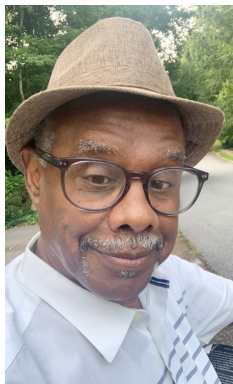


COMMENTARY / CULTURE

Consider the Iceberg - Gary and Monique Payton!



Psst, hey reader! If ever you needed an inspirational “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree” story, then look no further. Monique Payton (the tree) and her son Gary (the apple) are textbook examples and are at the center of the

inspirational story that follows.

Let’s begin with Gary.

“Journeymen” is vernacular for players who play for multiple teams over the course of their professional basketball careers. Often, many are signed, released, resigned, picked up on short-term contracts by other teams or end up on rosters in development leagues hoping one day to get one last shot with a team in the National Basketball Association.

Which brings us to the compelling story of Gary Payton II, crowned last week as a member of the world champion Golden State Warriors. And what a story.

Because of space limitations, I decided to share a synopsis of his story through the words of Payton’s grandfather, Ollan Christopher Bell, better known as Chris James, Douglasville, Georgia resident, co-founder of the 1970s hit-making group, The Natural Four and author of the book, “Music Saved my Life.”

With temperatures hovering near 90 degrees, we sat on James’ patio sipping wine the day after the Warriors victory, interrupted frequently by his rumbustious dog Antionette who vied for our undivided attention.

“Gary called and wished me a happy birthday the other day,” beamed Bell. “The last time I’d actually seen him was at a restaurant last year in California. And here we are, wow, a couple of days later and he’s a member of the world champion Golden State Warriors. Man, can you believe that?”

To begin the story about his grandson, I wanted to know what thoughts raced through Ollan’s mind before and during the championship game. He paused, shooed Antionette away, and leaned back in his chair.

“Honestly, being a musician and not a true sports fan, I thought that Boston would win and that the final game would be won by the Warriors in San Francisco. But I was not surprised by the outcome because Gary has always worked hard for everything he’s achieved. He inherited that from his mother Monique who was a great swimmer, basketball player and all-around athlete.

Now readers, we’ll need your imagination to “see” the story that follows.

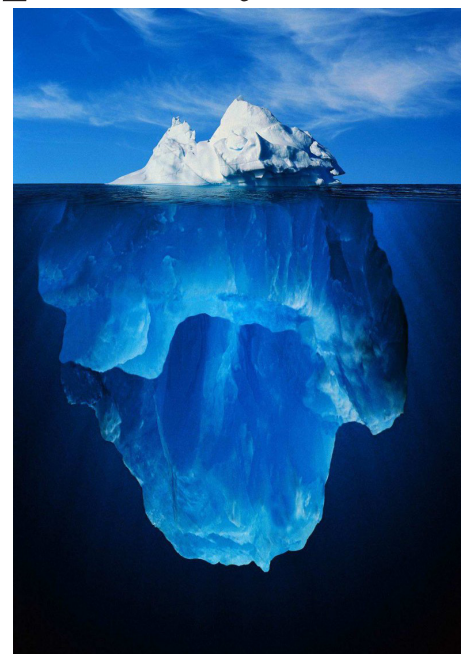
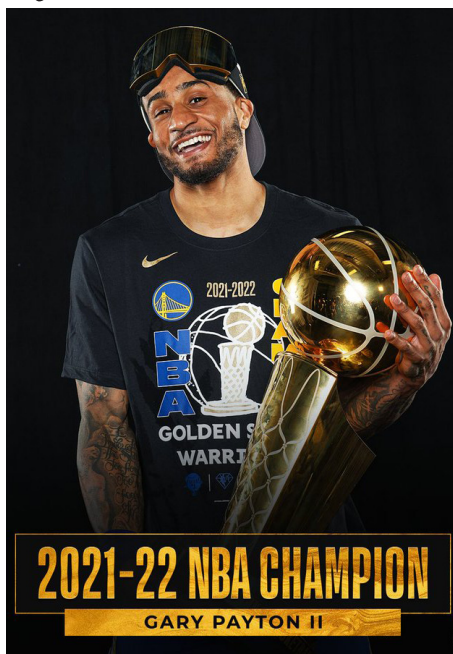
Now envision an iceberg, the tip of which is above the water. In that space visualize the picture of the above trophy-holding Gary Payton, II. But the bigger stories are the ones below the surface, the ones you cannot see that had an impact on the young Payton you see in the top of the iceberg.

To begin, Payton was born in Seattle to Monique and Gary Payton while his father was a member of the NBA’s Seattle SuperSonics. He played his college basketball at Oregon State University and was coached by Craig Robinson, the brother of former first lady Michelle Obama.

Gary’s journey to the Golden State Warriors was a long and arduous one. Over his career Payton played with the Milwaukee Bucks, Los Angeles Lakers, Washington Wizards, Toronto Raptors and the Golden State Warriors in addition to teams in the NBA developmental league.

He was waived by Golden State before the start of the 2021–22 season but was re-signed after he cleared waivers. He had a breakout season and started the first two games of the Western Conference semifinals against the Memphis Grizzlies.

In Game 2, Gary fractured his left elbow when he went up for a layup but fell hard after the Grizzlies’ Dillon Brooks chased him down and hit him in the head while he was in the air. Incred-



ibly, he recovered and in Game 5 of the finals he posted 15 points, five rebounds and three steals in a 104–94 win over the Boston Celtics.

Now let’s deep dive underneath the iceberg and learn something more that you may not know about Gary Payton II... his struggle with dyslexia.

Briefly, dyslexia is a learning disorder that involves difficulty reading due to problems identifying speech sounds and learning how they relate to letters and words. Also called reading disability, dyslexia affects areas of the brain that process language. It’s important to know that people with dyslexia have normal intelligence.

Although there’s no cure for dyslexia, early assessment and intervention result in the best outcome. Sometimes dyslexia goes undiagnosed for years and isn’t recognized until adulthood. Among famous dyslexic people are Whoopie Goldberg, Caitlyn Jenner, Tom Cruise, Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison and Winston Churchill.

Finishing up, I asked Ollan to tell me one other thing about his grandson that many may be surprised to know. With a smile on the face of a proud dad and granddad, he first told me that his

daughter Monique started a foundation and a non-profit after her divorce from Gary’s dad.

He then gave me a link to the Gary Payton II (GPII) Foundation, a non-profit organization that acts as a conduit for dyslexia-awareness, supports early screening, detection, and certified assessment for youth and young adults with languages-based learning challenges.

Befittingly, on June 1, 2022, Gary received the Bob Lanier Community Assist Award (previously called the NBA Cares Community Assist Award) for the 2021-22 NBA season for his work in dyslexia awareness and education.

Yes indeed, with Gary and Monique Payton, “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree!”

© Terry Howard is a contributing writer with the Chattanooga News Chronicle, The American Diversity Report, The Douglas County Sentinel, Blackmarket.com, Hometown Advantage, co-founder of the “26 Tiny Paint Brushes” writers’ guild, and recipient of the 2019 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Leadership Award.

Is Civil Disagreement Possible in Today’s Culture?

By Robin Smith

Americans tout how progressive our society has become, yet working together and working beyond disagreements are two commitments that are almost extinct. And, yes, it is a commitment to decide to work with others and, if they exist, to move past differences.

Politics is always fingered as the reason Americans are so divided. Without question, significant differences exist across the complete political spectrum, from the most conservative on the right to the most liberal on the left. These differences are emphasized and magnified for the benefit of political interests to divide and conquer.

But disagreements between individuals and groups are not confined to party politics or heated topics like abortion, gender confusion and whether the

money you earn is owed to anyone other than the one who worked to earn it.

Civil disagreement--those variances and differences of opinion, ideology and reasoning displayed with courteousness and politeness in manner--has been called a dying art.

Sometimes, it’s just easier to understand something by seeing what it is not. In the case of civil disagreement, it’s not winning the case with the loudest voice. It’s not eliminating another’s voice in a discussion because of a perceived difference of opinion or belief of superiority. Civil disagreement is not debate or discussion that includes personal attacks, name-calling or any escalation beyond discussion.

In 2022, our public discourse is disgusting and bears no resemblance to an advanced society capable of innova-

tion, achievement or forward movement when the Cancel Culture is a favorite tool of many who leverage social media to swarm and bully any who disagree with them. Resolving conflict is needed to avoid escalation and behavioral conditioning that devalues respect, discussion, self-control and collaboration. Put simply, if our families, communities and churches don’t value mutual respect and unity, not uniformity, we are endorsing the opposite through inaction.

Interestingly, our culture spends a vast amount of time devoted to discussions and efforts supporting diversity... unless it is a diverse opinion. Then, the tendency is to suppress and silence the individual possessing the opposing view. If a disagreement needs to be addressed, the wrong approach is to engage in self-serving, escalating behavior

that immediately signals no desire to find a solution.

Conflict resolution is a process that essentially involves a mutual commitment to agree to disagree or to compromise, to move past that disagreement and to work together for the good of the cause or community. Very basic principles and actions involved in conflict resolution are listening, identifying common ground and demonstrating mutual respect throughout the process.

So, back to the first question: Is civil disagreement possible in today’s culture? The answer depends on individuals making the commitment to mutual respect as demonstrated by listening, valuing others’ opinions and looking beyond self-interest and personal rights. A really simple way to say it is to treat others in the manner you want to be treated.

This Week in African American History

Ford Legacy Continues to Grow Along with New Additions

By Ashley Benkarski

WASHINGTON CO., TN — The Ford family legacy is one for the history books, and that’s not hyperbole.

Larkin Ford labored as a slave on the farm owned by Loyd Ford Sr., a Revolutionary War veteran, and when the latter passed away he left his 112-acre property to the former in his will when he died in 1843 at age 96.

“Whether or not they were his offspring (eventually a major court issue) Ford’s slaves were closer to him than were his seven legitimate sons—none of whom, as adults, chose to remain on the family farm and help their father,” wrote historian Anne Klabenow in “Loyd Ford Sr.: A White Man and His ‘Black Children’s’ Inheritance,” which was part of a study titled 200 Years in 200 Stories: A Tennessee Bicentennial Collection.

Enter Eric Ford and Rose Tate. Tate contacted Eric, saying the two had matched DNA on ancestry.com, “proof positive Loyd [Sr.] indeed fathered children with his slaves... We’re not just related by name and association but also by blood,” he said.

Tennessee Supreme Court Justice Nathan Green handed down an opinion that was uncommon in the antebellum South:

“A slave is not in the condition of a horse or an ox... he is made in the image of the Creator. He has mental capabilities, and an immortal principle in his nature, that constitute him equal to his owner but for the accidental position in which fortune has placed him... the laws under which he is held as a slave

have not and cannot extinguish his highborn nature nor deprive him of many rights which are inherent in man.”

The family is making plans to reunite June 18, with some meeting for the first time. The Ford family reunion will come after the installation of an historic marker on the former family property.

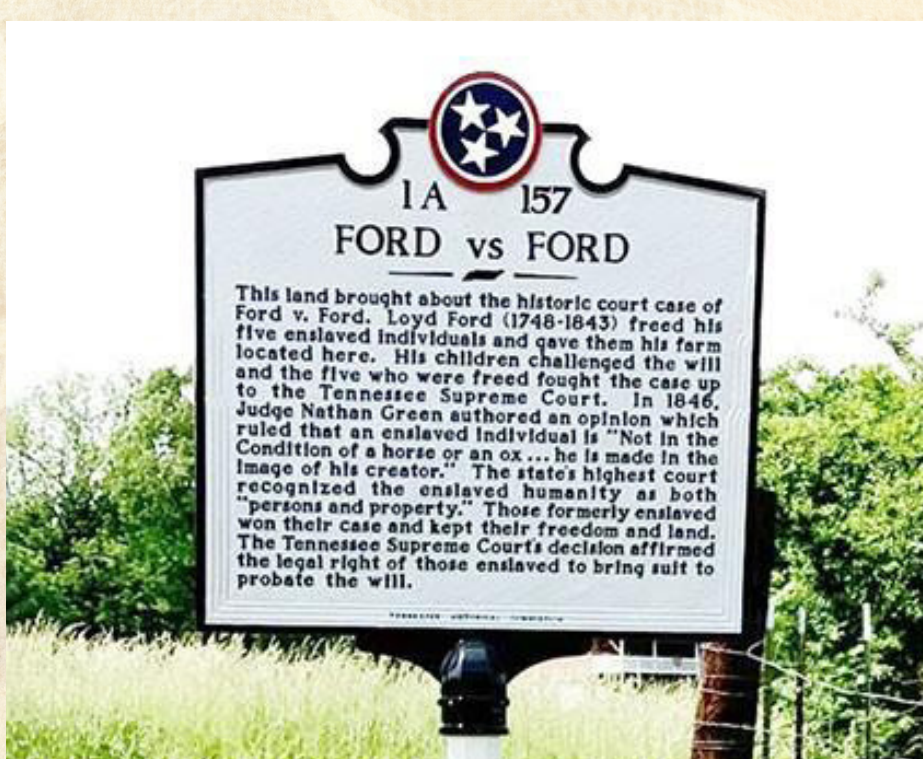
Descendant Agin Shaheed explained that family members boast alma maters such as Stanford and Harvard, with many going on to pursue educational occupations to prepare the next generation of Fords (and Americans) at large.

There have been two other gatherings between members, but the appearance of Sharee and DeVonn Burris of St. Louis on NBC’s “Roots Less Traveled” in 2020 brought renewed attention to this historic family’s search.

When Eric Ford learned of the case and saw the NBC special, he knew their ancestors needed an historical marker on the land. Jason helped write the wording for the marker and it was approved by the historical commission, Eric said, with the family launching a fundraiser to help pay for it. “Everyone pitched in to help,” he added.

For all of the pain and injustice that once hung over the Ford history, it’s healing and acceptance that has taken root now; Eric said the Black side of the family was the catalyst for them to get together.

“It still blows my mind that in my parents’ generation, segregation and oppression were not as removed from America as



With the historic marker finally in place, the Ford family is ready for the dedication and their reunion taking place June 18 in Johnson City. Photo courtesy of Jason Ford

I thought [they were] growing up,” he said, and recalled a favorite quote: “It’s hard to hate up close.”

“We need to come together and have community and that’s what I want to come of this,” Eric said.

The Ford family encourages anyone

who has information on their family history to contact fordfamily1846@gmail.com.

Previous coverage of this story by the Tennessee Tribune can be found at <https://tntribune.com/resilience-runs-in-the-family-finding-roots-in-fordtown/>.



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