

Every Kid in Williamsport Should Hear Dr. Carson's Message

I am awestruck. The man is incredible. "Who is he?" you may ask.

In June 2008, President George W. Bush awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest-ranking honor for a civilian. He has over 50 honorary doctorate degrees. He sits on the board of directors of numerous organizations including Kellogg Company, Costco Wholesale Corporation, the Academy of Achievement and he is an Emeritus Fellow of the Yale Corporation, the governing body of Yale University. In 2001, CNN and Time Magazine named him as one of the nation's 20 foremost physicians and scientists. In 2006, he was the recipient of the NAACP's Springarn Medal.

This man, who has received literally hundreds of awards during his distinguished career, came from very modest beginnings. At one point in his life, he thought he was stupid and he believed that he was unable to cope with the pressures of schoolwork. Yet, he held on to his dream of becoming a doctor. He was an angry black man-



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child from the tough streets of Detroit, Michigan. Today, he is a world-renowned neurosurgeon.

Academy award winner Cuba Gooding, Jr. played him in the TV movie, *Gifted Hands*, on the TNT cable channel last February. He is Benjamin S. Carson, Sr., M.D. Dr. Carson is coming to Williamsport! Thrilled, I wrote to Dr. Carson:

Dear Dr. Carson,

I could not have been more pleased when I found out that you were coming to the Community Arts Center in Williamsport, Pennsylvania on May 20, 2009.

I've seen your interviews and lectures on TV and I am in awe of your life's story. If there was ever a role model for young people today, you are it. You are particularly needed in Williamsport.

As elsewhere in the country, our

African-American males lag behind their white counterparts in our school system. There are several reasons for this but I believe the main reason is that these children are – or are the progeny of – a local social group known as "the influx."

The term has come to describe low-income, under-educated African-Americans from large metropolitan areas who have "emigrated" to Williamsport. Significant numbers of this population are recovering drug abusers and/or ex-felons looking for a new life. Sometimes a few slip and fall back into their self-destructive behaviors. During the last 25 years, this has had a negative effect on the Williamsport community resulting in simmering racial tensions and a distrust of newly arrived blacks.

Furthermore, those black families that have lived in Williamsport since the early 1800's but have not gained full participation in Williamsport's social infrastructure, have developed a jealous resentment towards the new "influxers." The new arrivals from the big cities, with help from government agencies, got better paying jobs and

boldly moved into what was once considered the better "white-only" neighborhoods.

Some of our black young men have adopted what Yale Professor Elijah Anderson calls an "oppositional attitude." To survive they think that they must be tough and uncaring. They think that being intelligent is "acting white." "Studying is selling out." "Being hopeful for a brighter future" is equivalent to "being a chump" for many of our young men.

In Williamsport few years ago, a young man was shot on a basketball court. Why? He ridiculed another young man for not taking off his shoes! There has been sporadic gang-related violence in our little town. But the incident rocked the community. Two years ago, the current mayor ran a "get tough on criminals" campaign that exacerbated social polarization.

Recently, there has been some progress. Parents, teachers and administrators are becoming increasingly sensitive to the problems of these children. Local groups such as CAPP, has succeeded in lifting the self-esteem of hundreds of kids. But eradi-

cating racism and prejudice from our institutions is very difficult. Williamsport is changing slowly.

Your invitation to speak to this community is a reflection of that change.

The Community Arts Center is an excellent venue. A 13-million dollar renovation transformed the old 2100-seat Capitol Theater into the crown jewel for the performing arts in North Central Pennsylvania. I am sure that there will be standing room only. I'll be there, God willing.

(Dr. Carson and his wife Candy founded The Carson Scholars Fund in 1994 to help students that had at least a 3.75 grade point average and who demonstrated strong humanitarian qualities. Many kudos to the Williamsport YWCA who is sponsoring Dr. Carson's speaking engagement. The event is free and open to the public.)

*James is the publisher of the online newsletter, *An African-American Perspective*. Visit www.rcjamesdesign.net/African-American*
