

A Matter of Life or Death

Why Black Men Must Save Black Boys in America’s Public School

Edited by Dr. Michael W. Nellums and Dr. Walter Milton, Jr.

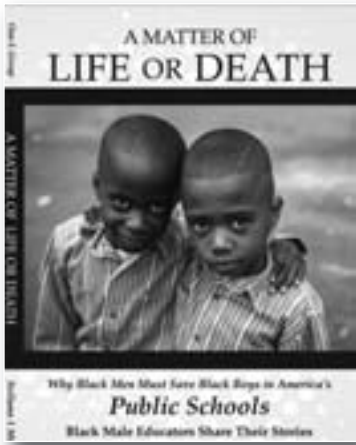
By Kam Williams
Special to The
Skanner News

“Life for many black boys is akin to a war. Wars on their minds, souls, spirits and yes, even their bodies take place on a daily basis. It is my desire that our sons become equipped with an artillery of excellence, weapons of mass knowledge/information and a navigation/GPS system that will help them avoid life’s roadblocks...

The co-author of this book, Dr. Michael Nellums, an accomplished educator... and I are dedicated to creating a resource for parents, students and community members. Our work in environments populated with black male students has propelled us to join in the pursuit to write this book...

It is our firm belief that readers will find our project meaningful and helpful in their fight to combat the numerous and varied challenges that impact our boys.”

— Excerpted from the Prologue by Dr. Walter Milton, Jr. (pgs. 1-4)



Despite the implementation of numerous educational programs since the Sixties such as Head Start, No Child Left Behind and, most recently, Race to the Top, African-American males continue to fare poorly in the nation’s public high schools. Rather than wait for the next federal initiative, Dr. Michael W. Nellums and Dr. Walter Milton, Jr. have decided to do something about it, given the

prospect of having yet another generation of inner-city black boys slip through the cracks.

As a principal and former school superintendent with a combined 40+ years of service in the field, these African-American academics feel strongly that it is incumbent upon folks like themselves to intervene. So, they enlisted the assistance of fellow educators in writing: to write A Matter of Life or Death: Why Black Men Must Save Black Boys in America’s Public Schools.

Read the rest of this story online at
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Duke: A Life of Duke Ellington

by Terry Teachout

By Jerry Harkavy
The Associated
Press

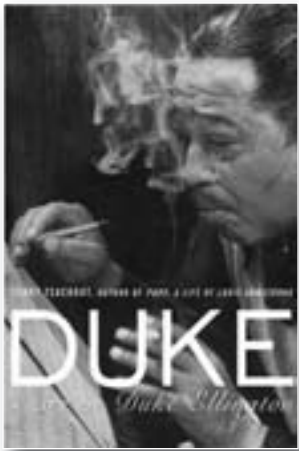
Duke Ellington died nearly 40 years ago, but for jazz fans of a certain age his musical creativity and elegant style remain timeless.

Whether he was leading his orchestra in “Take the A Train,” the composition by collaborator Billy Strayhorn that became Ellington’s theme, or assuring his fans in his velvety bass-baritone that he loved them madly, the Duke’s public persona as a jazz giant has endured for half a century.

Fans remain familiar with the music, from popular hits like “Mood Indigo” and “Sophisticated Lady” to the ambitious longer works that often drew mixed reviews, but the man himself is still — by his own design — shrouded in mystery.

Terry Teachout, the Wall Street Journal drama critic and author of a critically acclaimed biography of Louis Armstrong, penetrates that veil with a portrait of a talented musician obsessed with his quest for respectability who remained evasive and deceptive in his dealings with band members and other close associates. Even his closest friends could only guess at what he really thought.

But what cannot be denied is that this high school dropout and self-taught musician ranks as the greatest of all jazz composers, one who left behind roughly 1,700 compositions. He was notorious for incorporating into his work many of the musical riffs of his band members, often without offering them due credit or compensation. When he did pay, it was



usually a modest one-time amount rather than a share of royalties.

Ellington’s work schedule was daunting, and he did much of his composing in hotel rooms late at night and into the morning. He also was notorious for procrastination, putting off the completion of long-awaited compositions until the performance date arrived and delay was no longer an option.

One aspect of his life that the suave and urbane band-

leader did make time for was lovemaking. The Duke and his wife, Edna, separated in 1929 after 11 years of marriage when his philandering prompted her to slash him on the face with a razor, leaving a scar on his left cheek. They never divorced, but Ellington took up with a succession of women and never lacked for female companionship.

The experience of being black in America served as a theme for some of Ellington’s compositions, including “Black, Brown and Beige,” a 45-minute suite performed for the first time in 1943. The Duke and his band received a warm reception when they performed in the segregated South, but they bunked in private Pullman cars rather than seek lodgings that would accommodate them.

This well-researched biography is sure to appeal to longtime jazz fans who revel in their memories of Ellington’s work and others who may want to learn more about his fascinating life. Parts of the book presuppose a level of musical knowledge that not all readers have, but they are sure to gain a better understanding of his greatness.

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