

COMMENTARY / CULTURE

Laughing, a remedy for stressful times!

By Terry Howard
Contributing Writer

No readers, it's not your imagination. American civil society is in deep trouble.

Political bickering, nastiness, anti-mask freakouts and other head-scratchers have replaced what was once respectful discourse and sanity.

Wrote columnist Frank Bruni, "There's a fierce and terrifying attack on democracy underway in the United States, in which ideological differences grow ever sharper, tribal rivalries get ever uglier and a pandemic that should have brought us together drives us farther and farther apart. Our political leaders seem either lost or at a loss. We lurch from one crisis to the next. There is, in other words, a glut of grim."

Now since we're close to putting a turbulent year 2021 in our rear-view mirrors, I figured that maybe I could help ease that with a piece that, hopefully, will get you to lighten up and laugh. Hey, short of anything more definitive, maybe a good old fashion laugh from time to time could help.

Now it's true: laughter is strong medicine. My cousins who live in Virginia and Connecticut, respectively, and I talk a few times a month and never- I repeat, never- end those conversations without several good laughs. And by coincidence, another cousin sent me a list of side-splitting insults and asked me to lighten up and publish them. Here goes.

"Politicians and diapers must be changed often, and for the same reason." – Mark Twain

"I have never killed a man, but I have read many obituaries with great

pleasure. - Clarence Darrow

"Thank you for sending me a copy of your book; I'll waste no time reading it." - Moses Hadas

"I didn't attend the funeral, but I sent a nice letter saying I approved of it." - Mark Twain

"He has no enemies but is intensely disliked by his friends." - Oscar Wilde

"I feel so miserable without you; it's almost like having you here." - Stephen Bishop

"I've just learned about his illness. Let's hope it's nothing trivial." - Irvin S. Cobb

"He is not only dull himself; he is the cause of dullness in others." - Samuel Johnson

"He is simply a shiver looking for a spine to run up. " - Paul Keating

"He loves nature in spite of what it did to him." - Forrest Tucker

"Why do you sit there looking like an envelope without any address on it?" - Mark Twain

"Some cause happiness wherever they go; others, whenever they go." - Oscar Wilde

"I've had a perfectly wonderful evening. But I'm afraid this wasn't it." - Groucho Marx

The exchange between Winston Churchill & Lady Astor: She said, "If you were my husband, I'd give you poison." He said, "If you were my wife, I'd drink it."

"There's nothing wrong with you that reincarnation won't cure." -- Jack E. Leonard

"He inherited some good instincts from his Quaker forebears, but by diligent hard work, he overcame them." -James Reston (about Richard Nixon)

"-Light travels faster than sound. This is why some people appear bright until they speak." – source unknown

- "I don't hate you but I'm just not necessarily excited about your



existence." – source unknown

"I would like to apologize to anyone I have not yet offended. Please be patient. I will get to you shortly."

– source unknown

Hopefully, a few of these are laughter "day makers" for you. But on a more serious note, here are some benefits of a good laugh:

Laughter...

Releases endorphins: Natural chemicals in the body, endorphins promote a sense of well-being and relieve stress.

Decreases anger: When we're in a difficult situation or in a disagreement with another person, seeing the humor in it can help. Specifically, laughter defuses anger, conflict, and self-blame.

Eases distressing emotions: Laughter counteracts feelings of anxiety and sadness. Moreover, it helps us release other intense emotions, such as grief.

Relaxes and revitalizes: With reducing stress, laughter increases our energy levels. Therefore, we can stay focused more easily.

Changes your perspective: Laughter helps us access another point of view. Moreover, we begin to see something in a new, less scary way when we can laugh about it. In addition, humor helps us take things less seriously.

Reduces stress: When we laugh

and smile, cortisol levels decrease. Cortisol is also known as the stress hormone, so lower levels are better for our mental health. Therefore, laughter increases our stress resilience.

Here's my last bit of advice to deal with tensions in the world today.

Rid yourself of toxic, "gloom and doom" people in your life.

"Unfriend" them and don't feel ashamed for doing so. ("I'm busy right now, can I ignore you at some other time?")

Next, take a break from the deluge of depressing news and social media and do anything else, even if it's just for a week. You won't miss anything.

A trusted person in your life will alert you about anything you really need to know. Otherwise, spend your free time doing anything else.

And above all, look for opportunities for you and others to bust out laughing!

Happy Holidays!.....Happy Laughing!

© Terry Howard is an award-winning writer and storyteller, a contributing writer with the Chattanooga News Chronicle, The Douglas County Sentinel, The BlackMarket.com, co-founder of the "26 Tiny Paint Brushes" writers' guild, and recipient of the Dr. Martin Luther King Leadership Award.

Rooting out racism in children's books

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Ten years ago, I sat down with my then 8-year-old daughter to read a book before bedtime. The book was sort of a modern-day "boy who cried wolf" story, only it was about a little girl named Lucy who had a bad habit of telling lies.

In the story, Lucy borrowed her friend Paul's bike and crashed it. Lucy lied to Paul, telling him "a bandit" jumped in her path and caused the crash. I saw the image and stopped reading. I was stunned. The image on the page was the racist stereotype of the "Mexican bandit" wearing a sera-

pe, sombrero and sandals.

By training, I am a critical race theorist in education who understands that racism is ingrained into the fabric of our society in general, and in educational institutions in particular. One area of my research is about how people of color experience racial microaggressions, which are often subtle but significant attacks – verbal or nonverbal. They can take on many forms, such as remarks about one's identity, and occur because of institutionalized racism.

Although I am an academic who studies racism, in that moment, as a parent, I felt unsure about how to help my daughter understand what we were seeing in that book. Around the same

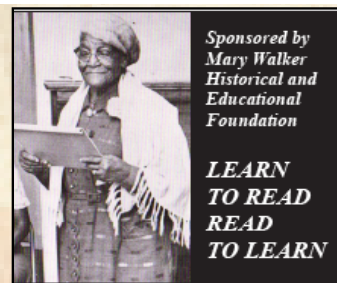
time, I read an opinion piece by children's book author Christopher Meyers in The New York Times titled "The Apartheid of Children's Literature." It outlined the problem of racial representation in children's literature.

The problem of scarcity These personal encounters prompted me to investigate the portrayals of people of color in children's books. I learned that the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC), a research library based at the University of Wisconsin, has been collecting data on the number of children's books published in the U.S. authored by

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THIS WEEK IN AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY



CLARA BELLE WILLIAMS (1885-1994)

Clara Belle Williams was the first African American to graduate from New Mexico College (now New Mexico State University). Many of her professors would not allow her into the classroom because she was black, so she took notes while standing in the hallway. She received a bachelor- of arts in English in 1937, at age 51, but was not allowed to walk with the graduating class to get her diploma because of segregation laws. Despite all this adversity, she continued her education at the University by going on to take graduate classes.

Williams was a dedicated and gifted teacher that served the black community

for over 20 years. She had three children with her husband, Jasper, all three attended college and graduated with medical degrees.

In 1961 New Mexico State University officials began to make amends, after recognizing the school's injustice toward their first black graduate. The University named a street on campus after Williams and named the Williams family outstanding alumnae of the year. Many years later the English department building was renamed Clara Belle Williams Hall. In 1980 Williams was awarded an honorary doctorate of law degree by New Mexico State University, which apologized for the treatment she was subjected to as a student.

Williams succeeded despite the discrimination and adversity she faced, she persisted. Clara Belle Williams deserves a place in our history books so that her story can serve as a fierce inspiration for those that follow.



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