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as the greatest American we have ever produced. Dr. King once told an interviewer, "I subject myself to endless self analysis. I question and soul-search constantly into myself to be as certain as I can that I am fulfilling the true meaning of my work. That I am maintaining my sense of purpose. That I am holding fast to my ideals. That I am guiding my people in the right direction. But whatever my doubts, however heavy the burden, I feel that I must accept the task of helping to make this nation and the world a better place to live in for all men...Black and White alike."

As a child, I read those words and I reasoned that if that process and standard worked for Dr. King, then that process and standard could work for me. And so, for most of my life, I have been almost pathologically self-analyzing and self-challenging. Socrates was right, "The unexamined life is not worth living." When you read the writings and words of Dr. King, you discover that he never shied away from referring to Black folk as "my people." No matter who he was speaking to... always... "my people."

I took from that that the goal is to love all of humanity. "All of God's children," as Dr. King might say. But, unapologetically, my love for all of humanity starts with a particular love for my people...Black people. Believe this: every word that I have ever uttered in this sacred space is born of a deep and abiding love for Black people. There are 30 million Black folk in America and I love every one of them.

Social or political commentary, by definition, means that everybody isn't always going to agree with everything you say. My role has been one of challenging us to re-examine the assumptions we hold. Helping us to expand our inventory of ideas and hopefully, empowering us with information that can help us live better lives.

I hate seeing the humanity of Black people contested. And I hate seeing Black folk living beneath their privilege.

Through it all and above all else, I have tried to focus us for 12 years on just one thing really: accountability. To our ancestors...to ourselves...to our sons and daughters...to Black children yet unborn. The essential theme of every commentary for 12 years...accountability.

I believe that, in the end, we are held accountable both for what we do and for what we don't do. Accountable for what we reveal and accountable for what we conceal. To that end, I have had

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just one immutable principle that has guided every one of the almost 1,200 commentaries I have delivered on this program. Just one immutable principle: TELL THE PEOPLE THE TRUTH.

When they love you...TELL THEM THE TRUTH.

When they hate you...TELL THEM THE TRUTH.

When they agree...TELL THEM THE TRUTH.

When they disagree...TELL THEM THE TRUTH.

When they laugh...TELL THEM THE TRUTH.

When they cry...TELL THEM THE TRUTH.

In times of comfort and convenience...TELL THEM THE TRUTH.

In times of controversy and challenge...TELL THEM THE TRUTH.

TELL THE PEOPLE THE TRUTH.

My loyalty has always been to the truth, not to consistency. But I hope that my message has been consistent: justice for all, service to others and a love that liberates. Because I believe in the power of love to ennoble ordinary lives. I believe that we are who we are because somebody loved us. I am who I am, and you are who you are because somebody loved us.

Each of our lives, then, is really about finding a way to deserve to be here. I'm still searching this morning, but I want to thank you for helping to point me in the right direction. Thank you for a love that's lifted me higher and higher. Higher than I've ever been lifted before.

To Tom, J., Sybil, Myra J., Miss Dupree, George Wallace, and all of the Tom Joyner Morning Show staff that I have had the pleasure of working with past and present... thank you for 12 years of lessons in how to live, love, learn, labor and laugh. You are all master teachers and I am eternally grateful.

And now finally, but most importantly, unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ever ask or think, according to the power that already worketh in us, unto Him be glory throughout all ages, world without end. And all of God's children said, "Amen."