

2 “Right and Tight” (Mind and Body)



THE SET-UP: STATISTICS ON THE HEALTH ISSUES FACING BLACK MEN

It's a tragedy that in one of the wealthiest nations in the world, many black men do not enjoy the same quality of life that most citizens expect. Consider these startling statistics:

- Nearly 4 out of 10 young black men lack health insurance (The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2006).
- Young black men die at a rate that is at least 1.5 times the rate of young white and Hispanic men, and almost three times the rate of young Asian men. Though the death rate drops for men ages 25 to 29 for most groups, it continues to rise among black men (The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2006).
- Coronary heart disease mortality rates are higher for black males than they are for white males, black women, and white women (Braithwaite, Taylor, & Treadwell, 2009).
- Black male lung cancer death rates are 1.3 times higher than their white counterparts (Braithwaite, Taylor, & Treadwell, 2009).

The fact remains that black men suffer from a lower quality of life—but they don't need to. How? For one, they can get an education. People with more education are likely to live longer, experience better health outcomes, and practice healthy behaviors such as exercising regularly, refraining from smoking, and obtaining timely health care checkups and screenings (Education Matters for Health, 2009).

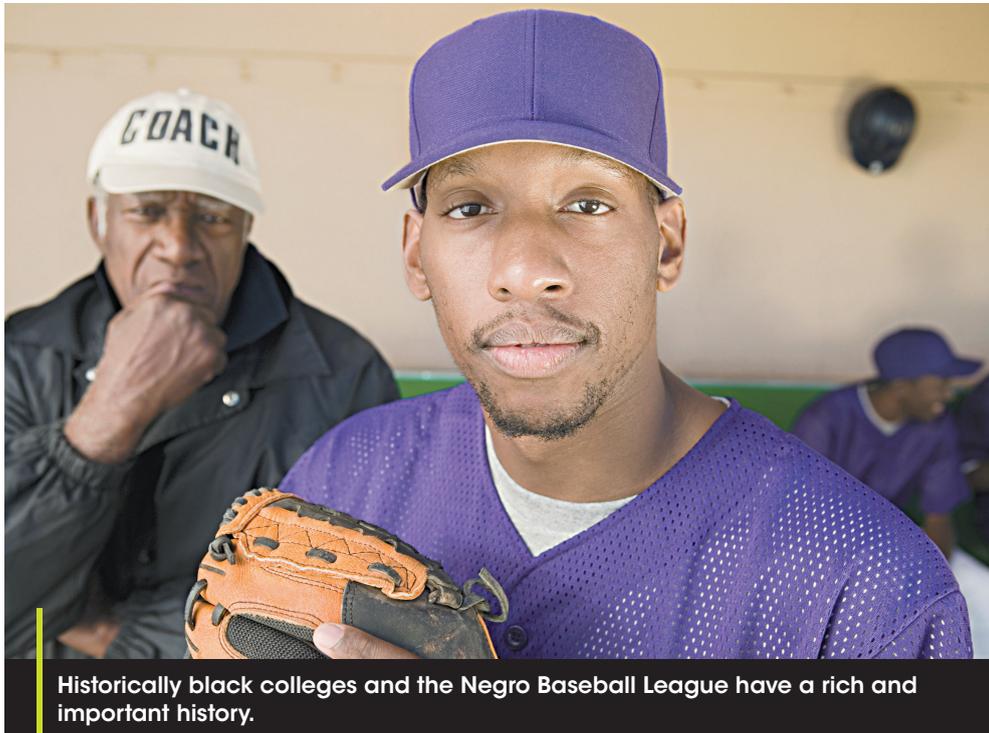
Eating whatever and whenever you want, trying to maintain with only a few hours of sleep, or kicking it all night will certainly affect your productivity in college. Don't be a statistic! Know thyself, and do what it takes to get your mind and body right and tight!

This unit will deal with another type of knowledge: self-knowledge. That is the place to start any time you want to make a change. Start with what you know about yourself, and then start adding to that knowledge base. The more you know about yourself, the better you can make choices that will help you be the man you want to be.

TRIBUTE: HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND NEGRO LEAGUE BASEBALL

According to the 2010 Racial and Gender College Sport Report Card, in 2009–2010, only 5.6% of black males participated in Division I college baseball, compared to 60.9% in Division I college basketball and 45.8% in Division I college football. The numbers indicate that we have no interest in baseball. This is a far cry from how baseball was received as king in the black communities back in the day (Lapchick, 2010).

The Center of Negro League Baseball Research (2012) states that many black ballplayers got their real start playing organized baseball at the college and university level. Baseball was the major sport at historically black college and university campuses all over the country. During the 1920s and 1930s Piney Woods College from Mississippi was the first black college to not only field a team but to travel all over the United States to raise funds to help support the college. From the 1930s through the 1950s some of the outstanding pioneers of historically black college and university baseball programs included the following:



Historically black colleges and the Negro Baseball League have a rich and important history.

- **Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA).** Hampton (Hampton, VA), Lincoln University (Lincoln, PA), Howard University (Washington, D.C.), North Carolina A & T (Greensboro, NC)
- **Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (SIAC).** Florida A & M (Tallahassee, FL), South Carolina State (Orangeburg, SC), Morris Brown College (Atlanta, GA), Tuskegee (Tuskegee, AL), Morehouse College (Atlanta, GA), Winston-Salem State (Winston-Salem, NC)
- **Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC).** Grambling (Grambling, LA), Wiley College (Marshall, TX)

The Center of Negro League Baseball Research also expressed how, for many black male student athletes, playing college baseball at the historically black colleges was their first exposure to organized baseball. Higher education provided the student-athletes not only with an education but also a stepping stone to their dream: Negro League baseball, or the Major Leagues of black baseball.

Black college baseball and the Negro Baseball League played an important role in the life of the black community from 1920s through the 1950s. The Negro Baseball League sponsored contests, raised funds for charity, and did promotions for entertainers and celebrities. The first national black beauty contests were held at the ballparks of Negro League teams. Jesse Owens first raced a racehorse as a promotion at a league game. Black celebrities like Joe Louis and Lena Horne often engaged in promotions for the black community. The ballparks during games were a place of community gathering (History of Negro League Baseball, 2012).

As we all know, when Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier, he opened the doors to Major League Baseball for all men, regardless of the color of their skin. The selection of Jackie Robinson into the Major Leagues was a historic event in civil rights history—it signified that baseball was the heart of the black communities despite economic depression and segregation. Through hard work and perseverance, many student-athletes from the historically black colleges and the Negro Baseball League paved the way for our student-athletes today (History of Negro League Baseball, 2012).

ACTIVITY 1 Where We've Been, Where We Are, and Where We Are Going

1. Describe some of the barriers that you think the black ballplayers who were finally selected to play on Major League teams had to endure to be productive on their new teams.
2. Based on the success of the black ballplayers now, how do you think that they can relate to what the black ballplayers went through to become a part of the Major Leagues?
3. Baseball is considered an American pastime and has been a popular, entertaining, and competitive sport for all races. However, over the past 20 years, black communities have lost interest in viewing and playing baseball. What factors do you think have contributed to the lack of interest in baseball in the black communities?

THE BALL IS IN YOUR HANDS

What you say is a reflection of what you think. There is such a thing as success language and failure language. As students, part of your success or failure is directly related to how you think, act, and speak. There is power in words, so you should always try to speak words that lead to success.

Just like in basketball, the ball is in your hands when it comes to how you think and what you say, and you can't afford to let the full-court press take you out of the game. Stay positive and look for an open lane. The same thing goes for stress! Stay positive and look for an avenue so you can maintain your composure.

ACTIVITY 2 Breaking the Full-Court Stress!

The following activity takes common failure statements that students sometimes make in the face of a challenge and asks that you rewrite them as statements of success.

Statement of Failure	Statement of Success
Example: This is a dumb assignment.	Example: By doing this assignment I can practice discipline and focus.
My instructor doesn't like me.	Example: I need to get to know my instructor better and let him (or her) know how much I want to succeed in this class.
I would rather be somewhere else than in class.	
I don't know why I am in college.	
This is too hard.	
I don't have time to work on assignments.	
I hate to read.	
I don't need to turn in assignments on time.	
I don't need any help with my college classes.	
I don't need help with career planning.	
I don't like my instructor.	

KEEPING IT REAL MEANS RESPECT! WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

A great man once said, "Show me your friends, and I'll show you your future." He was saying that who your friends are equals who you are. It is simple mathematics: $1 + 1 = \text{YOU}$. In some cases, friends and experiences do not *add* to your life; instead they *subtract* from the "you" who you ultimately want to become. And then there are people who *multiply* what is positive in you while others only seem to be able to *divide* you from others and your dreams.

ACTIVITY 3 Game Recognizes Game

Using the chart below, write down each person or activity in your life who adds, subtracts, multiplies, or divides you. Then, in the column labeled "Support/No Support," describe how they will or will not support you as you push toward college graduation. As you complete the chart, tell yourself, "I am ready to roll. I'm finally moving in the right direction and I'm ready to bring my A game."

Person/Activity	+ or -	× or ÷	Support/No Support

LIVING IN THE PRESENT

In reality no one can change the past. It is what it is! However, you can learn from it. The key is to not get caught up in the past, but strive to live in the present. In college, you will need to live in the present, one day at a time. The following activity will help you to reflect, identify, and then move forward.

ACTIVITY 4 Going Back in Time, but Only for a Moment!

I have no regrets in my life. I think that everything happens to you for a reason. The hard times that you go through build character, making you a much stronger person.

—Rita Mero

Think about something you've done that you regret. List the thought processes going on at the time and the reason that you fell into the bad behavior. Then list the steps you will take to avoid that behavior in the future.

What did you do that you regret?

What thoughts did you have before you acted?

Why did you choose to act?

What will you do in the future to avoid a similar decision?

RECOGNIZING YOUR INTELLIGENCE

Keep it real! As you begin college, you have to believe in yourself and really feel like you can conquer anything you set your mind to do. So, how far can you go? The fact remains that for many black men, they have grown up with the notion that being smart is selling out. It's not part of how they see themselves. They also have seen lots of negative images on television and on movies about what black men do—gangsters, pimps, drug dealers, and criminals. On the more positive side, they may also have a notion that the way for a black man to make it in the world is to be an athlete or a musician. But the reality is that very few people, no matter their color, can make it big in those competitive worlds.

So now you need to figure out if either of these images fits you. If you are in college, chances are you've got a bigger picture of what you want to be. As you set your goals, though, you need to make sure it is what you want to be, not someone else's idea of what you want to be. Your goal should match the ways in which you are smart. After all, people usually enjoy doing things that come easily to them and that hold their interest, so knowing what you do well can help you pick a career that will satisfy you. And most important of all: don't put a limit on your intelligence!

ACTIVITY 5 The "I Am" Poem

Complete each sentence with your sincere thoughts, based on how the sentence starts. Don't worry too much about grammar or punctuation; instead, focus on the freedom of open expression. For example: "I wonder what my future holds."

I wonder _____
I hear _____
I see _____
I want _____
I pretend _____
I feel _____
I touch _____
I wonder _____
I cry _____
I understand _____
I say _____
I dream _____
I try _____
I hope _____
I am a determined and disciplined black male.

ACTIVITY 6 Tracing Your Steps

Now think about something you've done that you're proud of. This should be a good decision that really benefited you. List the thought process and the motivation for doing it and the feeling you got afterwards. Then list the steps you will take to repeat it in the future.

1. What did you do that you are proud of?

2. What thoughts did you have before you acted?

3. Why did you choose to act?

4. What will you do in the future to act in a similar manner?

PROFILE OF STUDENT SUCCESS

Different City, Same Mindset: Assistant Fire Marshal Warren Robinson, Sr.



I was born in Texarkana, Texas, but raised in Ogden, Arkansas. I was blessed to be raised by both my parents. They have been married for more than 60 years and have lived in the same home all of my life. Every day I saw my mother wake up and prepare my father a warm breakfast: two eggs over easy, a meat, dry toast, and one

cup of coffee. I also saw my father work a full-time job as a pastor my whole life. They taught me by actions what a real family is made of and that every family member has a role. My role was simply to get an education and stay out of trouble. When I became a teenager, my father bought two hogs. He gave me the responsibility of feeding them before and after school to instill in me a solid work ethic. My mother told me, "You will go to college."

The structure provided in my parents' home taught me many things about life, but I never saw or experienced many things being the son of a pastor. The first year of college I learned a lot about people, life, and myself. The significant challenge during my college years was learning the diversities of human personalities while also discovering myself. During the process, the exposure to peer pressure pulled me in many directions while I tried to hold on to my religious upbringing. The greatest challenge was to simply say no to those elements that would cause a negative impact on me and my future.

There is no one key strategy for success that helped me. There were a number of them, such as prayer, separation from negative distractions, saying no and standing firm, and pledging Phi Beta. I kept in mind that the purpose of college was to get an education. During the first week of college the president of the university spoke to all the freshmen. He asked us to look at the person on our right, then the person on our left and one over. He then said, "Only one of you will graduate." I was that one. It was at that moment I heard my mother's words: "I want you to be the first son to go straight through college and graduate." And I was.

After graduation, I came to Little Rock to and began to work. It was by the will of God that I became a Little Rock firefighter. To this day, I hold on to those words of my mother. My father also spoke to me and said, "Whatever you do, be the best at it." It is that mindset that allowed me to advance the ranks of the Little Rock Fire Department. With the help of God, I am one of very few to have gotten promoted on every promotional test. I am now able to say that I am the Assistant Fire Marshal for the City of Little Rock Fire Department.

Reflect on It

1. Robinson said that in college, a challenge was "learning the diversities of human personalities." How is the understanding the diversity of human personalities relevant to succeeding in daily life while you are in college?
2. What type of challenges have you faced since your enrollment in college? What did you learn from them?
3. Robinson said that he stayed away from elements that would cause negative impact on him and his future. Name some elements in your life that might have a negative impact on your life. How do you plan to deal with those?

React to It

Robinson states that "There is no one key strategy for success that helped me." Instead, he used several strategies. What type of strategies can you use to be successful in college?

Read It

- Davis, S., Jenkins, G., & Hunt, R. (2006). *We beat the street: How a friendship pact led to success*. New York: Puffin Books Penguin Group.
- The Holy Bible, King James Version. (2008). Retrived from www.bartleby.com/108
- Madhubuti, H. (1991). *Black men: Obsolete, single, dangerous?: The Afrikan American family in transition*. Chicago, IL: Third World Press.

PROFILE OF PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS

From Humble Beginnings to Success: Chris Threatt



I was born in Akron, Ohio. After my parents divorced, my mother raised us. When my mother lost her job at a factory in 1983, she decided to return to her South Georgia roots and moved the family to Americus, Georgia. Although my mother showered us with love, money was usually in short supply. I learned not to ask

for expensive clothes or items. In fact, my brother and I learned that Santa Claus wasn't real when my mother, tears in her eyes, declared that she was Santa Claus and that there simply wasn't enough money to buy the things we wanted.

Growing up in the south was an experience for me. I had to adjust to people who noticed and sometimes ridiculed my northern accent. I felt that the classes weren't as rigorous as the ones in Ohio. Learning wasn't always valued by my classmates. One of my eighth grade classmates was already 18! I was lonely, poor, and shocked in my new environment.

I realized that education was one of the keys to being successful. I felt immense pressure to make my mother and grandmother proud of me. My mother often spoke of her unrealized dreams of attending college, and my grandmother, while wise and supportive, had quit school by the sixth grade. Both of them had tirelessly worked jobs that provided meals and shelter but often left them physically drained. My mother was often forced to work shifts that prevented her from attending my school activities. In fact, she never had an opportunity to attend any of my high school basketball games. Though I've never been too good to do any honest labor, I didn't want to work a job that kept me from family activities.

During my senior year of high school, Dr. Robin Johnson, Director of the Upward Bound program I attended, gave me the following advice: "Never involve yourself with anyone who has less to lose than you do." When I began college, I applied the advice in my selection of friends and study partners. I talked with and observed my new classmates. I chose to study with people who valued their education. If school was not

someone's priority, I didn't spend valuable time with them. Anyone who I felt wasn't working toward graduation and employment wasn't allowed in my "inner circle."

While trying to obtain an education, one of the biggest challenges that I faced was "walking without a guide." Carl, my older brother (11 months my senior), and I were the first two people in my family to attend college. But I took ownership of my education. Though I did meet with my academic advisor, I also set my own graduation goals.

Although it is true that 12 credit hours make someone a full-time student, it's impossible to graduate in four years if a student earns only 24 credit hours per year. I always took at least 33 credit hours per year (five classes one semester and six classes the next), which allowed me to graduate in four years. I received a B.A. in language arts from Alabama State University in 1992.

Today, I am a happily married father of two beautiful daughters. I teach English and coach basketball at a large urban high school in Little Rock, Arkansas. I am thankful that my education allows me to financially provide for my family while still allowing me to attend their activities. My job also allows me to do two things that are important to me: help young people and teach the game I've loved since I was six years old. I have also taught in our district's ACT prep program for over a decade. My profession has allowed me to assist future professionals who come from humble beginnings. I often share my story with my students for a simple reason: I try to be the guide that I didn't have.

Reflect on It

1. Threatt writes that he "felt immense pressure to make my mother and grandmother proud of me." How can this serve as a source of motivation? Could it also serve as a hindrance? How?
2. Do you have someone in your life that you'd like to make proud? Who is that person, and in what way do you want that person to be proud?
3. Threatt's mentor told him, "Never involve yourself with anyone who has less to lose than you do." What did his mentor mean by this? Give a concrete example.

React to It

"I was lonely, poor, and shocked in my new environment," says Threatt about his experience moving to a new school. On a piece of paper, sticky note, in a tweet, or in a blog, write a one-sentence summary that describes your experience growing up.

Read It

Gaines, E. J. (1983). *A gathering of old men*. New York: Knopf.

McBride, J. (1996). *The color of water: A black man's tribute to his white mother*. New York: Riverhead Books.

Wright, R. (1945). *Black boy*. New York: Perennial Classics.

Run with It

1. Many of our stressors and obstacles come from within. Decrease negative self-talk and increase positive self-talk.
2. Some health issues are a consequence of what we eat and how we take care of our body. Start eating healthier and begin an exercise program.
3. You've heard it before: "The mind is a terrible thing to waste." Take time each day for self-reflection, then visualize yourself doing something positive that will help you reach your goals.