

RISE AND GO FORTH...

by Antonio Lopez

It is human nature, I suppose, to prejudge or assume when confronted with limited and vague information, and only minor details of what something or someone is about and why. Recently, I was handed two printouts of the same announcement information by two separate sources-----both, associates in nonprofit-----regarding the opportunity to write an article that they believed would be good for me. Skeptical (because most people only think they know what's good for you), I gave it a careless once-over: "Blah, blah, blah...BARON JAY," I read, just above a whisper. "Baron Jay?" I questioned, in a burst louder than intended. "Who the hell...?" Keywords and phrases darted through my mind much like the ones I am certain are darting through the minds of some readers at this very moment; rapper, insecure, disillusioned, love-deprived, loud'n baggy dresser, etcetera-----human nature'n all. Additionally, in the first second or two, I imagined a bling-laden torso with the same tired pose and the trademark hard expression that rappers somehow believe makes them look even more intimidating than the sight of several grown men assembled together in pants baggy enough to sport heavy duty adult diapers. As a man that requires very little ego-stroking, I am proud to admit to the world that my first impression of Baron Jay could not have been more inaccurate.

Although his story, in brief, starts off an all too familiar one, young minority male from a poor family on the poor side of town, the character development here is awe-inspiring and before it is over it should, without

a doubt, become a well-followed template of motivation and inspiration for many in the coming years, mainly and most importantly, several hundred young students per year currently in the Los Angeles Unified School District system. More on that later.

Baron Jay Littleton Jr., Baron Jay, as he is affectionately known, was born in Detroit, Michigan Yes, that's your backdrop. Now imagine the odds against a young black kid born unto an unwed mother of sixteen years of age, fathered by a boy that, in most families, would easily be mistaken as an older brother at age fourteen. But hold your pity. Here is where the story takes a sharp left turn-----or better put, the right turn.

His parents, Mr. Baron Jay Littleton, Sr. and Miss Robin Elaine Colston were no ordinary mom and pop. Robin Colston, especially, an extraordinary woman of pride and strength, doggedly endured the early years of parenthood, limitations from age and lack of skills, knowledge and opportunity, and the humility of having to go on welfare to assure that her child always gets fed, clothes, and housed. Despite her struggles, Robin held her head high and never stayed down, returning to school to obtain her diploma and later, her degree. She never gave up, and never gave in. She raised her son to do the same and embedded into his psyche to never use the present state of their underprivileged lives as a crutch towards anything he could ever wish to accomplish. Little Baron, raised in his grandparents' home, knew only love and support from both parents. It wasn't until he became a young adult that it hit him just how poor his family had been all those years.

However, the initial ignition of the everlasting flame that burns equally as fierce inside Baron Jay to this day would take place much sooner. Monnier Elementary School, Northwest Detroit, over 97% African-American with well over 50% of its student population poor enough to qualify to receive free or discounted lunches. It was there that a young 4th grader named Baron Littleton would be exposed to Black History, mainly, African-American contributors to the greatness of this, the United States of America. I ask you once again to use your imagination, this time quite possibly to its limits. The U.S. of A., as great as it is and as great a job it does of letting everyone know how great, how big and powerful it is, does a very poor job of making some of its future orchestrators-----government leaders, blue collar workers, military protectors, and voters-----know and ultimately believe that they are a huge part of how and why this it became so great and will continue to get greater. From the mandatory subject of U.S. History in our early years of attending school, to the power of the media and its narrow-mindedness, to society's turn-n-pretend-you-didn't-see-it attitude towards racism, the cancer that even today continues to feed on the fabric of this "great" country's seams, some of our young minds develop seeing only that despite their efforts, some others continuously get the breaks or are provided the best opportunities while they are perceived as second-class citizens...if they are recognized at all, that is.

Baron Jay, in this writer's humble opinion, will prove to be the perfect example of what can happen to any child, black or white, rich or poor, healthy or handicapped, when given all the love and encouragement, the stability, opportunity, information and inspiration all children are entitled to.

When he learned of the wonderful and amazing inventions that have altered and improved America

forever, and that they were thought up, designed, and created, at least in part, by people that were once little and looked just him, that spark of hope I like to think is in us all caught hold of the fuse that dangles from deep where our desires dwell and where the measure of heart can be found. forever, and that they were thought up, designed, and created, at least in part, by people that were once little and looked just him, that spark of hope I like to think is in us all caught hold of the fuse that dangles from deep where our desires dwell and where the measure of heart can be found.

This drive manifested full blast as Baron Jay became a young man. His surrounding conditions unchanged, he decided on his own that college would not be an added burden on his parents. But going to college was must. At age sixteen he got a job as a bat boy for Major League Baseball and met professionals like Ken Griffey, Jr., Derrick Jeter, David Justice, Alex Rodriguez, and more. The exciting and responsible role had a very positive effect. Through persistence and diligent efforts on the job and in high school, and despite criticism from neighborhood homies that were either too proud or too racist to consider such an act of what they saw as betrayal, he discovered and subsequently achieved obtaining a scholarship to attend Michigan State University through the Evans Scholarship Program, a program founded by golf legend Charles "Chick" Evans exclusively for caddies and is considered one of the best scholarships in the country.

And now, Baron Jay the man stays extremely busy and poised to leave his mark on society, perhaps more than once. For starters, Baron Jay the publisher/entrepreneur started his own publishing company, The Disciple Group, from a self-taught business plan learned and written simply by picking up books and reading diligently. Amazingly, his plan, entered on the last day of eligibility, has made

him a current finalist in the 2007-2008 Miller Urban Entrepreneurs Series Business Plan Competition, a program sponsored by Miller Brewing Company and several community-based partners that include the Chicago and Detroit Urban Leagues, the University of Wisconsin, the Greater Harlem Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Dallas Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Recycling Black Dollars based in Los Angeles, and more.

He has a creative side that I admit not only surprised me but re-inspired me. Under the name Baron Jay, he is currently searching for the right fragrance to fit the theme of a magnificent idea that came to him one day; A His & Hers cologne/perfume two-bottle design that “comes together” to complete the letter U for Unity, appropriately called U by Baron Jay (www.ubybaronjay.com) and hopefully it will be available this time next year. I have no doubt it will become a Valentine season mainstay.

The author Baron Jay has researched and put together an amazingly first publishing titled *Your Little Black Book - African-American Inventions And Inventors* (first volume of six), a well-received and extremely easy-to-read collection of African-American inventors and their inventions designed to better acquaint tomorrow’s wide-eyed and eager minority generation with their history and fuel an interest in possibly equally or advancing on previous accomplishments of all kinds as well as creating future readers and book buyers in general. His just-launched Baron Jay Family Foundation will spearhead the Southern California Read For Literacy 2008 Youth Empowerment Book-a-thon Tour where Baron, in partnership with former news anchorman Larry Carroll (producer with Diversity Entertainment Group) and through the generosity of sponsors like the Southern California Edison Company and the Los Angeles Clippers, will visit designated schools in the Los Angeles Unified

School District throughout the year getting children involved in reading, first and foremost, and through fun interactive games designed around the content of his forthcoming *Your Little Black Book* and *Your Little Brown Book* volumes set in game show format, they will find themselves learning (and better retaining... but shhh!) the insight into how their people have taken part in the making of the greatness of America. They will be introduced to beautiful minds like that of Dr. Mark Dean, who is, in part, responsible for the modern day personal computer as we all know it today. He holds three of the original nine patents on the computer that all PC technology is based on. By show of hands, how many grown-ups knew this?

The volumes are as follows: *The Your Little Black Book* series; *African-American Inventions and Inventors*, *Your Little Black Book of African-Americans in Science*, *Your Little Black Book of African-Americans in Sports*, *Your Little Black Book of African-Americans in History*, *Your Little Black Book of African-Americans in Firsts* (example: Colin L. Powell, first African-American of the Joint Chief of Staff, 1989), and a much-needed *Your Little Brown Book – Latino: Contributions To Society and The World*, co-authored by Leticia Castaneda. These vital learning tools are set to be part of the libraries of schools visited by the Southern California Read For Literacy 2008 Youth Empowerment Book-a-thon Tour. If your child’s school is not on the current list, I highly recommend that you urge the L.A.U.S.D. to make this collection a constant in all the district schools. Uh, no child left behind, right?

Baron Jay the Actor receives a phone call during the interview and politely excuses himself. It was brief. “That was *The Young and The Restless*,” he says afterwards, with a satisfying breathe.

He has a reoccurring part on this daytime soap and has had parts on General Hospital, and in various films, has begun his own projects that include a sitcom he'll star in, and has recently auditioned for the lead role in the movie based on the life and times of Puff Daddy. He proceeds to explain how is able to have the time for his various projects, or more accurately to those of us that are too busy working (and/or too afraid), to chase his dreams and seek his goals. Working part-time and with flexible scheduling, he manages property for, and receives a meager stipend from Beverly Hills Property, a company owned by the controversial owner of the Los Angeles Clippers, Donald Sterling. Of course, I cannot resist questioning that in itself, his boss having been labeled a racist by some and taken to court for refusing to rent/lease to non-Koreans, mainly blacks and Latinos. Baron assures me he is treated great and with the utmost respect. I want to press on but I cool my inner fires that burn for social justice for two reasons: 1. I'm a creative writer, not a reporter, and I'm no good at willingly annoying people. 2. Baron and I appear to have a common denominator, the bigger picture. He has the knowledge and intelligence to make considerably more, and the fact that he is sacrificing early for the greater good, even in part, is impressive to me. What's more, as long as this ambitious young man is not inclined to sell his soul to do it, I am all for him using any and all available avenues to inform and empower new generations with the opportunity and knowledge it will take to wipe out this handed down cookie-cutter mindset of thinking that we as a people-----black, brown, red, yellow-polka-dot, or blue-happy-pink-----can/will never rise up and fully overcome as long as the white man blah, blah, blah...or because I was born and raised in the ghettos/barrios yadda, yadda...Yes, there is, and will always be racism and cultural ignorance, and of course, there are parts of this city that are openly (sometimes

purposely) neglected, but once upon a time, Britney Spears might have ousted Hillary for a run at the presidency...meaning both, things can change, and there is hope for the world yet. Personally, I would love for Ol' Donald to finance a program or two of mine some day. Perhaps save some city-funded WorkSources, One-Stops, or other employment resource centers where we help, amongst anyone, ex-felons and recovering drug addicts and alcoholics turn their lives around and become self-sufficient, responsible and motivated citizens as the City continues to cut monies and add cops while wondering why their anti-gang programs continue to fail. Yes, there is a much bigger picture to consider. It's called Our Future.

"I BELIEVE BY READING AND THROUGH EDUCATION, YOU CAN ACHIEVE WHAT YOU WANT IN LIFE"....."PEOPLE MUST KNOW THEIR HISTORY TO HELP THEM CREATE A BETTER FUTURE."

What Baron Jay the educator would like you to know is that there are answers out there. Get over yourself and your unfortunate situation and seek them out. "Read, read, and READ!" he stresses over and over again. "I believe by reading and through education, you can achieve what you want in life." He also emphasizes passionately, "People must know their history to help them create a better future." In talking to him I can tell you that there is a genuine disturbance boiling inside his gut that our children lack dreams and desires like that of the past when we were given hope via role models and positive influential leaders of our communities. . "Something has happened to the motivation factor within our children, our people. Children should have dreams,goals, but they look

around to see who is doing something and see no one doing something so they feel they can't do something." We all know today's generation lives too much in the Here and Now with little regard for the future, their future even. They are also losing touch with the past, their history. It will get worse generation to generation. Baron Jay's efforts will no doubt work wonders, but he confesses, "Parents need to know their history and teach their kids. Read to their kids." As I look around and see the gap between The Haves and The Have-nots widened, I'd have to agree. He would also like non-organizations, schools churches, charities, and more, to know that they can raise monies selling the Your Little Black/Brown Book series purchased directly from the book's web site: www.yourlittleblackbook.net.

As I prepare notes to write this, I realize that the premature image that flashed before me in the beginning, the young hip-hop mogul wannabe, is not only gone but long gone. There are no CDs with explicit lyric warnings, there's no books or exposés on How To Survive In Da Hood, if you go to his web page you will not see a kid with a pimped out ride or pounds of bling dangling from his neck. You won't see an expression hardened from street life, messed up parents and police abuse. What you'll see a man in a suit with an inviting smile, a professional appearance, and a sense of pride and purpose. Baron Jay, the actor/author/writer/researcher/publisher/entrepreneur, and property manager has emerged as an extremely focused and business-minded go-getter that doesn't sit around waiting on chance to hook up with luck. He aggressively seeks out opportunities then does the work it takes to make whatever needs to happen happen. This, of course, can be said of many successful businessmen or aspiring entrepreneur types. But I find that in my conversations with others about such people, words like greed, heartless,

ruthless, and insensitive are often used to describe them. To this point, I cannot associate those qualities with Baron Jay. Positive words and phrases like self-motivated, ambitious, dedicated, caring, kind-hearted, inspirational leader, and role model come to mind. And today, still not too late for such things as positive role models to help shape and counter-shape our young minds from the ever-increasing distractions like gansta rap, fallout from those TV ratings whores-----I mean wars, and the rises and falls of the Britneys of the world, I give you yet another of what I hope is a continuance of the beginning era of Forerunners of Change in the inspirational footsteps of people like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and César E. Chávez, and Jaime Escalante, positive forces in a modern-day success movement like Magic Johnson, Salma Hayek, Russell Simmons, Michelle Cervantez, and Warrick Dunn (Hillary and Obama?); Baron Jay Littleton, Jr..

Thanks, my dear and cherished friends/co-workers, Christine and Gabriel, you were right in that if someday I can get Baron Jay, future motivational speaker, to agree to speak to a packed room of second-chance candidates, the very people tomorrow's children may turn into if a more aggressive collective effort isn't made to alter more paths towards the greater good, this project has indeed been good for me.

***Writer bio:** Antonio Lopez is an Employment Resource Specialist with experience working, among the general public, ex-felons and drug/alcohol abusers in recovery (male & female) in the city of Los Angeles to help them transition and contribute to society in a positive manner. He also volunteers at a Compton Outreach center feeding the homeless. Although he has published poetry in the past, he has only recently decided to write more professionally, and is currently aiming towards completing his first novel and screenplay. This is his first non-sports-related article.*