



Sister Speak!

Reclaiming Our COMMUNITY

by Judge Penny Brown Reynolds

On May 29, 2012, I received a call from my aunt notifying me that my 19 year old nephew had been murdered. It is a day I will never forget. It certainly is a day that my sister and his father will never forget. You see, Jared Mealey was my sister's only child. It hit home for our family and to be honest, we will never be the same because of it. The perpetrators are themselves teenagers. Jared was a normal kid. He wasn't murdered because of drugs or being in a gang—he was murdered because we live among a generation of young people who have little regard and respect for human life. A recent report was noted by The Black Star Project and confirmed what many of us have come to realize: Our community is in crisis.

We kicked off our Conference this year by bringing to attention the issue of violence in our community and by recognizing those parents whose children were needlessly murdered. Due to the violence permeating our community and the statistics regarding the status of the black family, this inaugural article of SisterSpeak will serve as a platform of sorts to address the challenges we face as women, while celebrating the triumphs that are being made, but often go unnoticed.

Until America understands that when any demographic of its country is in crisis -- the entire country is in crisis; we will continue to see the consequences and actions of people who live without hope. We say loud and clear that many of our women and young girls are in a state of emergency and we must come together to bring back the hope they so desperately need.

Our country needs a healing after we watched the murder of teenager Trayvon Martin and the

subsequent not-guilty verdict of George Zimmerman. We watched in horror the images of teenager Michael Brown lying on a street in Ferguson, Missouri. The stories have become all too common.

I created this conference which draws thousands of women and girls for the crucial purpose of educating and empowering them to rise to their full potential. I'm concerned about the fact that most studies show that over 70% of black children are born to unwed mothers, often to teen-age girls and two-thirds of our children in black, female headed households, live in poverty. I was one of those children. My vision is to provide hope and options to our sisters, not to cast shame and blame, but to give them the ability to dream again. I am just one person trying to make a difference with the assistance of other people who care and corporations who value community and understand the necessity of having these conversations.

We desperately need to teach young girls what true womanhood means. They need to understand what it means to walk with dignity and purpose. The younger generation is watching how we treat each other.

SisterTalk is not just a conference, but a movement. It is our attempt to roll up our sleeves and get to work on reclaiming our community. We must find the courage and time to care enough, to love enough, to believe enough, and most importantly, to hope enough. All of us have the ability to make a difference if we work together as sisters, regardless of race or ethnicity. Every young girl should have the opportunity to soar as high as her abilities will allow.

Welcome to *SisterSpeak!*
This is the beginning of much more to come.