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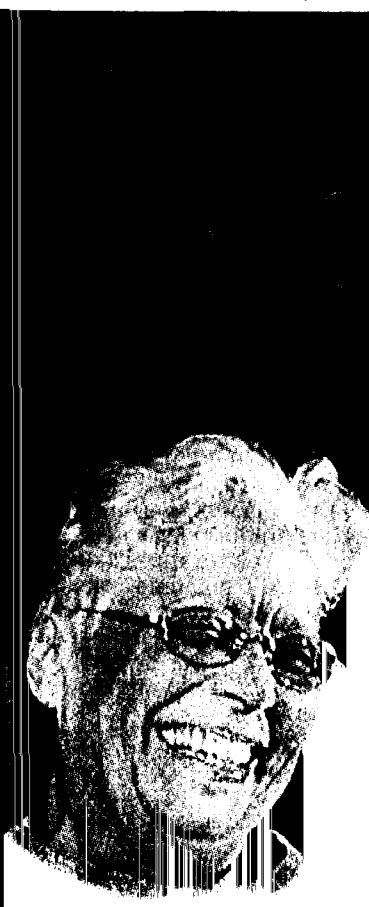
The Essence of Etiquette

HOW
TO
BE

CONTEMPORARY ETIQUETTE
FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS

HARRIETTE COLE

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *JUMPING THE BROOM*



A family focus: Left, author Harriette Cole with her mother, Doris Cole, and sister, Stephanie Cole Hill, at Enoch Pratt Library in Baltimore.

Harriette Cole learned good behavior in a demanding, respectful Baltimore family. She translates those lessons into 'How to Be,' a manners book especially for African-Americans.

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By JILL HUDSON NEAL
SUN STAFF

When Harriette Cole was a mischievous little girl, her mother, Doris, perfected the Look — the one that kept her in line and meant business. The Look said it all.

Chile, you'd better act right!

It has stayed with Harriette Cole to this day.

Her new book, "How to Be: Contemporary

Etiquette for African Americans" (Simon & Schuster) captures the spirit of her mother's basic lesson: slow down, breathe in and act like you've got some sense.

To be sure, "How to Be" is not an Emily Post or Amy Vanderbilt manual dedicated to parlor-room table manners or polishing the silver tea service.

Instead, the elegant 37-year-old Baltimore native says her new book was written as a "guide for conscious living for black folks."

"It's our responsibility as African-Americans to embrace each other," Cole says, "and treat ourselves and others with respect."

While "How to Be" is marketed as an Afri-

can-American etiquette guide, "it's a book that everyone can use," Cole says. "I recommend that people from all ethnic backgrounds read and use it. At the same time, there are many sensitive issues that face people of African descent like racial tension and discrimination.

"It is important that we all begin discussing in a respectful way things that are holding people back," she adds. "So many black people were taught basic home training while growing up, but we all need a few reminders now and then."

So "How to Be" offers potent advice for everyone on: moving up the [See *Etiquette*, 5E]

With respect to etiquette

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corporate ladder, starting a family, traveling, dressing properly for work and other rules for daily living.

But Cole also peppers her text with modern-day dilemmas: how to handle it when a loved one is in jail, how to deal with the police if you're pulled over, how to bring a white date home to meet the parents, when to give money to the homeless and understanding "C.P." (Colored People's) time.

She also takes on plastic surgery, lactose intolerance and dealing with an ex who wants to dabble in romance after the relationship has cooled.

Bringing message home

Cole — a former *Essence* magazine editor, writer of the best-selling "Jumping the Broom," wedding guides and daughter of the late Harry L. Cole, Maryland's first black state senator and first black Court of Appeals judge — recently brought her home-spun message back to Baltimore when she spoke before a capacity crowd of 400 at the Enoch Pratt library.

The great hall was filled with life-long neighbors, family members and friends from the old days. The hour-long talk and book signing was co-sponsored by the Baltimore chapter of Cole's sorority, Delta Sigma Theta, Inc., and her mother's club, The Smart Set.

Talking about honoring elders, minding your language and being considerate of others had many of the older, fur-coated women nodding their heads in agreement. Cole definitely preached to the choir — and more than 200 copies of "How to Be" sold within an hour and a half.

Standing tall behind the podium in her gray suit and sleek black boots, looking every inch the former model that she is, Cole said she wrote the book so black peo-

'How to Be,' an excerpt

All of the rules, all of the social graces, all of the codes of conduct that we possibly can engage to govern our lives mean absolutely nothing if we don't have a good grasp on why we are here. Instead of being supported by practical social conventions that help to make personal interactions more comfortable, people end up almost sleepwalking if they don't get the true meaning of life: that we are on this planet to care for ourselves, for our families, for our communities, for our environment and, as the Yoruba believe, to develop character. Life is not about keeping up with the Joneses, movin' on up like the Jeffersons or any other upward movement unless our efforts include reaching back and supporting our fellow brothers and sisters along the way. As our ancestors well knew, the role of a human being is to offer love and respect to everyone and everything on the path. That essentially is the reason that etiquette exists in the first place — to provide a framework for honorable living.

— from "How to Be: Contemporary Etiquette for African Americans" by Harriette Cole (Simon & Schuster)

ple could "remember who you are and cherish who you are. It's about understanding that there are different codes of conduct in every place you find yourself. As black folks, we need a strategy on how to negotiate those waters."

The book should be used as "a guide to conscious living," Cole told the audience, her voice soft and respectful. "Every culture has codes of conduct that are unique to their culture. The same is true of black folks.

"You know, there are a lot of us who are well-educated and we've earned a lot of money and we're living somewhere else now," she says. "We forget that we aren't alone. I want to challenge that."

One of the attendees at the book signing, Sharlimar Douglass, a 26-year-old middle school teacher from Towson, said books like "How to Be" "give blacks and especially little black girls survival strategies for how to live in our society. Emily Post may be more linear about bringing some Western ideas into focus, but Harriette's book takes our traditions and brings them to life." The publication of "How to Be" comes on the heels of a crop of etiquette manuals aimed at African Americans.

The most popular, "Basic Black: Home Training for Modern Times," (Doubleday) by Karen Grisby Bates and Karen Hudson, was published in 1996 and is now in its fifth printing.

Bates, a contributing columnist to the op-ed page of the *Los Angeles Times*, said "Basic Black" and others like it are aimed at tak-

ing the place of "the traditional etiquette books which were still speaking to relatively rarefied group of people. Black people needed acknowledgment of our own customs and mores."

Bates believes that black etiquette books are popular now because "home training goes beyond manners. There is a need for good manners all around ... a need for being gracious to other people."

Not surprisingly, Cole agrees.

But though "Basic Black" aims at coaching everyone — including the white community — on some of the finer points of race relations, "How to Be" focuses instead on teaching black folks the importance of embracing their African heritage and becoming more spiritually sound.

Cole's book devotes sections to such topics as giving children African names and jumping the broom at African-American wedding ceremonies.

There are also chapters detailing the virtues of honesty, compassion and patience, as well as the need for African-Americans to incorporate prayer, meditation and God in their everyday lives as ways to combat racism and injustice. "African-Americans know that family and community come first," she says. "The book teaches us about survival of the family rather than survival of the fittest. Having a spiritual anchor is something that's always been a mainstay in the black community. People are yearning for a sense of wholeness in their lives. If you remember your heritage, you will be empowered."

This, she learned at her par-

ents' knee. Harry and Doris Cole lived at the core of Baltimore's black middle class and Harriette and her two sisters, Stephanie Cole Hill and Susan Cole Hill, grew up with the understanding that they would be ambassadors for their family — and race.

Hers was a "very strict extended family. There was always someone making sure that the young people knew what was expected of them. There were many pairs of eyes watching out," she adds.

Cole grew up in Forest Park in west Baltimore and attended Baltimore's Western High School, the oldest all-girl's public school in the country. After graduating Phi Beta Kappa and summa cum laude from Howard University, Cole landed a job at *Essence*, where she served 11 years as editor of the lifestyle section. She now lives in Harlem with her husband, George Chinsee, a fashion photographer.

Nationwide input

"How to Be" was written after three years of research. Cole toured the United States, researching specific concerns many African-Americans had about daily life, including how to deal gracefully with being followed by security guards while shopping.

Cole will soon take what she's learned on the road, organizing a series of "How to Be" workshops across the country aimed at young African-Americans. Partial proceeds from the workshops will go toward a scholarship fund at Morgan State University in her father's name.

Cole also intends to create a line of contemporary stationery. As president and creative director of the New York-based company called profundities, inc., Cole offers image consulting, etiquette training and fashion styling to clients such as singers Erykah Badu and Mary J. Blige.

"I try to help people be the best they can be," Cole says of her clients. "I learned how to do this from my mother who taught me that etiquette. But my father taught me to keep his torch alive."

She says: "I'm his junior after all."