

# VOICE



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ANN HILL-BOND / TEDX COLLIER HEIGHTS



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**COVER STORY**

## DEAR BLACK MAN

Thirteen Atlanta-area Black men pen open letters of encouragement and brotherhood to Black men

**CURATED BY ANN HILL-BOND**

The Atlanta Voice

As far back as history can take us Black men have always been a part of our story — some good and some challenging. Far before the hashtags, Black men’s names and narratives have been written for them and, at times, by them. In the following letters, 13 Black men openly share intimate words to and with their fellow Black men. During these times of daily unrest from views of Black men being killed, abused, protesting, and peacefully kneeling — we must not forget to celebrate Black boy joy, Black men making the world smile, and spreading countless affirmations that Black men are magical, too. The letters are as follows:



COURTESY / MICHAEL GOLDEN

**During times full of unrest and anguish, 21 Atlanta-area Black men have penned open letters to themselves and other Black men full of practical advice and encouragement.**

Dear Black King,

I call you King, because you are powerful and deserve your crown (you just don’t know it yet). Tomorrow people will follow you, be influenced by you, and be better positioned because of you. Even so, I vividly remember the fears you currently wrestle with:

- I remember our desire for acceptance.
- I remember being frozen by intimidation
- I remember the times that we wished we were “them”
- I remember holding back because winning would draw attention.

I will keep this short but listen to me well:

- Uniqueness is your superpower and acceptance is found by accepting yourself.
- “Freezing” provides time to strategize and win with your next step.
- Stay true to you and tomorrow “they” will ask how to be like you
- Attention comes because people see a power in you that they don’t see in themselves
- Life is reinvention - YOU ARE MORE THAN ENOUGH!

—Darius Hicks, “While Black” Podcast

Dear Black Man,

God has great things in store for you. I know you are tired of hearing people lightly toss those heavy words and you are right to be skeptical of the manner in which they so easily roll.

The fact remains that God does have great things in store for you but they will not come without struggle, suffering and sacrifice. You will love and fail, fight and lose, strive and fall short. Even still, God has great things in store for you.

Nothing about your life has been easy: born to a rebellious teen mother, absentee father, reared by your grandmother, financial hardship, the death of your mother and so many other obstacles. Yet, you have been surrounded by a loving family, a nurturing village and received the best education.

Every lesson and experience of adversity that has shaped you as an adolescent will cement the character you will need as a man.

There is value in learning to trust God early in your life. Be strong and courageous. God is with you wherever you go.

—The Rev. Eric G. Vickers, Beulah Baptist Church, Vine City

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**CITY OF ATLANTA**

## Mayor announces return to Phase II of reopening plan

**STAFF REPORT**

The Atlanta Voice

Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms announced last Friday that the City of Atlanta will transition to Phase II of the city’s Five-Phase Reopening Plan. The transition to Phase II became effective immediately.

The Mayor’s reopening plan was drawn from the recommendations of the Mayor’s Advisory Council for Reopening Atlanta and public health experts. The reopening phases are based on milestone metrics and recent data.

“The city has met the metrics of our data-driven plan to cautiously move back to Phase II,” Bottoms said. “COVID-19 continues to ravage families across the city and state. We must all remain vigilant, wear a mask, practice social distancing, and take the measures needed to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our communities.”

In July, the City moved back to Phase I in response to the alarming increase in COVID-19 cases in the state of Georgia.

The City of Atlanta will continue to Phase III after reaching and sustaining Phase II metrics.

The City will transition back to Phase I if there is a sustained increase in new COVID cases, hospitalizations, or positive test results, and hospital bed/critical care bed capacity falls below 15 percent all available beds and testing capacity falls below 25 percent.

**During Phase II, the City proposed the following guidelines:**

**INDIVIDUALS:**

- Stay home except for essential trips
- Wear a face mask in public (City mandate)
- Frequent hand washing
- Social distancing
- Small, private gatherings of no more than 10 people, with social distancing

**BUSINESSES/NON-PROFITS:**

- To-go, curbside pickups from restaurants and retail establishments
- Continue practicing teleworking
- Frequent cleaning of public and high touch areas

**CITY GOVERNMENT:**

- Non-essential City facilities remain closed
- Continue moratorium on special event applications
- Continue communication with local, state authorities to monitor public health metrics

## MAN

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Dear Black Man,

I would tell you to slow time down as much as possible and don't be in a rush to get old. With age comes more responsibilities. At 14 years old, I wish someone would have told me to wait until I was a little older to have sex, as it's more meaningful when you find the right person.

At 15 years old, I would say to stop hanging around with the older kids on the block, they are bad influences. Hang with the people headed in the same direction as you. Being 16, all there is to do is get better in school and get those grades up, they're horrible. The more you know is the more you get paid.

At 17-years old, I would say that you're doing better in school, but don't be jealous of the seniors that have the hot cars and the hot girls. One day you'll have all the hot cars that everyone will be jealous of. You are 18-year-old now, study hard and earn straight A's. The real cool kids are the smart ones. Look into studying architectural engineering, you will be a builder one day, that will come in handy.

Nineteen years old, finish college and get your degree; you're paying for it, you might as well get something for all the hard work you put in. In your 20's, enlighten yourself with real estate. You will be a broker and a contractor one day and own multiple properties, own apartment buildings, build houses and manage properties.

Overall, stay true to yourself, stay loyal, stay humble, work hard, help others, protect your peace and find happiness in little things. You will find your tribe and get to the place where you want to be in life. You will face challenges, but you have what it takes to overcome them. Use the gifts God gave you.

—Shaun Wedderburn, SEW GLOBAL REALTY

Dear Black Man,

First of all, you're fourteen and Mommy passing away is not your fault. At fourteen, you have a fourteen-year-old mind and you're not mature enough to understand that you need to "love your Mother" and don't take her for granted because no one is promised to be here tomorrow, especially your Mother. When you are boxing down in Miami, take your training more seriously and really immerse yourself in it---take it seriously. Boxing can take you places and the discipline that you will learn from boxing will help you in the future.

When you move in with Daddy, try to spend as much time as you can learning and being committed to learning. Time is going to go by so quickly and, before you know it, you will be an adult; so take your time and try to focus on things that can and will help you in the long run such as real estate and online marketing. Think for the long term. Just because you feel a certain way today doesn't mean you will feel like that tomorrow. Stay out of harm's way and follow your own path. Don't be swayed by what everyone else is doing.

When you finish High School, stay in the Air Force. Toughen it out — no matter how hard it gets, stick with it. There is nothing to go back to Springfield. Stop thinking about what your friends are doing and what parties you can be throwing and stay in the AIR FORCE. Make Daddy proud once you get out of the Air Force. Don't go back to Springfield. Move to Houston or somewhere progressive but, no matter what you do, don't go back. There is a big world out there just waiting for you to conquer it and don't try to be in the 'Music Industry' and don't waste your time being a manager. That's STUPID. There's no money or longevity in that; instead, focus on the Internet and real estate.

Don't waste time on things that you cannot control and

people you cannot control. Focus on yourself and on education because the more you learn, the more you earn. And there are millions in real estate, the stock market and the Internet.

The cool kids won't be around but the smart kids will be. Leave them alone and walk your own path and stay out of harm's way. Associate yourself with people who are going somewhere. Get out of your comfort zone and stay in the military. Don't listen to others, but follow your own heart.

—Ricky McKenzie, McKenzie Brothers Realty

Dear Black Man,

I write this on the day of my daughter's 21st birthday. Take your time, young man. There are many lessons hidden in the work. Yet, more to be learned by simply living. There is no way to prepare for losing loved ones; just understand that it will happen. Honor them by being grateful for each breath. Save your money now. Your family will love you for it later. Although this life has many ups and downs, trials and injustices, you must wake up everyday and love it. Walk tall, keep your word and always keep the main thing...the main thing.

—Tory Edwards, Atlanta Influence Everything

Dear Black Man,

This life won't be easy, but it can be when you learn to let go and laugh. You have to be willing to use anything beneficial for the greater good of humanity. You will laugh harder than you thought you could and probably find yourself in tears with the same intensity.

You'll find that discrimination is rampant and real. It's even more disheartening when it comes from people that look just like you (and me). It's psychological. Taking on the perspective of your oppressors is def-minded at its highest level, but still you must and will rise. The same thing they use against you, will provide you ultimate power and alignment from the ancestors. When I speak of tapping into your power, use it wisely.

Now, let me speak---singularly to myself. I've stumbled hard and many times. I've been fearful, uncertain and insecure at different points, but it will get better. Focusing on the Creator and finding purpose puts things into perspective. Lack of self control (chasing every woman you see), envy, greed and all lower vibrational thoughts will keep you stuck. Avoid those things and always strive to be better.

Pay homage and show respect to other Kings. Uplift them. There have always been and always will be, multiple Kingdoms. Lastly, respect our Queens. Protect our Queens and watch how much better things become. I can't get it all done in this message, but it's a reference point for us to begin to get better. I think I need part two.

—Osei Kweku, Father/Philanthropist

Dear Black Man,

You're a gift to the world that only you can open. Trust yourself. Everything you want for yourself is yours to earn. You are already the version of yourself that you see in your head. You'll meet people who fall short in their understanding of your hopes, your focus, your gifts, your beauty.

Laugh. Laugh at them. Laugh at yourself and with yourself. Laugh every time you get yourself wrong, and every time you get yourself right. You'll be older soon, and you'll learn more of yourself. You'll rise, and fall, and prove yourself, and free yourself from the desire to prove anything. That comes with time. And laughs.

And your laughs are the sweetest sound on Earth.

—Howard L. Robinson Jr., RedClay-Hill

My Brother,

As you progress in life learn a healthy selfish love for yourself. The better you maintain yourself, the better man you will be for your family and community. I beg you to remember the following:

1. Put GOD first. Your spiritual life will manifest your earthly life.

2. Education is freedom and knowledge is power. Therefore, you should forever remain a student. Always feed your mind. Never stop learning new subjects, skills, and cultures. Read on all topics from history to current events.

3. Health is wealth! Your body is your spirit's temple and you need to maintain it at all cost. The best way to do that is to be mindful of what you consume. Everything in moderation. Drink a lot of water daily. Daily physical exercise.

4. Money is a tool that should be managed as such. Use it to build a stable home environment for you and the ones you love. Also use it to purchase as much real estate as you possibly can. God isn't making any more earth so you should own as much as you possibly can.

5. Travel far and often. See the world and touch every continent.

6. Never meet a stranger. Life is relational, speak to and get to know as many people as possible.

7. Listen more than you speak. You learn more when you listen. Become an active listener. Speak when you have something meaning to say.

—Richard Dunn, I AM Richard Dunn/Muddy Waters Group

Dear Black Man,

As you go through life now, you look back at the things that you thought were cool or things you looked at as a way out is no longer cool or an option.

Learn about real estate and pay close attention to politics. A Black man making money, buy houses and be a power player in the political space. Also, try your best not to have children by random women, use condoms every chance you get.

All though we are taught not to have regrets, you will have them. My biggest regret today is becoming a Sports Agent instead of going to Law School.the money was great as a Sports Agent but the world (our communities) require more Black men as Lawyers more so than a Sports Agent.

Think long game. It's chess and checkers.

—Duwon "Mooley" Robinson, Mr. Everything, Decatur

Dear Black Man,

There are things I want to tell you about the life you are about to experience. While the path you will choose won't be easy, be confident in your journey, even when you aren't clear where you are going. Relinquish control as early as you can. Fully accept both the honor and the burden of leadership. That balance matters. You have always desired to lead. You will. Despite your confidence, you are about to discover that you are not fully in control. There is great mystery in this life, and that is the beauty of it.

You are up for the challenge. Remember what you have learned so far, and be ready to surrender what you think you know for sure. Some of your majestic thinking will have to be sacrificed along the way. You understand the power inside you, but you are a bit naive about the way you understand that power working. That naivety will be taken and replaced with regal understanding,IF you allow it.

You'll receive direction at various points of your journey. Not everyone will understand the nuggets you receive, why

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**MAN**

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you receive them, and why you respond the way you do. That's because your purpose and journey is uniquely yours. It's not for anyone else. It's for you.

Enjoy the journey. Be happy with where you are on the journey, even when you don't know how it will end. Many people will give you advice.

Feel your feelings fully. All of them. You can expect to get lost in the journey to understanding your place in the world and your place in YOUR world. You can expect for your heart to hurt -and it will. Your ability to feel is what will protect you, keep you safe, and give you the empathy to continue to give your gifts to the world. Let yourself feel that. Let it sink into your soul.

GIVE ALWAYS. Giving is how YOU receive. Those who take advantage of your giving spirit aren't getting over, they're getting by. GIVE MORE. It sounds good, but in the midst of those moments, it won't make sense to anyone. GIVE ANYWAY. Maybe they'll get it later. Most likely they won't.

Enjoy the ride as well as those who join you on it. I Love You.

—Odie Donald II, City of South Fulton

Dear Black Man,

Continue being patient in making moves and accepting all people.

Dr. Maya Angelou once said, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." This is something you try your best to live by, yet we don't always make it that easy.

Remember, always be thankful for the community that surrounds you. Be thankful for the past because those giants kicked down doors you'll never have to pass through as you move forward. Be patient with self and others as these blessings continue to shower during the darkest of moments. Stay Humble!

Scripture tells us all the time, in James 1:19, "My beloved brothers, understand this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger."

Baldwin reminds us, "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

— James King Jr., Hollis King Company

Dear Black Man,

Why do we say "Black Lives Matter" then a year later we are killing our brothers and sisters? I get that the government put guns and drugs in our communities but how come we just can't overcome it? Can't we just think of a good way to use it instead of using it in harmful ways.

Also, why when a Black Man dies it's a whole lot of outrage (not saying that it's not a big deal), but when a Black woman dies it's just

nothing being said or just not getting enough attention. For example Secoria Turner, Atatiana Jefferson, Miriam Carey and ect. None of those women never got the attention that they needed or deserved. Why, do we come up with gangs instead of business?

If we make a business, imagine what we can do next. Other communities have their own businesses that are created for and by them---we can too. It might be a long shot but if we put our heads and money together then we can be as powerful as I know we are.

—Gabrie Irving, 5th Grade Student

Dear Black Man,

I hope this letter finds you well as you articulate through this current stage of life. A life that you have been blessed with. A life that has presented so many challenges that have deterred and distracted you from discovering your true purpose.

This thing called life varies in stages, and the challenges that you face will be personal. Your challenges will involve family, your professional career, your health and relationships. Your priority will be to persevere through adversity and come out on the other side a better person. Life is funny. We are either currently in a storm, coming out of a storm or about to go into a storm. You must prepare yourself accordingly.

Remain focused and disciplined to accomplish the task(s) at hand, which will in turn enhance your self-confidence. Continue to learn about yourself on every level, mentally, spiritually and physically.

The only limits in this life are the ones you place on yourself. Remain driven and ambitious. Always celebrate the small victories as much as the large ones.

Remind yourself that it is necessary to learn through the process of failure. And no matter what, never stop moving because nothing happens if you do not put things in motion for yourself.

—Lance Irvin, Irvin Development, LLC

Dear Black Man,

You are loved. I love you. Your village loves you. God loved you first.

You will not always understand and appreciate what life gives you but it is only designed to fulfill the Will of the Father and enlarge your own territory. Lean into the gifts He has given. Trust the wisdom of the ancestors. Feel deeply and wholly.

Treasure the 35 years you had with your Twin Brother. One day, the Ancestors will call him home in a senseless act of violence. It will take lots of self love and healing to get over that loss, but you will survive. He will become one of our guardian angels.

Continue to love hard and give freely. Your real wealth is in the Spirit realm.

You are loved. I love you. Your village loves you. God loved you first.

—Marshall Latimore, The Atlanta Voice