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dr. laura schlessinger and the evolution of the n-word

by n.m shabazz

She's known for her firebrand tongue and telling things as she sees them, but Dr. Laura Schlessinger has never been known for political correctness. The author and radio talk show host—long a bastion of conservatism—stirred up a new controversy a couple of weeks ago when a caller dialed into her radio show for help regarding her interracial marriage. She wanted advice as to whether or not some of her husband's friends' comments were racist.



Dr. Laura Schlessinger
Picture courtesy of Getty Images

During the exchange, Schlessinger told the woman, who called herself Jade, that she was being too sensitive. When the caller asked if she thought the N-word was offensive, Schlessinger retorted, "Black guys say it all the time," then went on to repeat it 10 more times in five minutes.

African-American leaders, such as the Reverend Al Sharpton, have called the remarks, "...despicable". "If you listen carefully to the logic of what she was saying," Sharpton stated, "it was that the N-word was not offensive."

Of course, this is not the first instance in recent memory a white entertainer or talk show host has so flagrantly used such rhetoric. Several years ago, comedian Michael Richards—verbally going toe-to-toe with a heckler in the audience at one of his comic performances—had an N-word meltdown. Additionally, while radio talk show host Don Imus didn't say

the dreaded vernacular, in 2007 he didn't exactly endure himself to black listeners in his listening audience when he referred to the women's Rutgers

"Their [blacks] use of the term is less an indication of their acceptance of it (and the black inferiority it suggests) than a reflection of their attempts to express themselves within harshly restricted circumstances imposed from without."

College basketball team as "...nappy-headed hoes..."

Yet, what appears lost in all of the diatribes surrounding what Schlessinger said—despite her evident lack of

foresight and cultural understanding—is an honest dialogue about the state of race relations in the United States. At the very least—since this keeps happening every other year—someone should ask just *why* African-Americans are so sensitive over the N-word. To examine that, one needs only to take a brief look at history.

While the N-word did not originate as a racial slur, it did take on a pejorative meaning over time. According to the book, *The Browder File*, by Anthony T. Browder, the N-word is a derivative of "negro", which has its roots in necromancy; the ancient Egyptian practice of worshipping the dead. However, the etymology of the N-word can be traced back to the Latin word "niger" (which means black) and the English noun "negro" (which means black person). In Spanish and Portuguese, the term "negro" was at first used to describe the color of unanimated objects.

However, after the advent of the Atlantic slave trade in the 15th century, the N-word took on a decidedly different connotation. By 1837, the writer Hosea Easton wrote that the N-word was, "...an opprobrious term, employed to impose contempt upon [blacks] as an inferior race..." and that it "...flows from the fountain of purpose to injure."

When whites, like Schlessinger, say **(continued on page three)**

remembering abbey lincoln by I. Lourdes Shabazz

To have been compared to Billie Holiday is perhaps every female jazz vocalist's dream. However, to be told your way of singing holds more emotional depth and range than Holiday is a compliment of the highest order. Thus was the talent of Abbey Lincoln. She was rare in that she was one of the few jazz vocalists who wrote and sang her own material, and who also enjoyed a successful movie career.

Born Anna Marie Wooldridge August 6th, 1930 in Chicago, Illi-

nois, Lincoln was the 10th of 12 children. She was raised on a rural Michigan farm and, perhaps because the family had a piano, developed an early interest in music.

Growing up listening to recordings of Holiday, Sarah Vaughn, and Dinah Washington, Lincoln learned how to make others feel the emotion of her singing, developing a passionate, dark range. It was inevitable she would hone her singing skills through church choirs and amateur contests.

At age 19, Lincoln headed west to California—in part to escape the harsh winters of Michigan and in part to start a singing career. At 22, she spent a year in Honolulu, performing at a nightclub under the assumed name of Gabby Lee. While in Honolulu, Lincoln was lucky enough to meet both Holiday and jazz great Louis Armstrong.



Abbey Lincoln

August 6, 1930 — August 14, 2010

Picture courtesy of the Washington D.C. Jazz Network

Meeting Roach would alter Lincoln's life forever. A bebop pioneer with an affinity for societal issues, he affected her professionally and socially. This was most pronounced on Roach's 1960 *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite* (Candid) on which Lincoln sung Oscar Brown Jr.'s lyrics

Russell that Lincoln—now performing in the supper club circuit—was urged to work her sex appeal on audiences. Russell was also the person who picked Lincoln's permanent stage name; Abbey Lincoln was a cohesive joining of Westminster Abbey and Abraham Lincoln.

The year 1956 was a particularly good time for Lincoln. That year, she recorded both her first album, *Abbey Lincoln's Affair: A Story of a Girl in Love* (Liberty), and debuted in her first film with Hollywood

bombshell Jayne Mansfield, *The Girl Can't Help It*. For Lincoln's second album, *That's Him* (Riverside, 1957), she still kept her stage sensuality, but stepped up her game musically by working with a modern jazz ensemble that included saxophonist Sonny Rollins and drummer Max Roach.

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lauded as a seminal arrangement about the civil rights movement, it marginalized Lincoln's reputation, branding her a radical. With the exception of *Straight Ahead* (Candid, 1961), she didn't release anymore albums in the 1960's.

Alongside other jazz musicians—such as Charles Mingus and John Coltrane—Roach and she participated in civil rights protests and benefit concerts for the NAACP and the Congress Of Racial Equality (CORE).

Lincoln married Roach in 1962 and starred in several more movies: *Nothing But A Man* in 1964 and *For The Love Of Ivy* in 1968, with Sidney Poitier; for the latter she received a Golden Globe nomination. In 1970, she divorced Roach and moved into an apartment above a garage in Los Angeles, for a time becoming a bit of a recluse. Visiting Africa in 1972 at the urging of singer Miriam Makeba, Lincoln was given the honorary name **(continued on page three)**

dr. laura schlessinger (continued from page one)

they don't see any harm in using the N-word because African-Americans use it, they are missing the point.

Historically, African-Americans have always used it. However, as Jabari Asim wrote in the article *Dr. Laura Schelssinger and the N-Word's Long, Painful Trek Through History*, "Their [blacks] use of the term is less an indication of their acceptance of it (and the black inferiority it suggests) than a reflection of their attempts to express themselves within harshly restricted circumstances imposed from without."

In other words, African-Americans took a pejorative word about them and used it as a source of identification amongst themselves for entirely different reasons. Yet, during the 20th century the N-word African-Americans used eventually took the slang form of "nigga", differentiating itself from the pejorative "nigger". The connotation of the former supposedly became a term of endearment, the latter a term for all of the brutality African-

Americans have endured because of slavery and racism.

Of course, the N-word has always had its detractors no matter how it was used. Dr. David Pilgrim and Dr. Phillip Middleton, in the paper *Nigger and Caricatures*, state that, "Nigger is the ultimate expression of white racism and white superiority, irrespective of the way it is pronounced. It is a linguistic corruption, a corruption of civility. Nigger is the most infamous word in American culture. Some words carry more weight than others. At the risk of hyperbole, is genocide just another word? Pedophilia? Obviously, no; neither is nigger."

Knowing the hostility that such a word attracts, then, should Schlessinger have used it repeatedly, even though she was trying to, in her own words "...make a philosophical point...?" Perhaps not, but she is known as the dragon lady of talk radio.

For her part, Schlessinger—who has a Ph. D. in physiology from

Columbia University, not psychology or psychiatry—did apologize over the air to her listeners. "Yesterday, I did the wrong thing," she said. "I didn't intend to hurt people, but I did."

Still, many don't know how genuine her apology was. She later went on Larry King's *CNN Live*, saying she was quitting her radio show at the end of the year because she wanted to regain her First Amendment rights. Though all of her sponsors still backed her—at least according to Schlessinger—she did not want the companies or their products to be attacked just because of something she said. Supporting her on Twitter via tweets was Tea Party harbinger and former Alaskan Governor Sarah Palin who told her, "Don't retreat... reload!"

Again, an opportunity for a relevant, intelligent discussion about race relations was lost. Sometimes, it's not about someone's right to say something, it's about whether or not it's right to say it at all.

remembering abbey lincoln (continued from page two)

Aminata Moseka by the president of Guinea and Zaire's minister of information.

During the 1980's, she moved back to New York and started performing again. Jean-Philippe Allard, a producer and executive at PolyGram France, signed her to what is now the Verve Music Group. Lincoln's *The World Is Falling Down* (1990) was a commercial and critical success. She recorded eight more albums and worked with a plethora of A-list jazz musicians, such as

saxophonist Stan Getz and vibraphonist Bobby Hutcherson.

She returned to the movie screen briefly in 1990, playing Bleek Gilliam's mother in writer/producer Spike Lee's *Mo' Better Blues*. In 2003, she received the *Jazz Masters Award* from the National Endowment for the Arts. Her last album, *Abbey Sings Abbey*, was released in 2007; the same year she had open heart surgery. From that point on, her health started to decline.

Her death on August 14, 2010, was announced by her brother David Wooldridge and not given an official cause.

Jazz vocalist Cassandra Wilson, who had paid attention to Lincoln and her career, said of her passing, "She had a profound influence on other jazz vocalists, not only as a singer and composer but also as a role model. I learned a lot about taking a different path from Abbey. Investing your lyrics with what your life is about in the moment."

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brooklyn Jazz Calendar

September 2010

Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	September 1 Family Feud with Eric Willis	September 2 Freddie Jones Quartet	September 3 <u>Absolutely Vegas</u> Michael Ward Natural Change	September 4 Michael Ward Natural Change
September 7 Mahogany and Jam Box	September 8 Family Feud with Eric Willis	September 9 Freddie Jones Quartet	September 10 The Buster Brown Band	September 11 Melanie Dutton
September 14 Montrose	September 15 Family Feud with Eric Willis	September 16 Freddie Jones Quartet	September 18 Natural Change	September 18 The Buster Brown Band
September 21 Rusty Johnson	September 22 Name Family Feud with Eric Willis	September 23 Keith Anderson	September 24 Zac Harmon	September 25 Natural Change
September 28 Domino Effect	September 29 Family Feud with Eric Willis	September 30 Mark Harper		
Monday September 20, 2010 <u>Legendary Mondays</u> This Month's Legendary Artist Willie T. Albert 7:00pm to 11:00pm				
Sunday Jazz Brunch 11:00am – 4:00pm Musical Performances 11:30am – 3:30pm				
September 5 Breggett Rideau	September 12 Breggett Rideau	September 19 Breggett Rideau	September 26 Carolyn Lee Jones	
Jazzy Sunday Evenings with Fingerprints Musical Performances 7:00pm – 11:00pm				

Special Events @ brooklyn Jazz Cafe

Absolutely Vegas, featuring Michael Ward September 3rd @ 8:00PM

Spoken Jazz, A SpokenWord Event—Tuesday September 7th @ 7:00PM

Legendary Mondays, featuring Willie T. Albert—Monday September 20th @7:00PM

Out In The Open...A Talent Showcase hosted by Domino Effect—Tuesday September 28th @ 7:00PM



the jazzy insert

the greatness that alludes terrell owens

by n.m. shabazz

Can you smell that permeating, acidic aura of increased testosterone in the air? That's right, folks, football season is almost upon us; the time when men get six-pack stomachs from sitting down, drinking beer all day, watching football. As always, there are the usual suspects. Even Brett Favre is back in Minnesota—as if there was ever any doubt—so there is more than enough about which I can write in this month's editorial. And while I won't have the temerity to claim the Kansas City Chiefs will make the playoffs or that the Dallas Cowboys will win the Super bowl, I will focus my attention on one of the more interesting characters in this upcoming football season; Terrell Owens.

A couple of months ago, it appeared no team wanted to sign him. After watching his previous meltdowns and gregariousness with several other football organizations, it looked as if he was too much a liability on which to take. However in the NFL, needs sometimes overrides liability issues. The Cincinnati Bengals—looking for some help down the field on offense (especially after the bust of Antonio Bryant)—have set their hopes, in part, on T.O.

The town is all abuzz and excited. A few have even had the audacity to claim the Bengals Super bowl bound, which is not as ludicrous as me claiming the Chiefs will make it to the playoffs. At least last year, the Bengals finished 10-6 on the year and swept the entire AFC North Division. However, I'm not so quick to jump on that bandwagon. For one, I don't think T.O. will make that much of a difference. If anything, I believe it will take away from the team.

For the record, I've never been a T.O. fan. It has nothing to do with his abilities. Going simply on talent, I still believe he's one of the best around; his work ethic and physicality are things of legend. No, the reason I've never been a T.O. fan is because he thinks it's all about him, that he's bigger than the game. He's too much of a diva and in a full-contact sport like football there is no room for divas.



Terrell Eldorado Owens
Picture courtesy of Associated Press

Virtually every team T.O. has been on, he's been a cancer, a poison to the harmony of the organization. He aspires to be the greatest at his position, but he must understand that being the greatest is about more than stats, number of wins, and even Super bowl rings (of which he has none). It's about rising to the occasion despite insurmountable odds.

When things went wrong in San Francisco, T.O. blamed the quarterback, Jeff Garcia, even hinting in a Playboy interview that Garcia was gay. When things went wrong in Philadelphia, T.O. again pointed to the quarterback, Donovan McNabb, questioning whether or not McNabb had "heart". And yet once more, after crying on national television about how he loved him some Tony Romo, when things began to fall apart for the Dallas Cowboys, T.O. started pointing fingers at the quarterback.

Along the way, he's divided teams, has had sideline tirades and fights with teammates in locker rooms, and has spit in the face of cor-

nerback DeAngelo Hall. The greatest? Not even close.

When I think of the greatest in sports, I think of people like boxer Muhammad Ali, of basketball player Michael Jordan, or cyclist Lance Armstrong, and professional bodybuilder Ronnie Coleman.

T.O. once said, *"I know hands-down I'd be close to Jerry Rice's records if I had been with quality quarterbacks like he had."*

Now that's an interesting comment. But somehow I can't imagine some of the men I've just mentioned saying similar things.

The greatest get things accomplished no matter how many adversities with which they are faced or the lack of talent or help around them. They also know when to shut up and when to use their mouths.

Ali—one of the most voracious trash talkers in the history of sports—rarely said something he couldn't back up. More importantly, he only used his mouth to get in the heads of opponents and to take them out of their game, not to antagonize people and to get ostracized from the game. Here's a hint, T.O., when the same thing keeps happening, it's time to look at yourself, not everyone else.

To his credit, I think T.O. has learned some humility during the course of his professional career. He realizes that he's no longer a spring chicken and that football teams would rather deal with someone who has less talent but causes fewer problems, than someone who has a lot of talent, but brings a lot of baggage and drama.

If nothing else, T.O. paired with the unreserved Chad Ochocinco (who has a television show as well) should be a magnificent spectacle every Sunday when the Bengals play.



ONE MAN AND HIS MICROPHONE

featuring **GNO**

with musical performances by **Mahogany & the Jam Box**

Tuesday, September 7th

7PM—11PM

If spoken word had an Old School, then GNO would be Marvin Gaye; controversial, poignant, penetrating, and entertaining. GNO, which is an acronym for Geometric Nubian Orator, always has a story to tell. As a spoken word artist who's actively graced the microphone since the 1990's, this award winning slam poet is well known in spoken word circles throughout the nation. Also on hand will be Maestro—the Biker DJ from Second II None—to spin the best Old School in-between the sets of jazz and spoken word. With drink and food specials all night—1/2 priced appetizers (excluding seafood), \$2 well drinks, \$1.75 domestic drafts of beer, and \$6.00 pitchers of domestic beer—you can't lose.

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