

# Movie offers lessons overcoming odds

By George E. Curry  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

After seven consecutive weekends on the road, I was glad to be home last Saturday. I decided to spend the rainy day reading, relaxing and watching TV. With few exceptions, I rarely watch television. However, when I scrolled through the cable menu and saw that "Lean on Me," starring Morgan Freeman as "Crazy" Joe Clark, was about to be aired on A&E, I became as excited as someone watching the movie for the first time.

"Lean on Me" is my favorite movie. I've seen it dozens of times since it came out in 1989 and each time, I have had to fight back tears. It's not that I was unfamiliar with the ending — that's always the same. I find the movie so touching because with tough-love, determination and a genuine belief in the abilities of his students, Clark turns around a decaying, drug-infested Eastside High School in New Jersey.

After asking instructors for a list of troublemakers, the Joe Clark character calls a school assembly.

"I want all of you to take a good look at these people on the risers behind me," Clark says, as the students behind him continue to misbehave. "These people have been here up to five years and done absolutely nothing.

These people are drug dealers and drug users. They have taken up space; they have disrupted school; they have harassed your teachers; and they have intimidated you. Well, times are about to change. You will not be bothered in Joe Clark's school."

The students on stage remain unruly, but not for long.

"These people are incorrigible," Clark says. "And since none of them could graduate anyway, you are all expurgated. You are dismissed! You are out of here forever! I wish you well."

A line of security guards show those on stage to the door, some of them forcibly. Turning to the remaining students, Clark says: "Next time it may be you. If you do no better than they did, next time it will be you."

After "expurgating" Eastside High of the miscreants, Clark explains his goal.

"My motto is simple: If you do not succeed in life, I don't want you to blame your parents. I don't want you to blame the White man! I want you to blame yourselves! The responsibility is yours!

"In two weeks we have a practice exam and a minimum skills test on April 13th.



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That's a hundred and ten school days from now. But it's not just about those test scores. If you do not have these basic skills, you will find yourselves locked out. Locked out of that American Dream that you see advertised on TV — that they tell you is so easy to get."

For the three people who still have not seen the movie, I won't give away the ending except to say it was a dramatic and happy one.

After my 2-hour movie, I knew the opening game of the playoff series between the Cleveland Cavaliers and the Washington Wizards would be less intense.

And the basketball game proved to be just that. The only real question was how well LeBron James would perform in his first playoff game. In retrospect, that question should not have been raised, given James' stellar performance.

It was the half-time profile of Wizards Star Gilbert Arenas that tugged at the heart. Best known for throwing his jersey into the stands after each game, Arenas has a tender side. The captain of the Wizards has become the self-appointed big brother of Andre

McAllister, a 10-year-old and sole survivor of a fire last December in Washington that killed the boy's mother, twin sister, great-grandfather and cousin. Arenas spends time with McAllister, got him a job as a ballboy for the basketball team and remains devoted to helping shape his future. He has already made plans for the youth to attend college and says McAllister is the brother he never had.

Watching "Lean on Me" and the clip about Arenas brought back memories of Robert L. Glynn, the head of McKenzie Court, my housing projects in Tuscaloosa, Ala. He spent countless days telling me and others that we could accomplish anything that we set our mind to.

He told us of his poor upbringing, letting us know in the process that we, too, could overcome that barrier. I'll always remember the stories he told me about filling holes in his shoes with newspapers and how he worked his way through what is now Alabama State University.

Sometimes we forget just how much of an impact we as individuals can have on the lives of our youth. And if there were ever a time to exert that influence, it's now.

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## Despite troubles, Ohio activist soldiered on

By James Clingman  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Kabaka Oba died on Saturday April 15, 2006 in Cincinnati, Ohio, after being shot five times three days earlier in front of City Hall. In broad daylight, around 3:00 p.m., after addressing the City Council, the "General," as he was called, was sitting in his car when six or seven shots rang out. Gravely wounded but still able to identify his assailant to police officers, Kabaka fought for his life but finally succumbed.

Just a week prior to his death, General Kabaka was memorializing Timothy Thomas, the young Black man killed by a police officer in Cincinnati five years ago; his death spawned the civil unrest and a boycott of Cincinnati. Kabaka abhorred and fought unceasingly against police brutality, his mission, as he called it, and spoke out against it, and other issues, in support of Black people.

He demonstrated against the Klan when it made its annual pilgrimage to Cincinnati during the Christmas holidays; he went to City Council meetings for at least five years straight, uninterrupted, to protest the inequities that exist in this city. He addressed the County Commissioners as well, relentless in his determination to speak truth to power.

Kabaka was not a perfect man, but how many of us are prepared to throw the first stone at him? He had his warts like we all do, but he wore his compassion for his people right over his heart, for all to see. There was nothing he would not do in support of Black people. That kind of personality will always create enemies, of course, but Kabaka understood and dealt with the reality and the possibility that he would be harmed in some way.

Who would have ever thought a Black man would be accused of killing Kabaka Oba? But then again, who would have thought a Black man would have killed Malcolm X? Of course, the White media had a field day with this tragedy, mainly because of its animus for Kabaka and what he stood for. On many occasions they resorted to that old stand-by of calling him a racist and a hater of all police officers and other ethnic groups. They called him anti-Semitic as well, the tried and true way of raising the ire of people against a Black man.

But no matter the names he was called, no



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matter the accusations, no matter the persecution, Kabaka continued to smile and stay on the course he had charted. He continued to help others, to protect others, and to comfort others, despite the personal battles he had to fight along the way.

Ironically, Kabaka's death is grounded in one of the issues for which he fought, and an issue for which the boycott of Cincinnati was called. Economic exclusion has been the bane of Cincinnati for many years. Through blatant discrimination and collusion, Black people have been excluded from the real economic benefits of public and private development projects. The rift between Kabaka and his accused killer, as the story is told, resulted from economic issues — a boycott and a picket line.

How ironic it is that a Black soldier, committed to fighting for economic justice for his people, is killed because of an unrelated economic issue that he was accused of causing. And even more ironic, if the primary problem of economic apartheid in the city of Cincinnati had been solved, the nonsensical

secondary economic issue that led to Kabaka's death would not have existed. We created a new problem by not fixing the original problem. If we, Black folks, had been collectively "fighting the power" instead of individually fighting one another, Kabaka may be alive today.

What does that say about us as role models to our children? What will that do to stop our youth from killing one another? Two Black families are suffering now at the loss of two Black men. We are literally killing ourselves and our families. How are we ever going to reach our children if we continue such inappropriate behavior as adults?

Why does someone always have to die before we get serious about taking care of our business? Much of Black Cincinnati is now in mourning; we hear all of the condolences being conveyed on the radio. How long will that last? Is it that we just love to pay tributes to people who have died? Everything we are saying now about Kabaka should have been said to him, not to one another. I feel good because I told him what I thought of his work; I gave him his flowers before he died.

I will end this column with a quote from  
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## LaGrande

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or destroying something. In other action movies, the hero dies but comes back to life in the next movie. After watching such a movie, teens might imagine themselves to be similar heroes and strive for justice or to just simply demonstrate violence.

And finally, one more underlying reason considered a provocation for violent behavior — aside from substance abuse, crime, etc. — is boredom and lack of life goals. Teenagers who feel bored and do not see any objectives in their life, and they hold no hope for a bright future or respect for any distinct system, nor were they taught human and

moral values, often simply cannot imagine doing anything positive. Destruction and violence they spread are in their souls. This is the soul that we must cure.

Whatever the reason for teen violence, we as a society must act — and we need to act quickly. Violence is the second leading cause of death for Americans between the ages of 15 and 24 and the leading cause of death for African-Americans in the same group.

African-American males in this group have a homicide rate nine times that of White males. These statistics suggest that if we don't do something soon, we stand to lose a whole generation of young people to violence.

The first thing we need to do is take responsibility for our children and stop making excuses for them. When they're young and acting out, we say they are sleepy or tired instead of dealing with the behavior. When they're older and acting out, we say they were in the wrong place at the wrong time or they were with the wrong crowd.

The latter excuse is not a legitimate excuse in a court of law, as I'm sure the young people involved in last weekend's melee will find out.

Parenting is a job—a job that requires time, energy, commitment, dedication and guidance. When you allow a teenager to be

out at 2:00, 3:00 or 4:00 a.m. overnight, you are failing miserably at your job.

When you allow a teenager to function by their own rules, and you have no absolute standards set for them, they are raising themselves and, ultimately, there is going to be some trouble.

In some cases, if you follow an unruly child home you'll find an unruly parent. So for those parents who don't know how to parent, enroll in a parenting skills class and save your child's life.

The fact of the matter is this: If you don't raise them, the police have no problem sending them to jail or hell.