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It Starts With a Story

Profound Gentlemen [profoundgentlemen@gmail.com]

Sent: Friday, May 22, 2020 9:29 AM

To: Steve Johnston

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It takes a village to raise a child. For many Black boys, having a male educator of color could be the difference between graduation or living a life where they don't achieve their fullest potential.

Antonio Henley believes that male educators of color are desperately needed in public schools.

Antonio was born and raised in Charlotte, Amalie, an island city often perceived as the Caribbean's version of New York City. It is, for many, a gateway to the U.S.

Antonio grew up in the projects there. He understands the blights of Black boys in public schools, and his experience in public schools empowered him to seek success.

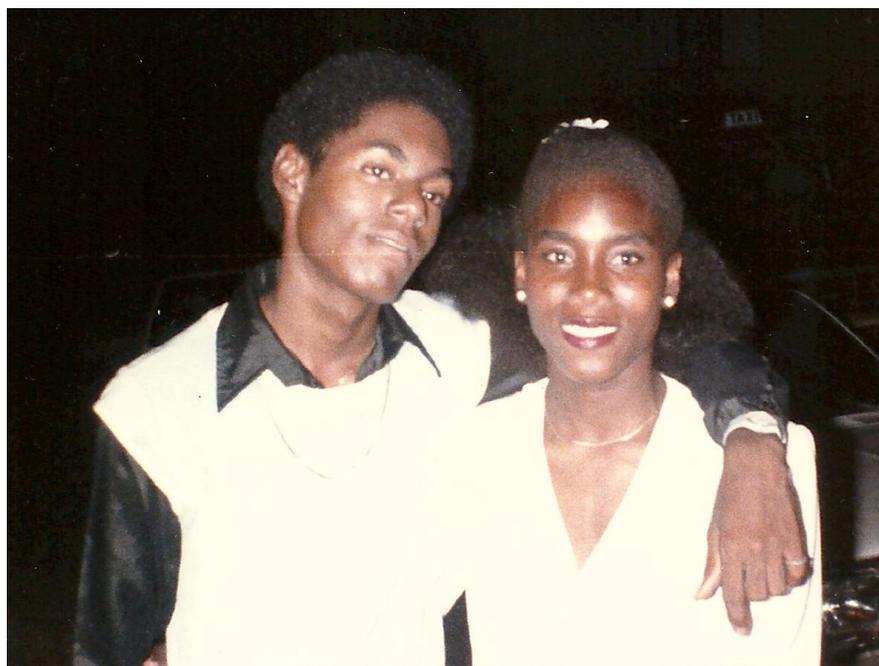
Notwithstanding, Antonio's family has a deep and enduring legacy in both the U.S. and the British Virgin Islands. This familial connection, as well as his experiences in a territory controlled by Black Americans, informed and influenced his beliefs about what achievements were possible.

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Dr. Antonio Henley has personally made it part of his life's work to impact the lives of boys of color through education. He currently serves a Dean at Johnson C. Smith University, as well as a member of Profound Gentlemen's Board of Directors. The following interview is part of our ongoing It Starts With a Story series, highlighting individuals who make up the PG community.

What are you currently reading?

I am almost finished with a book I've been slowly reading through, entitled *Soaring Hope*, given to me by Johnson C. Smith University's first-year student, Brandon Smith. It is his first authorship, and I have been impressed at the authenticity of his experience and the vulnerability of his expressions. His storytelling is so compelling! There are moments when I see myself through his eyes.

Who/ what inspires you?

I strive to be a man of faith. So, I say God, and the wonder of creation in its (our) beauty and mystery is awe-inspiring.

What do you do to feel connected to others and feel as though you are part of a larger community?

To feel connected, I Interact. I love people, as scary as we are sometimes. I cannot say that I do anything special to link to others or to feel linked. I am blessed and privileged to be in a profession where I get to engage people daily. As a species, we are interdependent and, therefore, dependent on human relationships. I do my best to focus on the connections in the moment.



What about Profound Gentlemen's work most resonates with you? Or what drives you to be a partner in their work

Years ago, while in college, I heard society was structured to the advantage of males and that men were in charge of everything. As I looked around my environment, I began to question the notion. It did not seem to be true in my immediate sphere. Once I graduated and began work professionally, I questioned it even more. If men were on top, they were not consistently so.

Moreover, where they were so, it was almost always a specific demographic of males. As I watched more Black and Brown boys be disproportionately impacted negatively by zero-tolerance policies both in the educational arena and the judicial and correctional systems, I sought to be a part of the change. I am fortunate to have participated in the founding of three non-profit organizations in three states in an effort to make a difference in the lives of boys of color. For me, Profound Gentlemen is an extension of that commitment made long ago. Male educators of color are desperately needed by boys (and girls) of color. These educators are models of what aspirations and achievements are possible!

What is something that you wish to be true for future generations?

It may be cliché, but I wish race and gender were not social factors of limitation. What if industrious mobilization of potential was the measure of us all? What a world that might be!

What advice would you give your 18-year-old self?

Yes, it is hard, but stop comparing what you do not have to what others have; The comparison only mires you in negativity and stymies your growth. You will earn the things you desire. And, you will learn, they are just things. Finally, trust the educators around you who keep pointing out your strengths. They know what they are talking about. Let go of the self-doubt and imposter syndrome. Though you don't perceive it now, you are more brilliant than you think. So, continue to invest in learning and knowing.

This interview is shared as part of our It Starts With a Story series, which highlights the individuals which make up PG's community. Visit www.ProfoundGentlemen.org to learn more about our organization and how you can get involved.

More PG Updates

- We are hiring a [Community Development Manager](#) to support our data, grants,

special campaigns, and overall strategy. Please pass this opportunity on to your network.

- PG is one of eight organizations that were recently selected for the EdCatalyst \$100,000 capacity-building grant. The EdCatalyst is a pilot initiative is in partnership with New Profit and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and supports "a set of high potential organizations spearheading innovation in K-16 education and beyond." Read more [HERE](#).

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