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Expectations of A Black Man
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IDS
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1994 December 14

Listen real close to what you are about to hear. I know once you have heard this you may understand better, especially those of you who know how to listen.

I have been trying for many years to reach a point, yet I'm still not there. I don't know when I will get there, but I feel that someday I will be there. I realized a long time ago my journey to this point was necessary. This journey has become the focus of my life. I didn't realize how important this journey was to me, until recently. My journey is probably more important to you than it is to me. If I reach this point some of you will be able to say, "I should have been with you man." The truth is, you have been with me the entire time. I can't remember when a day has gone by when I haven't thought about one of you. I've needed you all more than you've needed me. I'm thankful you have all been right by my side. Every step I took, you assisted; sometimes you carried me. The reason that I am still on this journey is because you wouldn't let me quit. You all know how much you mean to me, and I really do miss you when I'm away. The strongest feelings I have in my heart are for all of you, my family, and this journey. I never felt passion for anything until I began this journey. I still struggle with the fact you are not right here in my presence, but you are in my heart. I've never told you how sad I get when I'm hundreds of miles away from you, or how happy I am when I realize I'm on my way home, and just hours away from spending most of my time with you again. There are no others who can take your place but many are trying. I refuse to let them because my true love is for you, my people in Franklin, Tennessee.

I know we have gone through some tough years together and sometimes things really don't seem any better. My journey has put me on a different path, and that's what I need to talk to you about. Neither of us know whose path is the right one, but we have been made to believe I am on the right one. I know this is the right one for me, because I can feel the passion on this side. The weird thing is I still travel on your path also, and I feel passion on the path we share. I want us to be together. I know both of these paths are bumpy. I really wish you were on this path with me. We need to do this together, but since you are not with me, I will grow strong and do this alone for the sake of all of our children. The two paths travelled have made us somewhat different. America is telling me; I have an advantage on you now. They are trying to make me believe I am different, special, not like you.

Remember this my friend I am still the same ole, Terry. I was a little more ambitious at one time, and they chose to show me something different than they showed you. Shh, they think I am going to keep it a secret. I hope you realized; I will never keep this a secret from you. You are the reason I went on this journey. I will share my vision of the path closed to you, so you may borrow my eyes. They thought I was someone else, but I was just curious. I will show our children how to get on this path. After all, no matter how different we have and do become, they will always see us as just alike. If they are against you, then they are just as much against me. I know because of my journey you all have higher expectations of me. I have high expectations of myself, and for you. Now, we both need to place these high expectations on our children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and everyone else in our community. We are on our way to the top and we mustn't stop.

There are people in America who believe we are incapable beings. I have lived through these expectations of failure for 23 years. America has continued to show me that nothing good is expected from me, unless I possess a skill they can use to exploit me. America has never been a place where I was expected to succeed, although I have. Just as many black men before did. America fails to recognize us. I don't believe they want the world to see us. They don't want little black children to grow up successful. We are not wanted at the top, and we are not invited to the party. I'm sorry America here we come. I will personally see to it.

My experiences in America have led me to make decisions that have taken me on a journey. While I've been on this journey, I've had the opportunity to discover things about myself, America, the world, and living happily within the three.

My desire is to help my people in America to have a journey. A journey to happiness and prosperity. African Americans still need to do a lot of growing as a group of people. America still believes we are incapable beings. After everything our people have accomplished, we still do not get the respect all human beings deserve.

Franklin, Tennessee began as a small town but has continued to grow and prosper during my lifetime; with growth and prosperity came many changes, which sometimes created problems. Franklin, in my opinion, is the best place in the United States to raise children. We have our share of excitement and problems, but we usually pull together and overcome them as a community.

Franklin, like everywhere else I've lived, has racial tension. This tension seems to be inescapable. It is a problem nationwide in diverse communities. Throughout my travel I've yet to encounter a community which has not been touched with racial issues. There is a bigger problem that has been created through racist ideas, prejudice, discrimination, and stereotypes, stemming from this racial tension. This is a problem African Americans have to deal with on a daily basis. We have been placed under certain expectations. We are not expected to succeed. We are destined to fail. All across this nation, we continue to be viewed and judged in negative ways. I realize not all white Americans view us negatively, nor are they the only group to portray bad images of us, and have little to no expectations of us. We sometimes do it for them.

While attending Hope College in Holland, Michigan, I've learned a lot about living in a small community not made up with mainly blacks and whites. I quickly realized in this community that not only did white people assume that I was up to something, but they also acted as if I was not suppose to be there, or that I must have gotten there by accident. Other students would ask if I was in the focus program. My reply "What's that?" I soon learned the focus program allows students to enter Hope College on probation because their grades were not good enough upon leaving high school. I don't know any black people who were at Hope under this program. Why did they assume I was part of this program?

One Sunday, I decided to attend church with a friend and was told by one of the older members I must be going to college to be a basketball coach. He didn't ask me my major as he did the other students. I also, remember some of the students would form a study group during my Freshman year. I was in my third year before anyone asked me to be part of a study group. I wonder, why? I always seem to have good relationships with my

classmates. I'm sure I could have added something worthwhile to the group and made things a lot easier for us all.

The one thing I have really learned throughout my travels is America has low expectations for black Americans, particularly for young black men. The things we have to overcome on a daily basis can be tremendously stressful. As a young black man in America, I have to always be conscious of my environment. It is hard for me to go into unfamiliar situations spontaneously. America has continuously made me aware of what I am, "a black man!" I am always being scrutinized. I can very seldom walk into stores without being followed. I can not walk through neighborhoods unfamiliar to me without precaution. I have to wonder if some of my own people are going to bring me up on charges of being a spy, narc, sell-out, or hostile because they don't know or recognize me. I am not from their neighborhood. I may be accused of trying to steal, rape, or any other terrible thing if I was seen in any affluent neighborhood that is not populated with my kind. The only thing I am guilty of is being in the wrong place and being a black man. I fit the description, so now I must explain why I was in your neighborhood sometimes; I have to explain why I'm in my own neighborhood, or a friend's yard. I can't even stand at a bus stop or walk downtown without being under someone's suspicion. Someone please tell me what I've done to deserve this treatment. How can I succeed in America with these expectations? Where did all this come from? I know most of the things you say we do are untrue, but you continue to portray all of us in a negative way. Every time one of us does something good you do your best to find something bad about that person, and then go so far as to say, "see all black men are bad and can't be trusted."

America has no expectations for me. As soon as you see I am a black man you put me under the rock. I might be able to dig my way out, if I'm lucky, but I will always be expected to do something wrong. If I so happen to give you satisfaction, I am sure you will be right there to rub my face in my mistake.

When will we realize good and evil does not come in a color? The day has come for Americans to be judged by their character rather than their skin color. We need to stop categorizing people and making assumptions about those groups. We are all capable of the same actions. It's time for everyone in America to focus on what we all have in common, rather than how we are all different. You can not have expectations for an entire group based on the actions of a few individuals.

Since the day I was born into your country most of you expected my life would be no better than my father's or uncles'. You never believed that I had a chance to amount to anything. You told me the only thing I could do was be a professional sports player, an entertainer, a factory worker, or a janitor. Some of you are still telling this to my people today. The sad thing is I almost believed you, just like some of our kids believe you today. I am now standing on the very edge, of proving all of you wrong. I remember when some of you would tell me that I was going to be just like my father, and the other black men in Franklin. A good for nothing, baby making, criminally minded fool. You thought this was the way all of us turned out. You never thought I could be like George Washington Carver, but you did assume I had the chance to be Dr. Julius Erving, or Walter Payton. I have always been two steps away from making your thoughts about my failure a reality. Some days I was as close as one step. You tried very hard to turn me into what you thought I should be, but I wouldn't let you. Now some of you sit around patting me on the back. "Good for you son. You made it; you beat the odds. I am not naive enough at this time to fall for any of your traps. You continue to tell me through your actions that you're not finished with me yet. I can never get too comfortable in America, and you will see to that. You have shown me this much through your daily interactions

with me. I've seen what you do to those black men that get a little money. I've watched you successfully destroy some and come up just short with others. I've learned from everything you've done to my kind. It has never failed as soon as we get too cozy with you; you find something to tear down our character, and send that negative image all across America. You say to America and the world "that no matter what a black man accomplishes you must always expect the worse from him."

One night after a home basketball game, one of my teachers brought over a friend to introduce to me. The teacher complimented me on a play that I made in the game, and continued to go on about me to the friend. There was one particular comment made by the teacher that has stuck with me. "Terry is different than a lot of the other players on the team. I hear a lot of teachers complaining about the athletes not doing what they need to be doing in the class. Terry is not like that. He always does exceptionally well in my class, and from what I hear in all his classes." The next day I found out that the teacher's friend was a very important person from a local college. The teacher was trying very hard to advertise me as the type of student for them to be looking for. I noticed a lot of colleges are interested in black athletes who can sell game tickets and win championships. The major schools usually don't expect their black student-athletes to graduate with a degree. I believe they expect the black athletes to help them win national titles, and then go on to the pros.

I can never be free of the expectations you have for me. There is nothing I can do to gain your trust. Our relationship is so wounded in its foundation I'm afraid it can't be mended. However, we must live in this nation together, so we have to find a way to make things better. The first favor I would like to ask of you is you educate my children the same way you want yours to be educated. I believe this will begin to mend the broken foundation in our relationship by having the same expectations of all children, providing them with equal opportunities, the same type of instruction, and fair testing. We must teach our children to have self-respect, but also have respect for others. There is nothing wrong with differences as long as we make difference a positive rather than a negative. I've noticed often a lot of your children are in the same situations as mine. This should be a wake up call to all of us. The difference in the skin color is just a small difference. If a white or black child can't pass a basic reading skills test the problem is still the same. We have a child that can't pass a reading test. As a teacher, I am committed to doing everything in my power to see both children become capable of passing the reading test. The fact the skin color may change from year to year doesn't mean my expectations for a child in the situation will change. This is where things get tricky with you because you look at a white child and say, "why can't this child do this." Then, you turn to the black children and say, "These children are so helpless their lives are going to be so tough. I bet half of their parents can't read that well." What? It never happens!

While I was doing my student teaching in a school that is 99% African American, I spoke with and overheard several teachers make comments about the incapability of their students. I witnessed a teacher call on a student to label something on the board. The student labeled it correctly to the surprise of the teacher. The teacher said, "gosh I called on you because I thought you would get it wrong." I heard several teachers say to others, "my students would never be able to accomplish that." Will these be the expectations my children have to face in your hands? I hope not. I wonder why the schools in the Northeastern part of Philadelphia, and the magnet schools, are doing so much better than the other schools in the city of Philadelphia. I know for a fact one thing magnet schools advertise is they expect more from their students, and I think this is one of the major reason why they do much better.

You are so right; this is not totally your fault. As a matter of fact you are a small part of this problem most of the time, but don't let anyone fool you into believing you are incapable of making this problem bigger or smaller. Do you know the kind of power you have? If you do not expect your students to do well, or give them the opportunity and support to achieve, it will be hard for them to succeed later in life.

I have been trying for many years to reach a point, yet I'm still not there. My destination is right next to you, equality for all. This destination is a place in which we can sit and talk about the problems our children are facing in the community. I mean yours, mine, his, and hers. At this place, we will not only talk about these problems, but come up with solutions. Together me, you, him, and her. I don't know when or if we will ever get to this point, but I hope that someday we will. I realized a long time ago my journey to this point was necessary. I believe that you realized it too, or at least you gave me hints you understood this was indeed necessary. Somewhere along the way some of your people, especially, and a few of mine too, decided this was not the right thing to do. So, your people continued on your way, and mine were sent on a detour. Some of our people realized there was something wrong. Some of your people decided, after many of mine complained that in order for America to continue to progress things were going to have to be changed. Your people cleverly began to pick and chose which of us you would allow to join the party. You found people who were somewhat like you, made them feel like you, and made them believe they were like you. A lot of them were so naive they really believed you, so they turned on the rest of us. They began to take your side and fail to realize they were hurting their own people. These so called African Americans don't care about their own people. They have everything you have. Some of them are our worse critics. They are killing us before we get out the gate. Now, you will let us out the gate. You let some of them taste all the nice things life could offer, and they began to forget the obvious. Yes, they really were still black. It has taken some of them longer than others to realize this obvious truth, but some of them must be still sleeping. One day you will tell them that they are indeed still black. I know how you will do it. You will slip and perhaps call them a nigger, or one of your buddies will pull them over and take them through the usual routine for blacks. One day you will decide you no longer need that particular nigger and get you another one and put that one out in the cold. Guess what, my brothers can always come home. We will forgive them. I'll see you when you return.

You show us how to get to the top, then you set us up for the big kill. If a person makes a mistake and does something wrong you take the opportunity to tell everyone in America we can't live up to your expectations. You can do more damage to us this way, because you can point at one person and say, "see we gave him all these chances and look at what he did." You do everything you can to portray us as not worthy, and negatively. I see this on television everyday. I don't even watch the news any more because I know you are going to show someone who looks like me doing something stupid, rather than one of my people doing something good. You might switch this around every so often but the majority of the time, you will show the worse picture of me, and the best picture of you.

Franklin, Tennessee like a lot of southern towns has grown and changed dramatically over the years. When I was a little boy the town was very segregated and racial tension was high. Segregation in Franklin was mainly done through housing during my early years. There is still only one neighborhood with nice houses in which, every house is occupied by a black family. There are some other neighborhoods with very nice houses in which you can find black and white families. Most of the black families in Franklin at one time or another lived in the projects (low income housing), or were related to someone living in the projects. Through legislation such as Section 8 housing some have

been able to escape the grips of the projects and are now in the process of buying a house. I want to see more African Americans have the opportunity to buy a house. The projects in Franklin have become more integrated now that poverty hits some white families as hard as it does blacks.

While I was growing up in Franklin, I remember some of the girls making statements like, "I can't wait to get my own project." I never understood. What is having your own project to look forward to? All I see in the projects is poverty. This type of poverty takes forever to break out of. The projects have drained enough money out of my family alone we could have probably paid for at least two brand new houses. I want all of you to look for some way out of this mess. We have to do something to escape the grips of poverty. I still believe education is the only one way to get out of this dilemma, so we better start seeing to it our children get proper education. A high school education is a small step, and is really not enough to make the necessary steps toward progression for our community. I have yet to see an African American employed in the place where a lot of us continue to pay our rent. I know we have people which meet the qualifications, but for some reason they don't seem to care. I am committed to not only making things better for my family, but for my entire race. We need to do and expect more from one another to satisfy the needs for our community.

The schools had been forced to integrate well before I entered the system, but I remember my mom, aunts, and uncles talking about the fun they had in their schools when they were segregated. I also remember the fear they've spoken about concerning integration. They spoke about being helpless and having very few alternatives. White people for many years treated them as if their lives were nothing, and did to them whatever they chose. There was a time in my life when every black man who I was familiar with had a brush with the law. As a young child I have seen or heard about every man in my family being arrested. Quite often in Franklin, Tennessee I've seen young black men arrested by police officers for no apparent reason. I've watched men get beat brutally by officers, just as bad as the Rodney King beating witnessed on television all across America in 1991. These men were my family members and friends; watching these incidents drove me for a period of time to not trust police officers, especially white ones. The incidents have also caused me to be more aggressive in speaking up for my rights rather than backing down because of fear. They have caused me to pay great attention to things and know exactly where my rights begin, and know when I am being violated.

I have learned one thing from police officers in Franklin; they expect all black men to be involved in criminal activities and they are determined to catch us. They will by any means necessary find a way to keep us from prospering. It is their job to make sure that black men fail, while catching actual criminals is just one of their hobbies.

One night, I was driving a friend's Honda Prelude. It was very nice and still had the drive out tag on it. He was proud he could now afford a nice ride. He had worked his ass off for the past four years in the United States Navy and even fought in Desert Storm. We were cruising in the projects where some of our friends live, just hanging out having a good time. A police officer pulled up beside the car and told us we were not allowed to be there. When I drove off, he followed us to another neighborhood and before I knew what was going on I was in hand cuffs on my way to jail. After several preliminary hearings I finally arrived in court on trial facing a felony charge of reckless endangerment. I beat the case because the district attorney had no choice, but to drop the charges after the arresting officer and another officer who supposedly witnessed the incident, gave conflicting testimony. One officer had me traveling east, and the other west. I guess other than this small piece of evidence their story was almost similar, the second officer was asked to

diagram the incident on the blackboard. He stood very confidently in the courtroom, not realizing every person in the court room knew he was lying, because his testimony totally contradicted the previous officer. My belief is they pulled me over expecting to find something bigger, like an ounce of cocaine. Judging from their anxiousness to search the vehicle, they expected to have a big case. They couldn't have been more wrong. Listen to this because it might save your life and your family some grief. For several years we have helped them destroy us. Police officers have been able to destroy us because we have allowed them to do so. We do not have to like them, but we need to give them some respect, and learn to speak to them without anger or fear. If you've ever done this to an officer you will notice they temporarily lose their power and for a brief moment they can't touch you because they stand there dumbfounded, because they were not able to control you emotionally. At the very moment when you use your voice and speak to them in a tone they must respect, you have exceeded their expectations and they no longer have a clue as to what to do because this was not in their training. However, we must never give them the opportunity to grab on to something because you know they have a place waiting for you. One thing we must do is stop providing the opportunity for them to arrest us. It's time for us to build great habits, and stop the generational poverty. It's time for a new mindset.

I know how hard it is for you because I go through everything you do. The difference is, I have learned from the mistakes of others. I suggest you pay closer attention to the things happening to our people in our neighborhoods and lend a hand when you can. Don't let others pull you astray. We must stop the assault on our lives, and empower our children with the necessary knowledge to allow them to succeed. We have to be there for our children. Make up your mind and control your destiny. Educate yourself. Get the knowledge and skills you need to survive. There is only one person who can stop you from achieving the goals you desire, but there will be several working against you. You can overcome them all, if you choose to. You must overcome them; our children are depending on us. A child will very seldom fail to imitate the behavior of adults, even when they have not listened to a word you've said. They will still often times follow your lead. Please, lead them in a positive direction.

In my lifetime, we have made tremendous steps in America. I am sure you realize we can't stop here. We must continue to move forward, our struggle is still evident to me everyday. I realize there are forces waging war against us and we better prepare a defense against these forces. United we can stand, divided we will fall. My journey includes a conscious effort to unite my people. My journey is to help you to realize the potential of America when we expect great things from all Americans, rather than write them off as incapable beings as some people have done to us. We are a people of great magnitudes and if we are given the same opportunities as others, quite often we rise and achieve to your disbelief.

My experiences have prepared me, and given me certain expectations. I have ideas of what to expect before I even approach a situation. I know what you expect from me, and I know what I expect from myself. You expect the worse, but I give you my best. I know. I blow your mind. I often come prepared for the worse, and hoping for the best. If you prepare for the worse, then your situation can only be better once you arrive. A lot of you are going to be very surprised because you are expecting heaven, and are not prepared for hell.

The expectations placed upon me by others and myself have led me on a very special journey different from you. These expectations have caused me a great struggle in which I continue to battle today. I am on the very brink of success. I can taste it, smell it, feel it, but I have not yet obtained it. One slip and this journey could end. This journey started

before I was out of my mother's womb and twenty-three(49) years later it continues. There are a lot of people in Franklin, I am sure never expected I would be doing this today. All the odds were against me, but I turned them around with the help of some outstanding people.

My elementary school teachers helped me a lot without even realizing it. As I reflect back on those experiences, I must thank them, but at the same time criticize them. They did something critical and detrimental to other black children, but helpful to me. The teachers had very high expectations of me, but most of my peers were not expected to do very well, and therefore did not. When I entered formal education, I already had a grasp on things such as letters of the alphabet, numbers and some words beyond most of my peers, and this shocked my teachers. This was especially evident in regards to my black peers. I was treated very differently than my black friends and I felt somewhat special at first, then I felt I was better, and I not only isolated myself, but the teachers isolated me. I now realize my instructional level was higher than my friends, so I had to be separated in order to advance. I extend my gratitude to those teachers that did this because they surpassed all the expectations of how black students should be educated. They did not give in to the belief that all blacks were incapable of obtaining the same concepts as white students. They did not give in to those racist practices that would have hindered my progress, keeping me with students that were below my current development. I remember my earliest grammar school experience as being very joyful. The teachers seemed very caring and concerned about most of their students. We knew exactly how we were expected to behave and we carried ourselves accordingly for the most part. There was always at least one student in the class who would give the teacher enough trouble and gray hairs for the entire class. We learned to expect that.

I cared very deeply for all my teachers and didn't want to get on their bad side, so I kept my behavior under control. I knew if I got into trouble at school, I would be in double trouble at home. I was also afraid of receiving a paddling from the principal.

My grandmother raised me along with my mother, aunts, and uncles from birth to around five years old. We were all living in a project in Cherokee, a neighborhood under the provision of the Franklin Housing Authority. Our house was always clean, but it was too crowded. There were nine people living in this four-bedroom project. I learned a lot of what not to do by watching my uncles. My mother is the oldest child and she was only fourteen years older at the time of my birth, to make a long story short I practically grew up with my mother, aunts, and uncles. We were all under the supervision of my grandmother. I call her mama just like everyone else, and addressed my own mother by her first name. As I grew older, all of these people expected good things from me. I believe now they see me as the opportunity for a new beginning for the family. I have a lot of cousins, a younger brother and sister who look up to me with astonishment. We expect a lot from our family members, and we support them in whatever they choose to do. They will never turn their backs on me, and I will never turn mine to them. I am the new beginning and we are determined to bring our family honor.

On my journey to carry my family name to honor, and provide a better life for my children, and the children in my community, I have run into another unexpected dilemma. I am almost as surprised as some of you are that I made it this far. My journey has caused a slight separation between me and some people that are very dear to my heart. Through obtaining a college education I've come to a situation that Zora Hurston and Richard Rodriquez write about in their life stories. They both give a reflection of how education has separated them from their culture. Hurston seems to appreciate the fact that her education helped her to achieve individualism. Hurston wanted to be viewed more as an

individual, and I feel the same way. I don't like the fact everyone first recognizes me as a black man. I would like nothing more than to be viewed as Terrance Haynes first. Through identifying us in a group America paints a picture of me that is not representative of me. It is a picture of what you expect me to be. It is a picture that says, I must be an athlete, entertainer, coach, or employed in a position that requires me to perform a skill that doesn't require thinking. The other picture you paint of me is even worse. "Lock the doors honey the black guy is looking at our car." " There are a lot of black men on the street corner let's cross to the other side." America has helped me to realize people who look like me are your worse nightmare. I am only used for two things in America. You can exploit my skills, or I can fill your jails. You would rather do both. Exploit me until I'm all used up then lock me up and throw away the key. America has no expectations for me to hold on to. If I listen to America my life will be of no value, and I will soon die a mystery.

Expectations are the key here. I have them. Some of you don't. I have expectations of myself and for our future generations. My expectations are high, some may say too high. There is no such thing if you ask me. The expectations America has tried to ingrain in me are not what we want. Those are not expectations; they are death traps. If we continue to tell our children that they are worthless and allow them to pursue things that are not in their best interest, we are going to continue to have problems in America. Our children should not be expecting the only way they can succeed in America is with a ball and through playing. We need to push them and support them through obtaining a balanced life, anchored with education. Children believe what they see. Most of our children believe two things because this is what they've seen. Black men become rich and successful through the entertainment industry, or illegal activities. If this is what they see, this is what they will try to be. We need to show them the entire picture, because this is just a small version. These versions of the black man will cause us the death of your family, spirit, and our community.

Now is the time for us to stand together and fight for one another rather than against each other. We have been making white America so happy because they don't have to work to take us out, we are doing it for them. Too many of us have bought into these expectations, and given up on life. I've seen so many of you work so hard, and then get to a point and turn back without a fight. I've come too far to turn back. I will fight for what is right, but I am tired of fighting people who should be fighting with me. Come on brothers! I thought you would understand this. I am not doing this just for myself. I'm doing this for you too.

I am on a journey to raise the expectations of the black man in America. I intend to start this process by first working with young African-American males and females, future fathers and mothers. I will teach them to have high expectations for themselves and their children. I want this to become a chain reaction. We must first have high expectations for ourselves before we can have them for others. Once they are in place and we begin to overcome all of the negative emphases placed on us, then America will give us the respect we deserve. I don't think I'll give America a choice in this either.