



THE PHILADELPHIA TRIBUNE

A Letter to Will Smith from the Barbershop

Robert Woodard | Posted: Tuesday, August 30, 2022

Brother Will Smith, the climate in our nation and in our world breeds violence. Now with the influx of guns being poured on our streets, this ignites the explosion of death. I am a barber in the Wynnefield section of Philadelphia. My barbershop is right around the corner from where you, my friend and neighbor, grew up. The name of my barbershop is Woodard's Barbershop. I have been on this corner for many years, here at Bryn Mawr and Lebanon Avenues.

My message for our youth who live in and around West Philadelphia has been that health and human life are worth fighting for. Be a life saver, starting with your own. Control your behavior and be a good neighbor. In other words, we should all learn to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Then keep in mind, it is always better to give than it is to receive.

Brother Will Smith, I have watched you work your way to the top. You have made Wynnefield very proud. However, God is not done with you yet. The mistake you made by slapping Chris Rock on national TV sparked violence at a very high degree. You as my "Young Boy" and me as your "Old Head" want to share with you a little wisdom from the barbershop. In other words, let's have a little "Barbershop Talk."

I can remember your barber, Brother Cook on 56th Street, and also Mr. Lewis Roanne at 57th Street and Lebanon Avenue, where I did my apprenticeship. Both of these brothers were my "Old Heads." They shared a lot of their wisdom and knowledge, which is still with me today. Brother Will Smith, your uncontrolled actions on the entertainment award show were despicable to say the least.

However, for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. I thank God for Brother Chris Rock for not reacting and for allowing peace to be still, even after you smacked him in his face. That act alone really let me know just what love has to do with it. You and I know he could have made life very ugly for you. Your actions were a choice you made that was completely out of control. Now, you are asking for forgiveness from Chris Rock. I do believe his actions have shown that he has already forgiven you.

My question becomes now to you Will, "What are you going to do about the millions of young brothers coming up that watched the program and saw you out of control and they are now using violence as their answer to solving conflict?" I am asking for you Brother Will Smith to help me spread the word that violence is not the answer, because the highest form of life on earth is to be a human being. Our youth need to learn to promote human life and despise violence and the taking of human life that causes death.

Brother Smith, with your help, I know we can change the hearts and minds of our young people. All I'm asking of you is to help spread the good news, and that is that human life is the most valuable natural resource on earth. I know that we can start right here in Philadelphia and this will spread in barbershops all over the world. Pre-acting before reacting is the most powerful weapon anyone can have. By teaching our youth that positive energy is a negative energy deterrent, they will discover how to control energy positively. Brother Will Smith, to date, right here in Philadelphia, over 30% of adults are illiterate. I need your help to bring us out of ignorance, into the light of understanding, because in all of your getting, you, I and us should get understanding.

I'm looking forward to your response.

Robert L. Woodard, "The Wynnefield Barber," is a Philadelphia barber and writer.