



“Challenging People to Shape a Better Future Now”

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Human Tragedy and Triumph

I am always fascinated by the impact of human emotions on our consumer behavior – whether those emotions are inspired by tragedy or triumph. Two television broadcasts made ratings history recently, one because of a tragedy and one because of a triumph: the 54th Annual Grammy Awards on CBS and the contest between the Los Angeles Lakers and the New York Knicks, Feb. 10, on ESPN.

Nielsen research has proven Americans love sports and music programming. African-Americans are typically well-represented in both. The Grammy Awards have been a viewing favorite. Research backs up the common sense notion that Blacks tend to gravitate to programming where there are larger numbers of people who look like us – but this year, the number of us who watched the Grammys was almost off the charts (no pun intended). The recent 54th Annual Grammy Awards attracted nearly 40 million viewers (39.9 million), which made it the largest Grammy audience since 1984 and the second largest in the history of the broadcast. Of those 39.9 million viewers, African-Americans made up 6.21 million. That means a whopping 60 percent more Black folks watched the Grammys this year than last (3.7 million out of a total viewership of 24.7 million in 2011).

Some people like me may tune in to see who's wearing what. How fabulous will our favorites

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Cheryl Pearson-McNeil

be, or how outrageous? Others are true music aficionados. While the why for this year's phenomenal success of the Grammys has not yet been officially analyzed, I suspect that the tragic news of the sudden death of beloved music icon Whitney Houston the night before piqued the increased interest. If you were like me and my

up when they got to the Whitney tribute. Someone from Ft. Wayne, Ind. (my hometown) actually alerted me when Glen Campbell's tribute came on. (You couldn't grow up in the Fort without being inundated with his music back in the day). So I loudly and proudly sang along to the tribute. My son watched me with his mouth hanging open in disbelief. "Really, mom?! Seriously, you LIKE this country music?" (If he reacted like this to my Glen Campbell tribute, he does NOT want to be around

per game – launching him from bench warmer to global superstar. In addition to a 73 percent increase in viewership of Knicks games on MSG and ESPN in New York, nationally the February 10 game between the Knicks and the Lakers on ESPN was the most-watched Friday night regular season NBA game on the network, so far this season - with just over 3 million viewers.

On top of that, NM Incite (a Nielsen McKinsey company) reports that social media buzz has also hit a frenzied pitch around the world since the first February 4 game. Even the phrase "LinSanity" has been coined. The online chatter about Lin has surpassed conversations about the Knicks, LeBron James and Kobe Bryant combined. Now, that's powerful. And so are you. Because, if you follow these ratings stories, you know these surges in increased viewership are a result of people just like you and me tuning in. It's great news for the networks as well as the advertisers. Those advertisers are dedicated to reaching us – the consumers. Which brings me to my mantra, "Knowledge is power." The power is in your hands, and so is the remote control.

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Some people like me may tune in to see who's wearing what

friends, we were reeling with disbelief. Tuning into the Grammys seemed to offer a kind of solace and comradeship in our collective desire to pay homage to a musical phenomenon who was one of our own.

Now, in the interest of full disclosure, the show didn't hold my attention for long beyond the luscious LL's prayer for "our fallen sister" (a very nice touch). But after his intro and having glimpsed the outrageous outfits of Nicki Minaj, Gaga and the sweet acknowledgements from Alicia Keys and Bruno Mars, I begged my Facebook friends to wake me

when my sister, his Aunt Natalie, goes berserk over Kenny Rogers). Following Jennifer Hudson's moving tribute of "I Will Always Love You," and after fighting back tears, I clicked off. On the flip side, Americans love to cheer on an underdog, a "Rocky," a champion who rises from the ashes of obscurity to achieve victory. In two words: Jeremy Lin. It was my basketball-playing son who turned me onto the phenomenon that was taking place with the undrafted 23-year old, Harvard-educated Asian-American from California and his fortuitous match-up against the New Jersey Nets. Lin has averaged 27 points

Faith of Our Fathers: On the Black Church

Black History month often reminds me of the brutal past we have endured as a people. The common thread we all share is that of a people forcibly removed from a continent and their respective nations. They were brought here across the Atlantic to serve as human chattel. One of the biggest criticisms of the Slave Trade was the forcible conversion of people and the names they were given to reflect those of their Christian masters. The knowledge of this heinous chapter in our nation's history, coupled with the codified racism that followed, have led some to vehemently oppose the Christian faith and label it a "White man's religion." That stated – I beg to differ with the description "White man's religion."

The Slave Trade had many conspirators of diverse religious backgrounds, from the indigenous, ancestral worship of warring tribes that captured their enemies and sold them to the merchants or kept them for themselves, to the Arab Muslims who historically enslaved non believers and rivals alike. Religion has always been used to justify atrocity and one man's oppression of another. We must always keep in mind that many good Christian White people fought and gave their lives as abolitionists to destroy the institution.

I believe some of our fathers found a new faith in the journey across the Atlantic. It was not something their fathers would rec-

RELEVANT NOW

Hakim Hazim

ognize or something they were force fed by plantation owners. They created a culture grounded in a hope for the future and a freedom they would never experience in this life. They were not earthly minded. They looked past the hypocrisy of their captors and believed in the God of the Bible based upon their own internal witness. In spite of all tangible evidence, the Black church believed that God was with them and that he in fact died for them. The preachers insisted that those who called upon their God would be saved, but not by human hands, and not necessarily in this life.

Think of the profound contrast between modern day saints and the rampant materialism that is taught from the pulpits of many Black preachers today. In the past, Courageous believers planted seeds of hope through their simple instruction the wonderful music left behind that spoke of the riches of Christ. Stripped of all earthly hope, they found an architect who promised to build them a city beyond the Jordan, and they sang (man did they sing!) about it often. They grabbed hold of a compassionate Christ that loved them and looked neither like their master or

themselves. He was a spirit, a fire, a light, eternal and unchanging. Their music identified with the bondage of the Hebrews and they surmised that one day their deliverance would come, and if not for them – then the generations that would proceed from them.

I have often wondered about this faith handed down for centuries. The faith of our fathers is something to reacquire ourselves with. They were illiterate, yet spiritual beyond description. Victims; yet, overcomers in every sense of the

Sunday experience into the everyday toil of a life in bondage.

In my mind's eye I can see them now and I hear the passionate cries of yearning that ascended into heaven that came be known as gospel music. I see their torment of soul as their family members were tortured, raped and sold off. I imagine the sweltering heat of the sun during the summer and blistering cold of winter and alas I hear a prayer from the battered psyche of a people. "Delivah us Lawd, and if not us, our lil ones."

That was the spirit of our fathers. The church is not about color, but it is about people called out from diverse backgrounds throughout the history of the human race. Our spiritual journey emerged out of extraordinary circumstances because God reached out to a people, oppressed and dispersed throughout this nation. Whereas some ridicule the history of the Black church by citing excessive expression, emotionalism, shallow theology/doctrine and the like, I salute it and thank God for it. I understand that it is an inseparable part of our unique history.

Hakim Hazim is the founder of Relevant Now Consultancy and co-founder of Freedom², a web-based Christian think tank focused on believers in America and other free societies

I believe some of our fathers found a new faith in the journey across the Atlantic

word! They possessed nothing but were rich beyond compare. Their faith created a perseverance few human beings would ever know. I believe their prayers were answered regarding many of the opportunities Blacks have been given today, but I believe many remain unanswered still because many have remained in mental bondage.

The Black church has a rich heritage. Historically, it gave us was a sense of community and belonging to one another. It was a place we could go to and seek a God who would make Himself accessible when we called upon Him. I think it was the closest place to home they knew. They carried the