

## Dr. Randal Pinkett, The Only African-American Winner of “The Apprentice”

**D**r. Randal Pinkett has established himself as an entrepreneur, speaker, author and scholar, and as a leading voice for his generation in business and technology. He is the founder, chairman and CEO of his fifth venture, BCT Partners, a multimillion-dollar consulting firm headquartered in Newark, NJ that provides organizational development and capacity building services to public and nonprofit sector organizations. He is also a partner in the Chicago-based joint venture, Blackwell-BCT Consulting Services, which specializes in management consulting and information technology solutions for the Federal government and Fortune 500 corporations.

Randal has received numerous awards for business and technology excellence including the Information Technology Senior Management Forum's Beacon Award, the National Society of Black Engineers' Entrepreneur of the Year Award, and the National Urban League's Business Excellence Award. He has been featured on nationally televised programs such as *The Today Show*, *Live with Regis and Kelly*, *Nightline* and *Larry King Live*. In 2009, he was named to New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine's official shortlist as a potential running mate for Lieutenant Governor.

A Rhodes Scholar, Dr. Pinkett holds five degrees including: a B.S. in Electrical Engineering from Rutgers University, where he competed as a high jumper, long jumper, and captain of the men's track and field team; a M.S. in Computer Science from the University of Oxford in England; and a M.S. in Electrical Engineering, MBA, and Ph.D. from MIT. Most notably, he's still the only African-American-winner of Donald Trump's reality-TV show, “The Apprentice.”

Born in Philadelphia and raised in New Jersey, Dr. Pinkett is a proud member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated and attends First Baptist Church in Somerset, NJ, where he resides. He is happily married to his wife, Zahara, and they are both proud parents of their daughter, Amira. Randal firmly believes that “for those to whom much is given, much is expected,” so throughout his endeavors, he places great emphasis on his desire to give back to the community.

Dr. Pinkett is the author of *Campus CEO: The Student Entrepreneur's Guide to Launching a Multimillion-Dollar Business* and *No-Money Down CEO: How to Start Your Dream Business with Little or No Cash*. Here, he talks about his latest book, *Black Faces in White Places: 10 Game-Changing Strategies to Achieve Success and Find Greatness*.

**Kam Williams:** Hi Randal, thanks for another interview. How have you been?

Randal Pinkett: Great! Great. I appreciate this opportunity

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ty to reconnect.

**KW:** Same here. I really enjoyed “Black Faces in White Places.” Why did you write the book?

**RP:** The book is a reflection both of my own experiences and of those of many other African-Americans, particularly folks who have progressed in their careers. Although I was born in Philadelphia, I was raised in East

Windsor, NJ, a predominantly-white suburb where we were among a handful of black families. That trajectory has continued in my careers in college, grad school and as an entrepreneur in corporate America where I have found myself one of a few, if not the only, person of color. Anyone who has been in those types of environments knows that it gives rise to a unique set of challenges characteristic of the struggles that America faces as it relates to leveling the playing field for everyone. So, the book is designed not so much to lament racism but rather to be proactive by helping to address the issue by providing strategies, tools and solutions to make it easier for the next generation.

**KW:** I made a reference to Ellis Cose's classic study, “The Rage of a Privileged Class,” in my review of your book. He has just published a follow-up report, “The End of Anger,” which suggests that educated blacks who have made it are by-and-large content with the state of affairs in American society. Have you read it yet?

**RP:** No, I haven't but I'm eager to get a copy of Ellis' book.

**KW:** His basic thesis is that well-educated blacks are no longer an angry class by-and-large but are comfortable with how they've fared in corporate America. Do you agree?

**RP:** That's a fascinating question. We did see “The Rage of a Privileged Class” as one of the bodies of work which we were attempting to build upon, but looking at it through a generational lens. Our argument in the book is that the anger and the rage are no longer in play, although the challenges that gave rise to those emotions still exist. However, I think this generation of professionals has learned to navigate these corporate environments in ways that they don't internalize the discrimination, stereotyping or attempts to pigeonhole them as much as they seek to be empowered by the talents they bring to the table. So, when I speak to people like Roland Martin, Hill Harper or Ben Jealous, I don't detect a sense of rage, but a sense of acknowledgment that there are still challenges, that they are accepting of those challenges, and that they have resolved to overcome them. The generation addressed in Ellis' earlier book faced the tacit expectation that you had to change who you were in order to succeed. That assumption has now been shattered. America has at least progressed to the point where people



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are accepted as they are. But that's not a panacea; there's still much work left to do.

**KW:** From what I've seen, this recession has really devastated the black middle-class, between unemployment and home foreclosures. A lot of folks have suffered very serious setbacks after losing their job or being denied coverage by their health insurance company. So, I was quite surprised by Cose's conclusion.

**RP:** That's a good point. I think the economy has exacerbated those challenges and highlighted how racism rears its head. In the book, I looked at the unemployment statistics for college-educated African-Americans, and the numbers were pretty stark. There's certainly a large segment of the black community whose discontent has recently been amplified, but I also do believe that there are those members of the black intelligentsia who, while not angry, are still frustrated at the pace of change.

**KW:** Dante Lee, author of “Black Business Secrets,” asks: What was the best business decision you ever made, and what was the worst?

**RP:** My best decision was to not go into business alone, but to find strength in numbers with three other classmates of mine at Rutgers University. I can say, unequivocally, were it not for that friendship and that brotherhood we wouldn't be where we were today. Curiously, my worst business decision was prematurely allowing others into the partnership who hadn't proven themselves to be worthy, and then later having to figure out how to escort them out the door. [Laughs]

**KW:** How would you say winning on “The Apprentice” has impacted your life?

**RP:** It has created a platform for me as an author and as a speaker that would've been more difficult to accomplish otherwise. Businesswise, it has enabled me to get access to decision-makers more easily, because they're already familiar with me from the show. Not everybody returns my phone calls, but the pros far outweigh the cons.

**KW:** What did you think of Donald Trump's aborted Presidential campaign, and his making such a big thing about Obama's birth certificate?

**RP:** [Chuckles] I spoke to Donald about a week or two before he bowed out of the race. I reached out to him to bring to his attention that the way in which he was couching his attacks on the President was alienating and offending not just African-Americans, but Americans in general. It was my sense that there weren't many people, if any, in his inner circle who were challenging him in that regard. So, I raised the issue to let him know that I was personally offended by some of the things he'd been saying, and that he needed to learn how to relate to all Americans if he seriously aspired to be President.

**KW:** How did he respond?

**RP:** I don't know that that message was initially well-received, but it certainly was by the end of the conversation after I simply lamented that I was approaching him in the spirit of sharing some constructive criticism.

**KW:** Do you think he was ever serious about running, or was it all just a publicity stunt to boost the ratings of his TV

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