History Repeats Itself: Egypt’s Revolution Parallels U.S. Civil Rights Movement

By Nathaniel Tolbert

“Those who cannot remember the past are bound to repeat it” - George Santayana.

There have been few quotes as true as Mr. Santayana’s. History has a tendency to repeat itself especially when men are willing to do anything to gain and maintain power. The recent struggle in Egypt is an example of what happens when people refuse to be marginalized. The case of citizens lashing out against an oppressor or restrictive form of government is nothing new, not to the world or to people of the African Diaspora.

The Egyptian Revolution is a story that we have hear many times over. The people, disenfranchised, use their ingenuity to respond to societal injustices. Inspired by Tunisia, an African country whose people defeated a monarchical government, the young people of Egypt, using social networking sites to organize civil rallies, successfully overthrew the thirty year reign of President Hosni Mubarak. Economic instability and a general poor quality of life inspired the youth, many of whom are college graduates unable to find jobs. A college degree no longer guarantees a job in Egypt and much of this is due to the economic imbalance created by the business monopolies and corrupt politics allowed to run rampant under the Mubarak regime. The economic disparity between rich and poor has widened tremendously during Mubarak’s reign (sound familiar?). Members of Mubarak’s cabinet have had their net worth estimated at between two to two point five billion dollars. The Mubarak family fortune has been estimated to be between fifty and seventy billion dollars; the family has not been conservative in their displays of wealth as evidenced by their penchant for employing renowned acts such as Usher and Beyoncé to entertain at lavish private parties. While the Mubarak’s were partying and enjoying their incredible wealth, the population was growing exponentially and so was unemployment.

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Protesters in Egypt 2011

by Ashley Woods

In 1992, Terry McMillan stunned the world with her novel, Waiting to Exhale, which later became a film starring four of the most prominent Black women in Hollywood: Angela Bassett, Whitney Houston, Loretta Devine, and Lela Rochon. Where has McMillan been since such a pivotal film for Black women? Well, we all saw How Stella Got Her Groove Back, and long story short, it was about McMillan—except she found out that her gorgeous, young, Jamaican lover was actually gay. McMillan went on to be angry for three years, and in 2010 she finally published the sequel to Waiting to Exhale—

Getting to Happy.

I read Waiting to Exhale years ago when I was in my early teens, and I couldn’t wait to be in my thirties to have Robin’s sass, Bernadine’s strength, Savannah’s intelligence, and especially Gloria’s unconditional love. And, even if these things didn’t lead all of these women to stable relationships by the end of the book, I was determined to have all of this and a genuine love interest like Gloria did Gregory Hines.

Now that I’m in my early twenties, and I see that life is not even close to what Waiting to Exhale made it seem to be, I was in need of a book entitled Getting to Happy. Getting to happy is not easy for Black women—especially Black women at Boston College. As much as we may have fantasized about having strong and successful Black girlfriends like Robin, Bernie, Savannah, and Gloria; and engaging in vibrant, Black love as though we were our own version of Sex and the City, this is nearly impossible on BC’s campus. I have spent a lot of my five years at BC disappointed in the Black community, because frankly, there is no community.

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Black love is not present enough on this campus, whether the love is between significant others or a love of sisterhood or brotherhood.

McMillan’s book came right in the nick of time when I was about to declare myself the infamous angry Black woman. This is my fifth year at BC, and as a grad student, I was not surrounded by my close girlfriends anymore, and I was also at a low in my dating relationships. What better way to pick myself up than by reading Getting to Happy? Boy, was I wrong. In Getting to Happy, the same four women are now in their fifties and still going through drama that only Terry McMillan can create. In the first few chapters, it is clear that Savannah, Bernadine, and Robin still have not gotten their lives together, and you hope that by the end of the book they have gotten to happy. Gloria, on the other hand, has lost a significant amount of weight, and she and Marvin are about to celebrate an anniversary. She’s as happy as can be, but only for the first few pages. I won’t ruin it for anybody, but I will say that my only reaction was “Damn, Terry!”

I finished the book, and got as close to closure as possible with the Jerry Springer-like twists, but I did not get out of it what I thought I would. I did not get to happy by reading about Robin, Bernie, Savannah, and Gloria. All I read was Terry McMillan’s anger—for which she had reason, but once again, I was disappointed. I actually had to think about how to get myself out of this angry Black woman funk without the help of Terry McMillan, because clearly, she was in it herself. I am determined to get to happy very soon, but the role of Black women and our relationships are changing drastically, and it is illogical to maintain fantasies of a book written twenty years ago, nor a book written today, if it is written by a bitter Black woman.

Read the rest of this article at www.bc.edu/aads

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The young people of Egypt, armed with fiery rhetoric, refused to remain complacent in the status quo. An Huffington Post article quotes 24-year-old Ismail Syed, a hotel worker who struggles to live on a salary of $50 a month, saying: "This is the first time I am protesting, but we have been a cowardly nation. We have to finally say no," This is the kind of determination necessary to defeat an oppressive force. The people did not turn into cowards when the government shut down their tool of communication, the internet, and they fought back when the military government began to attack them with force. They remained true to their convictions and stayed the course until they got what they wanted, Mubarak’s resignation. The Egyptian uprising not only continues a history of revolution it serves as an example of the human will to overcome insurmountable odds.

Looking back at the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s we see a similar situation: an oppressive system being overturned by people who would not tolerate it any longer. The Civil Rights movement was the African-American response to the discriminatory Jim Crow system of the dangerously racist American South. The same fearlessness that allowed the Civil Rights leaders to organize against a seemingly insurmountable force is the same energy that fueled the Egyptian people. An additional similarity between Egypt’s revolt and the Civil Rights Movement is the significant role played by young people. When Kwame Toure (formerly Stokely Carmichael) of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) called for “Black Power” the Civil Rights Movement evolved into a broader struggle for Black liberation; and The Black Panther Party, another organization led by young people, was born out of the political struggles of the Civil Rights Movement to further demand control of the socio-economic and political institutions controlling the oppressed Black communities throughout the United States.

Read the rest of this article on the AADS website at bc.edu/aads.
Voices of the Diaspora

Word Around the Community

Each month Voices will include articles of note pertaining to the African and African Diaspora. Feel free to submit any articles that pique your interest to aads@bc.edu.

Rev. Al Sharpton tells Bethune-Cookman grads journey just beginning
By Mark I. Johnson
DAYTONA BEACH -- As the Bethune-Cookman University class of 2011 headed out into the world after graduation ceremonies at the Ocean Center on Thursday, they had taken with them more than diplomas and the cheering well wishes of family members.

The graduates also took away some advice from honorary classmate and commencement speaker, the Rev. Al Sharpton.

The civil rights and political activist joined those receiving undergraduate and graduate degrees from the historically black college with an honorary doctorate of divinity of his own. However, he stressed in his address to those stepping out into the world that their journey was only the beginning.

"Don't let this be the last time they call your name," Sharpton said.

With his trademark oratory at full volume, the 54-year-old adviser to some and thorn in the side of others told his audience while they may have all the support in the world now, they must look to themselves and their faith in God to succeed when all else fails.

"Even if you are not responsible for being down, you are responsible for getting back up," Sharpton directed, using himself as an example.

He said every morning he walks into the bathroom, looks in the mirror and calls a meeting of the "Al Sharpton Fan Club."

Read the rest of this article at newsjournalonline.com (5/6/2011)

NFL Player Assaults All Black Women, President of Black Women Matter, Inc speaks out.
By Yasmeen Muqtasid
"I didn't touch her. I don't even like black girls. I know what this is about, she is just upset I have a white girlfriend. I couldn't tell you the last time I dated a black girl. She was trying to get with me."

I had to do a double take when I read this in the Washington Post's recent article about sexual abuse charges against NFL player Albert Haynesworth. Haynesworth - who is no stranger to controversy, was recently indicted for assaulting a black waitress. In his defense he states that there's no way he could have assaulted the woman because as he put it, "I don't even like black girls..." 

Read the rest of this article at blacknews.com

Culture on Campus

Boston College has a rich tradition of cultural clubs pertaining to the Diaspora. Culture on Campus' goal is to make students aware of said clubs' events. This month's section focuses on Black History month oriented events

The 13th Annual Roxbury International Film Festival begins Thursday, July 28th and runs through Sunday, July 31st, 2011.

The Roxbury International Film Festival takes place over four days, with workshops, panel discussions and film screenings taking place at the Museum of Fine Arts, Massachusetts College of Art, Wentworth Institute of Technology, Northeastern University, the Roxbury Center for the Arts at Hibernian Hall and the Coolidge Corner Theatre.

2011 Boston College Alumni Reunion
*List not reflective of all scheduled events

An Evening of Boston Comedy on the Heights
9:00–11:30 p.m. | Conte Arena Floor
Experience an evening of “Boston Comedy” by none other than Steve Sweeney, and fellow Boston comedians. If you’re from Boston, you know and love Steve Sweeney’s standup comedy performances that have travelled cross country and back many times. Conte Arena floor is transformed to a Boston night club.

Arrive early for the best seats in the house. Cocktails and antics…don’t miss out! (Casual attire)

Alumni Reunion Barbeque
11:30 am–2:00 p.m. | Shea Field
Bring the whole family for this fun-filled outdoor celebration for all ages! Enjoy food fresh off the grill while catching up with old friends. A variety of children’s activities will be available, including games, face painting, and BC inflatables. (Casual attire)

Sunday, June 5
Reunion Jazz Brunch
9:00–11:00 a.m. | 2101 Commonwealth Ave – Former Cardinal’s residence
Enjoy a delicious Sunday morning brunch, set against live jazz music. What a nice way to cap off the weekend with friends. (Casual attire)
Voices of the Diaspora

Minors Profile — Dave Reed ‘11

Why did you choose to minor in African and African Diaspora Studies?
I choose to minor in African and African Diaspora Studies mainly because of my own interest in Black History. Coming from a family that is strong on remembering and celebrating our history and legacy I wanted to continue that tradition in college. When I discovered that AADS covered not only African American history but the Diaspora as well, I knew minoring in the AADS program is something I wanted to do.

How do you think it will affect your professional life moving forward?
Learning about the history of many other members of the Black community, not just African Americans will definitively be a plus later on in life. I hope to bring my new knowledge of their history to whatever I do professionally. I believe I am a better fit professionally now that I am learning the complete story of those affected by the Diaspora.

How do you feel AADS is promoting diversity on campus?
I believe AADS is doing a great job of promoting diversity. In every class I have taken in the minor, I have ironically always been the minority. As a freshman when I registered for my first AADS class my misconception was that the class enrollment would be majority black, however that was never the case. The amount of knowledge and how in depth ever professor is with each topic is extremely beneficial for all students.

Dave Reed ‘11

Musings from the Diaspora

Each month, “Voices” will pick a topic of interest relevant to the Africans in the Diaspora and submitted by its readers. The goal of these editorials is to promote dialogue; after each editorial, readers are encouraged to submit written replies. Respondents may respectfully agree or disagree, but always remember that the goal is dialogue. The opinions expressed are exclusively those of the writer. Ed. Note: In a slight departure this month Cat McAtee the Administrative Assistant for the AADS program has written a piece examining her time as a white woman in a Black Studies Department

My Time at AADS
By Cat McAtee
When I moved to Boston in 2005, I arrived without a job and without much of a plan; I was unsure of when - or if - I would be starting classes in a Masters program at BC. A tip from a friend led me to look through the offerings on the Boston College job site, and I hurried to put in as many applications as I could. 18 resumes later, I sat back to wait for responses that I could only hope would be quick in coming. When I got my first call, though, I was in for a big surprise.

“This is Cynthia Young, director of Black Studies. I’m calling about the application you put in?” said the voice on the other end of the phone. I racked my brain. Black Studies! Did I put anything in for Black Studies? Why would I have done that? My experience with the Black community was limited at best; I couldn’t have pretended to know anything about the topic. But here I was, arranging to interview for their part-time administrative assistant’s position.

Sitting before both Cynthia Young and Sandra Sandiford Young was a daunting experience. I was at a loss to explain the little I knew about anything related to the African Diaspora; the most I could talk about was my father’s work with gold miners in South Africa. Both women were welcoming and professional – Dr. Sandiford Young’s congenial questions put me at ease while Dr. Cynthia Young’s direction and focus made me realize that this program meant business; I tried hard to match their attitude with my own enthusiasm and professionalism, but in the end it felt more like dumb luck and a little bit of sympathy that got me the job.

Suddenly here I was, plunging daily into the world of black culture, communication, history, a world of imperial legacies, post-colonialism, reparations, jazz, migration and diaspora, civil rights, a constantly changing lexicon of slang, understanding institutional racism...and how it felt to be a minority. There were other white people in our office, but I was the sole constant white presence, day in and day out. I was being immersed in the program, and I was experiencing a mind-blowing new understanding of the infinite complexity of race, ethnicity, identity, and, well, Blackness.

There was plenty of suspicion about me at first. Most students didn’t know what to make of a young white woman in the traditionally black Black Studies office. Even professors were politely guarded until they gradually got to know me. I faithfully attended every faculty meeting for the first few years, taking notes and learning simultaneously about the concerns of reaching out to (and providing support for) black students at BC, and about how to build a better program academically so that the rigorous nature of our program would become widely recognized. The struggle to raise the Black Studies -- now African & African Diasporas Studies program’s profile has become my struggle, too.

Interview
Nathaniel Tolbert: Has your immersion in the African and African Diaspora Studies office broadened and or changed your perspective [on life]?
Cat McAtee: Well yes, but I think any job can potentially do that
N: Can you think of any memorable event that triggered this awakening?
Read of the interview at www.bc.edu/aads

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