

**CHAPTER ONE:
'FREE YOUR MIND
AND YOUR ASS WILL FOLLOW...'**

“Liberty is not merely a privilege to be conferred; it is a habit to be acquired.”

Lloyd George

“Free your mind and your ass will follow; the kingdom of heaven is within.”

George Clinton, Parliament/Funkadelic

SURVIVAL.

Survival is the overwhelming constant during the African's long and painful sojourn through the fog of world history. Despite repeated attempts at cultural eradication, genocide, and economic, physical and mental slavery, we have survived, and, to a degree, thrived here on these American shores distant from our original homelands.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS DESIGNED TO DO

I have condensed some of the lessons learned from the personal experiences of Black students, including myself, who have been where you are going. Every fact, hint or technique is the result experience, observation, empirical research, or the hindsight of students who have made mistakes you don't have to make. This book is not a work of fiction, or a joke book.

The experiences and observations are largely related to my attendance, as well as the attendance of other Black students, at a large, predominantly White state university, the University of Florida. However, the techniques for success and the obstacles

one encounters are basically the same, no matter what type of school you attend whether high school or a historically Black college or university. If you use this book as a guide, your grades, attitude, and self-confidence will improve.

I do not pull punches and I do not mince words. The opinions expressed are mine alone. Therefore, some may attack this book as racist, paranoid, unrealistic. Some of my colleagues, former instructors, and friends may be hurt by the strong opinions expressed here.

So be it. The situations are real and they are true. This book is written from the perspective of a Black student to Black students. I ask you to use what you can of the ideas, techniques and opinions presented, find a system that works for you, and throw the rest away.

I am convinced, through personal experience, observation, and study, that there is a thin veneer of racism in American higher education that reflects the attitudes and actions of the larger society. Let this book serve as your warning and preparation for the 'brave new world' of opportunity and responsibility which racial integration has wrought.

LIFE AT THE ACADEMIC "BIG HOUSE"

Students in major colleges and universities are like the house and field slaves in giant plantations. We have little control over our lives. We are usually dependent on the college or university to provide food, clothing and shelter through financial aid; Black students in particular are made to feel like 'welfare queens' for accepting financial aid, particularly minority scholarships.

Black students are considered by many to be intellectually inferior, a 'disadvantaged' group who are being educated

(civilized?) through the beneficence of a system that is attempting to rescue us from our own savagery.

But as in slavery, a contest of minds and wills is being played. And just as some slaves were able to outwit ‘Ol Massa’ at his own game, you too can win! The key is in harnessing both your spiritual power and the power of your own mind.

MY STORY

I have always been pretty happy-go-lucky regarding school. I have always done well, even though I never liked school that much. I got out of high school and college with B+ averages in each; I partied, hung out, and had a great time in each. I was on the track and basketball teams in high school. I ran track and played intramural basketball in college, and was always pretty popular.

I entered law school at the University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida (UF), ‘on a humbug’. My Law School Aptitude Test (LSAT) scores were substantially above the average for Black students, and slightly above the average for White students. Good LSAT scores were critical to admission to any American law school.

My grades and test scores were high enough to get me admitted to UF’s College of Law under their Affirmative Action program. After graduation from college, I was unable to get convince my employer, an Atlanta television station, to hire me full time for more than minimum wage. Off to law school I went.

During my first year in law school (1978-‘79), I heard that the university was offering a joint Juris Doctor/Master of Business Administration (JD/MBA) degree, with \$3,000 per year in scholarship grant money. (This was a lot of money in

those days.) Since I was using loans to go to law school, I thought I could get into the MBA program and help pay for the law school education, and not be in so much debt after graduation.

I didn't know what I was doing.

I was a journalism major in college, and had never taken a business class during either high school or college; had taken no Accounting, no Statistics, no Finance, no Management or Computer courses. When I was accepted in the business school, I had not taken a math class in five years. I had never seen a financial statement; I didn't know the difference between a debit and a credit; didn't know how to balance a checkbook.

For the next three and one-half years, I competed against students who graduated from colleges with high honors in Accounting, Computer Science, Engineering, Statistics, Finance, and Business Administration. I took the same classes they did: Quantitative Analysis, Cost Accounting, Corporate Finance, etc. A 3.0 cumulative grade point (a 'B' average), was required for graduation.

At the same time, I was taking courses at the College of Law, and was dangerously close to flunking out after my first year, since I made mostly C's. (The law school required a 'C' average to graduate.)

For the first time, I saw myself in trouble academically.

For the first time, I had to get serious in school.

It almost killed me.

WHAT I DID

The first thing that I did was to set what I believed to be realistic goals about my level of performance.

I made a calculated decision that, at the graduate and professional levels, I preferred graduation to high grades. At that time, I was unwilling to pay the price, to go the extra mile that it sometimes takes to achieve excellence.

Thus, my goal in law school and business school was not to make A's; not to make the Dean's List, the Honor Roll, Law Review, the scholastic honorary societies. My goal in law school was to get a 'C' average and get the hell out, pass the bar exam, and attempt to live life as a normal human being. My goal in business school was to get a 'B' average, graduate, and go down life's merry road to forge my destiny, two diplomas in hand.

My goal, like the goal of so many other Black students, was SURVIVAL.

Some readers may say "Well, Cherry, aren't you saying it's OK to be mediocre? Aren't you telling Black students that it's OK not to do your best?"

No. That is not what I'm saying.

I was not a perfect student. In retrospect, the key mistake that I made was in not calculating the extra effort that it would take to achieve academic excellence.

What I have discovered since is this: **THE ROAD FROM ACADEMIC MEDIOCRITY TO ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE IS ALWAYS SHORTER THAN YOU THINK.**

I could have made better grades by doing only a little bit more work than I did. But the techniques that I put together during my graduate education were so powerful that I was still able to accomplish my goal, which was to be awarded two graduate degrees simultaneously.

At the same time, I knew that school served a social function. I knew that a lot of action occurs outside of class in interactions with students. I knew that I would remember the lifelong friends I made, the social events I attended, and the strange incidents that happened in my academic career much longer than I would remember those valuable nuggets of knowledge that dropped from instructor's mouths.

Basically, I wanted to party and still pass my classes, and I did. I graduated the same day from two academically challenging programs, as one of a handful of students in the history of the University of Florida, to ever do so. It was an indescribable feeling leaving one graduation ceremony, Juris Doctor in hand, to another to pick up a Master of Business Administration degree, after four and one-half years of joy and pain, work, and anxiety.

The system I used allowed me to party, hang out, travel, goof off, and generally have a great time despite the intensity and academic pressure of competing for grades in two rigorous graduate level programs. If it can work for me, considering my woeful academic preparation for the ordeal I found myself in, it can certainly get you A's in middle school, high school or college.

The individual goals that you set are up to you. But I believe that EVERY high school or college student should, as a rule, set graduation with a 'B' average as a minimum goal, regardless of the major. By setting anything less, you are seriously hurting your chances to land either an entry-level job

of your choice, or progressing to the undergrad, grad or professional school of your choice.

WHY REINVENT THE WHEEL?

Most folks I know don't want to work any harder than they have to accomplish a particular goal. I'm no different.

King Solomon, the well-known biblical wise man, once said that there is nothing new under the sun. This can be easily applied to academics and the skills needed to be successful.

Therefore, it made no sense for me to reinvent the wheel and develop a system of studying heretofore unknown to modern man. All I did while I was in school was find out what systems existed, pick out a few, and tinker with them until I found out what worked for me.

For memory, I relied on a memory expert, Harry Lorayne. For making study outlines, I noticed how commercial law school course outlines were put together. For essay tests, I looked at model answers. For multiple choice (which I will abbreviate in this book as 'multichoice' tests), I got info from multichoice exam review material. For speed-reading, I took a professional course. For note-taking, I went to the library and studied books on how to take notes.

One thing before I go further: Don't get the idea that you are gonna use this book to bluff your way in and out, scheming on everybody along the way. This book will not help you if you are not willing to work, work and work some more. It will not help you if you do not have discipline or are unwilling to develop it. If you fall into either of these categories, you are wasting your time. Give this book to somebody who is serious about school.

NAME YOUR WEAPON

By nature, I am a rebel, like almost everyone else.

I like to think that if I were a slave some 150 years ago in this country, I would have been the kind who may have been beaten to death for attacking Ol' Massa in broad daylight with a butcher knife. Or maybe I would have been a house slave trying to pick the right opportunity to poison Ol' Massa when he wasn't watching. (Actually, I probably would have been to paralyzed by fear and terror, like most other slaves, to do anything.)

I am always looking for an edge, for a different way to accomplish a goal, without losing my personal dignity and without fitting into somebody else's mold. If you were a slave, and if your goal was freedom, you could do it one of two ways: big and bold and maybe get beaten to death, or you could do it by a tactic we can call 'misdirection.'

Most slaves were masters (forgive the pun) at misdirection, which is the art of making somebody focus on one thing while you are doing another. The 'happy' slaves singing all those mournful songs that even Ol' Massa grew to love were actually coded messages to runaway slaves and others on the probabilities of successful escapes. What Ol' Massa focused on was what he thought was real; the truth was quite different.

Contrast the strategies of John Brown and Harriet Tubman during the slave era.

Brown thought of himself as the avenging hand of God, and attempted to start a violent slave rebellion by murdering White folks in their homes, and gathering an army of slaves along the way. Freedom or death. Brown and his army ended up

getting shot, burned, or hung, though Brown himself became a martyr for the cause of abolition.

Tubman took the opposite approach. After establishing a series of secret ‘stations’ on the Underground Railway running south to north, she figuratively ‘stole’ slaves from the plantations at night, one at a time, under cover of darkness. Those old slave songs, part of a strategy of stealth and misdirection, were critical factors in the success of the Underground Railway. Note that the Underground Railway’s success was also due, in large part, to the participation of sympathetic Whites who did were opponents of slavery.

NOW YOU SEE ME...

I decided early in the game not to take the John Brown approach and become a martyr for the academic cause. My personal strategy of higher education was based on misdirection. I always wanted instructors, classmates, and others to see and focus on one part of my personality or me while I was doing something else. Essentially, I played on the knowledge that many White folks, particularly those in power, will consistently underestimate the capabilities of Blacks until they are shown different. And even then a lot of them may think a Black person who succeeds is a fluke.

That crucial miscalculation, underestimation and low expectations of the Black student’s motivation and capabilities, was my edge. It can be almost every Black student’s edge.

Ah, I see that I now have your attention.

Read on...

