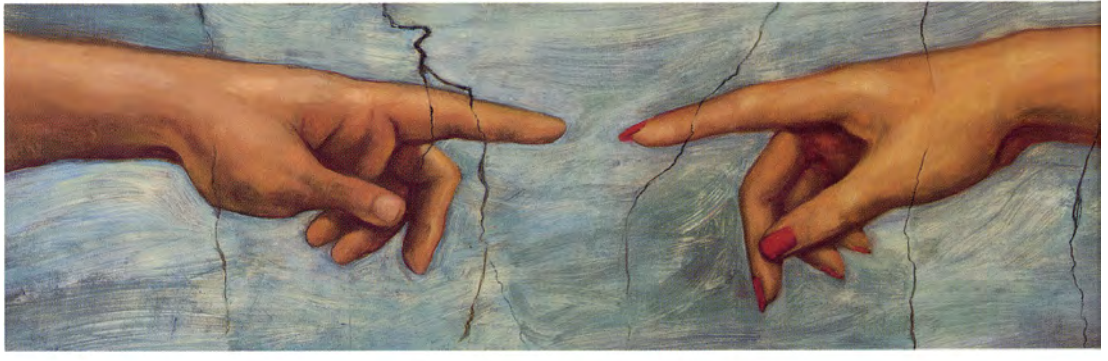
GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN



WOMEN TALK CANDIDLY ABOUT THE BALANCE OF POWER BETWEEN THE SEXES

JACK KAMMER

Audrey B. Chapman

Audrey Chapman is nationally known as an expert on black male-female relationships. She is a Washington, D.C., therapist who specializes in family and relationship issues and has a private practice working with groups, married couples and single couples. On Howard University's radio station, WHUR, she hosts a call-in show called *All About Love*. She is at work on *Entitled to Good Lovin': The Black Battle for Power and Passion*, a book scheduled for publication in 1994.

Jack: Do you think that African-American men need and would appreciate some expressions of good will toward them?

Audrey: There's no doubt about it. I think that in general African-American men perceive that black women don't have much that's good to say about them. Many black women are very angry because they are often left on their own to deal with the ups and downs of daily living, and because it seems so difficult to love black men.

Black women often say that black men come to them because of what they—the men—need, and that it is very difficult for the men to provide what the women need. Black women want to be held, respected and loved by black men. Black men also want the same in return. Both groups feel the other individual owes them what they've not received throughout life. I have described this dynamic as the Entitlement Syndrome. Black men and women believe that they are owed what they feel they've not been given by society and their families. Whether that's justified or not doesn't matter; it has had a grave impact on the way black men and women have related to each other. This attitude has funneled down into their relationships with each other. The woman has expectations, and her expectations of the man are often greater than he could possibly supply. That leaves her disappointed and angry, feeling abandoned and uncared about. Then she acts all that out by behaving in an indifferent way to him. "I don't need you." That's a problem. You can pick up any book on marriage and relationships and learn that the core of a balanced relationship is interdependence, not independence or dependence.

I've heard it said that "black mothers raise their daughters and love their sons." What's that about?

Ever since slavery, black women have been assigned the role of protecting black men in this society. The women had to watch the men be beaten and sometimes hung. So they began to groom their young sons to be more docile, less outright, less aggressive, less outspoken and more childlike so that they would be less of a threat to white males, basically. That way the mother felt that she was keeping her boy child safe. Some slave women, of course, also experienced terribly cruel things, but they didn't have to worry as much about being killed as men did. More often they were raped and beaten.

How did this inability to protect their loved ones affect black fathers?

That's the flip side of the coin, the ugly flip side of the coin. Black men who were husbands and fathers were stripped of their sense of manhood and power by not being able to affect or control the traumatic dynamics that took place against their household, against their woman, their wife, their daughters, and particularly their sons. There was no way to protect them, and if they tried in a very direct and aggressive way, they ran the risk of losing their lives, having their sons' lives taken and God-only-knows-what with the rest of their family. Black men had to learn to endure their aggression, their rage, their depression, their pain; they had to learn to internalize feelings.

So from the moment they arrived here, African-American men experienced a tremendous sense of powerlessness with no way to openly express what they were internalizing. When that happens, you have two choices. One is to find some kind of outlet, and generally what happens in that case is that you take it out on the people who are nearest to you. The other is that you shut down your emotions. That way you don't feel anything. I often think about Denzel Washington's character being tied to a post and whipped by the white officers commanding his black regiment in the Civil War movie *Glory*. He showed absolutely no expression. Black men have had to learn for centuries to endure, to deny that they are emotional beings, to cut off their expression of pain and rage. That, of course, does not allow them to be very comfortable with the tender side of their emotions. It especially makes it difficult to express those tender feelings to the woman you love, as well.

You mentioned that Denzel Washington showed no emotion. I certainly understand what you're saying, but my thought was that he was showing absolute, sheer, utter, ironclad defiance.

Yes. "I will not be broken; I will not be reduced to a crying, whining, two-year-old. I will stand here and be an ironclad man while I am experiencing all this incredible shame, incredible rage, incredible physical pain, but I will not allow any of you to know that."

I think that's been passed on among African-American men, like you pass on a banner, generation after generation after generation. That's where I believe the drugs and alcohol come in, because both are means of anesthetizing one's pain, one's rage, one's sadness, and one's shame.

Let me also say that femininity and masculinity issues in the black community are very sensitive issues. If you had several black men sitting in this room, they would say, "Look, I know who I am." It's a very sensitive issue that we used to throw under the rug, but now society is just beginning to talk about it. Michele Wallace was trying to start the discussion, I think, when she wrote the book *Black Macho and the Myth of Superwoman*. She was talking about why black men had to be so macho, why they have to oppress and depress black women. Some people say they need to try to gain some control and power in this society to feel like a man. Michele said she believed that most black males felt very emasculated, and were very angry about their lack of power. She believes this is why sexism exists so strongly in the black community. Many men say the "superwoman" strips them of their sense of masculinity.

If you're not being what you're supposed to be, and you're not fulfilling the role that you're supposed to have, certainly you're going to feel bad about yourself, but how do the people around you begin to feel about you?

The people around you, and specifically the women around you—your mother, your aunt, your sisters, your daughters, and your wife, or your lover—are going to have ambivalent feelings about you. They're going to feel on one hand, "You owe me. I've been carrying the weight of our culture and your confused sense of who you are for a long, long time. I've taken on what I felt you should have been about, plus I've carried out my own end of the bargain." And so they're going to feel frustrated, they're going to feel that it's important to try to get what's

theirs. This is what I call the Entitlement Syndrome. They're going to feel ambivalent about wanting to be in a relationship with you, but also ambivalent about being without you. They're going to want what most women want, which is to be in partnership, to have a bond, to have companionship with someone, to raise a family, and that whole business. But why should I do that if I have to do it all on my own? If you're never going to be here? Or if you're going to be here but always giving me excuses, or if you're going to be here but not be able to carry your weight? Or if you're going to be here but not really connect with me emotionally? You're sitting here with me but there's no love connection. Many women say, "I feel so alone." So many women, particularly the married ones, say that they feel so lonely, so alone.

Could we suggest that maybe what's happening here is that the man builds an emotional facade around himself because the truth is too terrible? If we could make it safe for African-American men to say what their truth is…

If we could make it safe; that's a big if. I don't think black women can make it safe for black men. I think that if it's going to be safe, black men are going to have to make it safe for other black men. I have suggested for some time now a national "Black Male Movement" based upon affirming who they are emotionally. I think older black men must take the time to engage, model and support new thinking and gender training for younger men. Mini-groups need to form in churches, civic organizations, and college and university fraternities. Fathers, uncles and brothers need to reach out and confirm their brother, their fellow man.

But if it could be made safe, what do you think black men would say? What do you think they're really feeling behind the emotionless macho posturing?

I think they would say that it's exhausting; that it's tiring, that it's scary, that it takes so much energy to keep this ideal posturing out there to the world, that they feel threatened by the society, they feel the lack of having the means and the tools to fulfill the masculine role as it has been designed for men in this society. They would say they feel inadequate as men because they don't have the economic clout to do what they know they need to do for themselves, their families and their

women. And that they feel terribly ashamed and vulnerable within a hostile society, and especially threatened by their women, who seem stronger than they are.

What are men afraid will happen to them if they express and expose and are honest about these insecurities that they feel?

That they'll be seen as whining. Terry McMillan, in her book *Waiting to Exhale*, called black men whiners. She said all they do is complain about what they don't have instead of making a way to get a piece of "the rock." Black men are concerned that what they're experiencing won't be understood or accepted as okay by others.

That's a reasonable apprehension on their part, isn't it?

Absolutely. It's absolutely reasonable. It's real. Some men have checked it out. Six or seven years ago I did a seminar in Ohio with black men and women. And at one point, we separated into male and female groups. I had a male partner and he took the men upstairs, and I went with the women. Both groups did some processing of what gender issues existed for them. Then the men decided they wanted to express to the women some things that they had never had a chance to say. So we came back together and had the men in an inner circle and the women around them in an outer circle, which was interesting in itself.

Who chose that configuration?

I don't remember. I just remember really struggling with that one, but if I had to do it over again, I would have put the women in the middle and the men on the outside, just in terms of what men are supposed to represent—the whole notion of protecting something that's "in." But it's interesting. The unconscious is very powerful. That's actually the way African-American relationships really look. The women are on the outside protecting, and the men are feeling on the inside.

So the men started expressing their pain and disappointment. They started expressing how they feel about not being accepted for who they are, for not having their struggle recognized, for having women respond to them in very self-centered ways where the women were only talking about what they needed, what they wanted. "You want, want, want all the time. Can't you see that I'm working with very limited resources? I'm doing the best I can." They were tired of the women complaining

about them not expressing their feelings; they're expressing them to the best of their ability based on what they've ever seen as role models with their fathers and their grandfathers and their uncles, and why can't the women appreciate them for who they are, and for what they can do?

And as they were in the midst of talking about that, the women lit into them. I mean they fired at them! The women started screaming and yelling at them, "How dare they be so insensitive and uncaring!" and all the kinds of foul statements that can be made. And the men shut down. They shut down. They couldn't say another word. The male leader, at that point, described the dynamic. He said, "These men sat upstairs for an hour together, and struggled with their issues, got in touch with some feelings, felt supported by each other, and for the first time in their lives they had shared very intimate things with other men"—which by the way, many African-American men don't do; they do it on a one-on-one with a buddy, but not as a group; they'll talk sports and all the other stuff; I guess American men in general don't do it—"So it took a lot for them to do what they did. They wanted to share it with you. And you couldn't receive it as it was presented to you. You had to not only react to it, but then you had to tell them how they should see it, how they should feel about it, and label them, and say who they were, and why they were that way." So he had them look at this as typical of the kind of dynamic that goes on between a woman and a man.

Another little scenario you might find of interest happened in 1992 at a conference on the black family. We were first in a large, general session where people were talking about male-female relationship issues. Then we were to move into breakout rooms for smaller workshops. People had several workshops they could choose. So I was walking behind a group of men who were coming to my workshop. The women had moved to the breakout room immediately and gotten their chairs. When the men got to the door, they looked in the room, saw all these women sitting in there, and stopped. They didn't move. All of a sudden I hear one man say to the other, "I'm not going in there." So the other man said, "Doesn't look too good, does it?" The third man said, "Looks like a lynching to me." The fourth man said, "Yeah, and I've been hung too many times; I'm going downstairs." The black women were just sitting in there, just kind of chatting. They weren't being hostile. Nothing was happening yet. But already there was the anticipation of what was going to take place.

Where did their apprehension come from?

From their experiences in their communities, from watching black men and black women relate to each other. And from the knowledge that it seems so difficult to protect themselves with women. Men feel so threatened by women's power. Many men perceive women's power because black women seem to be able to do so much with so little. They more often are left in charge of everything. The male perception of women's power is so overwhelming that it creates power struggles between the sexes.

Let's assume that the women reading this book really do feel good will toward men. They want to help make things better. They are nodding their heads knowingly at your story of six or seven years ago in Ohio and they are willing to acknowledge that maybe they have some share of the responsibility in the problem…

Some, not all, but certainly some.

Yes. Some. What's the message that needs to be clear to the women who are nodding knowingly and saying, "Yeah, I've done that."

First, I want to say that many women really do want to know what they do to shut men off. Loads of them come to seminars, they come to counseling in much larger numbers than the men do, and they're always in search of self-help programs on TV, or textbooks or whatever. I think it's difficult to take a look at yourself and look at your part in the problems. They also want the men to work on themselves so they'll be better partners.

But I think sensitivity is the key. I'm seeing a large number of males now in my practice. They come in for individual counseling, which is refreshing. A lot of women say to me, "How do you get them to do that?" and "I don't believe they tell you anything in there!" And I say, "Oh, no, they do. They share very deep, personal secrets and experiences. They allow themselves to think about things that have brought them tremendous pain and shame and sadness. And they struggle hard to allow those feelings to be shown." I usually ask the men, "What allows you to do this here?" And the one thing they say is that they feel that I empathize, that I'm sensitive to what they've been through, that although I'm not male, I seem to be patient with their struggle, that I get

to tap into some of these things that for generations have been turned off. When they come in my office, they get to experience me as a firm mother, direct mother, clear mother in terms of where they're going. I am confrontive. But I'm also caring, I'm sensitive, I'm open, I'm empathetic, and I give them a lot of nurturing feedback that says you are okay with me whether you cry, whether you scream, whether you slash out, whether you show me your humiliation, your pain, your sense of powerlessness, your joy, your clarity, all of that is okay. I accept all of it. Most people want acceptance if they're going to take risks and open up to another person.

Have you had men scream in your office?

Absolutely. Scream out at the anger, at their mothers, for holding them so close, so tight, so restricted, in a good way with good intentions to protect them, but feeling so stifled and overwhelmed by the rigidity of protection, that they make the association that to love a black woman is to lose all of your masculinity and power, personal power. And the other piece that they express around pain and anger is the lack of protection from their fathers in episodes with these women. The fathers would often go out the back door to get away from the woman who was screaming and yelling, so that they wouldn't have to endure. Or who would sit there in front of the TV or pull the newspaper up in front of them. Or go to bed. Or remember something that they needed to do with a friend or buddy, and go hang out with him until everything got calm in the house and the whole thing had blown over. Meanwhile, this young man would have to endure it by himself. This is so scary for a young boy, to deal with a woman's rage or control.

It sounds like the current situation is that we have women who, for a variety of reasons, are very strong, very powerful, very assertive, very much in charge.

At one level. But if you could hear a group of women talking about themselves and their relationships, you'd hear them feeling very tired and needy, you'd hear them talking about longing. Black women have always had the awesome burden of feeling responsible for the entire African-American culture, community, family, themselves, and their men. They feel so overwrought with the burden and so in pain about it, but at the same time, they feel enlightened that they have the ability to

do it. It's a mixed bag, it's a bittersweet experience, because we know we can do it, but we also feel sad and weary and wish now that it could be shared. Black women want what most women want: compatible relationships with a significant other.

What do you think needs to happen to make things better?

We have lost, we are in the midst of losing, an entire generation of young black men, between the ages of fourteen and twenty-five, in the streets. We've got to begin to send the kids who will survive—and most of them will be women—a different message about loving, and about who they are, what their identities are, and how to relate to each other in very different ways, so that the black family will survive, so that the culture will survive. If you don't have stable family, you don't have culture. And if you don't have men, you don't have any of it.

Tell me what you mean by that. Are you talking about men in families here?

Yes. If you don't have enough men, how do you create two-parent households? And how do you create balance with a twosome arrangement? When there is only one parent, that one must try to do both the father's and mother's role. It's pretty difficult, and quite impossible for some to achieve. And the sons, I think, lose a significant developmental factor—male bonding for healthy gender identity.

There are those who would say that a family could be a mother with children, and you don't need a man to have a family.

Yes, a family can be a mother with children, but I don't think that black women can help black men to know who they are as men. The best mother in the world, with the best intentions and all of her time and energy and heartache, cannot do that.

One last thing I'd like to jump back to, just for a bit. You mentioned that the fellows in Ohio said what was on their minds, and the women shut them down. Did you pick up any body language or muttering from the men in the aftermath of having been shut down?

Yes. The men were disappointed. They were sad. When they left, they looked depressed to me, which meant that they were angry. But

they didn't want to risk firing back at the women. They shut down and that was the end of it. They internalized their emotions, and looked the way Denzel Washington looked when he was being beaten.

The sad aspect of this is that both groups really wanted to understand what creates the tension between them. We must continue to find the answers together. We have come too far, for so many years in this struggle in America, to abandon each other now.

Advance Praise for Good Will Toward Men

"Passionate and intelligent… a courageous book."
—Thomas Moore, author of *Care of the Soul* and *Soul Mates*

"A well-reasoned invitation to replace blame with understanding, hostility with compassion, and bitterness with reconciliation."
—John Amodeo, Ph.D., co-author of *Being Intimate*

"This book will help our relationships with men."
—Jan Halper, Ph.D., author of *Quiet Desperation: The Truth About Successful Men*

"Will create good will toward women… will help turn the war between the sexes into love between the sexes."
—Warren Farrell, Ph.D., author of *Why Men Are the Way They Are*

"Many smart observations by clever women willing to speak the truth softly but with courageous insight."
—Denis Boyles, editor-at-large for *Men's Health Magazine*

"Wise, brave and long overdue."
—Harry Stein, former "Ethics" columnist for *Esquire*

"I hope it's widely read, because it's badly needed."
—Herb Goldberg, Ph.D., author of *The Hazards of Being Male*

"A great and important book… a masterpiece… a rallying point for women and men of good will."
—Doug Gillette, co-author of *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover*

"A hopeful, healing book."
—Asa Baber, "Men" columnist for *Playboy*

"Powerful and deeply moving… Every man owes a 'thank you' to the women interviewed in this book."
—Nathaniel Branden, Ph.D., author of *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*

"Opens up the conversation between men and women in ways it has never been opened before."
—Geoffrey Greif, Ph.D., author of *Single Fathers*

"Eminently readable… A welcome and needed book."
—Nadine Strossen, National President, ACLU; Professor of Law, The New York Law School

OUR COMEBACK
www.our-comeback.com