

SAY IT LOUD: *a theme for Black history!*
By Dr. Charles A. Tillman, Sr., Black Ministries Facilitator

Fifty-five years ago, James Brown proudly sang these words, “Say it loud, I’m Black and I’m proud,” at a tumultuous time for an American society still coming to grips with change. This change would usher America from the Jim Crow era into a new era of equality and justice for all. This change was underscored and propelled by the turmoil and unrest of an American society reeling from the mid-to late 1960’s assassinations of three major civil rights leaders: Medgar Evers, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. The racial climate in the country was indifferent, dangerous, and very toxic, to say the least.

Brown’s song stood for black empowerment and self-reliance for a race of people that had long been disenfranchised and discouraged. It stood for the notion that Black people deserved their fair share in a country that they helped to build. It was a cry for the right to pursue the American dream of life, liberty and happiness, unhindered by societal, structural, economic, and racial bias. Many of the leaders of the 1960’s movement are now gone. But we should take a moment to take inventory of the progress we have made since then.

A woman of color now occupies the second highest office in the land, the Vice-Presidency of the United States. An African-American man has held the highest elected office in the land. Black Americans and people of color are able to participate in all major professional sports. Blacks and people of color hold prestigious positions in every occupation from physicians to scientists, and from entertainers to philanthropists. I echo the words of the old saying, “We’ve come a long way baby!”

In my forty years serving as a Nazarene Pastor, I am encouraged by the fact that today, I see the most diverse Board of General Superintendents in the storied 114-year history of the Church of the Nazarene. We have men of color and a female providing strong Christ-centered leadership to our holiness denomination. However, we still have work to do at the district and local levels, if we are to be a denomination that is at the forefront of evangelizing and winning a growingly

diverse American society to Christ. Our churches and leadership should be a microcosm of the population we serve and truly reflect the spirit of the Arminian-Wesleyan holiness message we preach and advocate.

Are we as a society and a denomination where we should be? Ah, most definitely not! But we certainly are leaps and bounds ahead of where we used to be, fifty-five years ago, when the singer and entertainer, Mr. James Brown, sang these words of affirmation, admiration and adulation to and for the Black community. I thank God for the progress that has kicked open the doors of opportunity for yours truly and the scores of leaders that are exploding on the scene behind me!

Here is a link for exploring more about the Celebration of Black History Month:

<https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/black-history-month>