- 'Global Family, a New Voice for Freedom' - Morgan E. Moore

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Global Family, a New Voice for FreedomBy Morgan E. Moore When you see Michael Crenshaw perform he is an impenetrable force calling out intelligent rhymes that speak of the inequalities and injustices of the world. Whether he’s teaching workshops to primary or university students or performing with his longtime group, Hungry Mob or his newer formations such as Suckapunch or Cleveland Steamers, his messages are the same only the musical styles vary. Mic, as he’s sometimes artistically referred to, attributes his social actions through art and education to be what define him as a peace worker. On a spiritual level he says he is always “searching and striving to be more at peace with myself, and others.” Aside from the obvious influences of music and the “emotional energy comprised in songs”, Michael credits his childhood for building upon his exploration of peace work, “My mother was single for part of my childhood and we, my brother, mother, and I, would move from neighborhood to neighborhood.” A youth of the eighties, Michael confides that, “All this activity exposed me to being a poor person in the ghetto as well as truly being a minority in the suburbs. Class and race have always played important roles in what and who I was exposed to.” Having lived from the South side of Chicago to a small farmhouse in Central Illinois to Minneapolis, and now currently residing in Portland (though he’s touring much of the time) music varied for Michael from place to place. He says he would, “develop a cultural understanding and identity through music.” But it was the influences of “antiestablishmentarian lyrics in metal, punk, reggae, and hip-hop songs that challenged the status quo that reflected my emotions around the injustices in society that I experienced and observed.” Now an adult, he wears tattoos on both arms, and if you are lucky enough to catch him with his shirt off, you’ll see the well developed torso of a martial artist and weight lifter as well as an image that resembles a traditional ethnic collar along his collar bones to describe a few. His head is shaved smooth, though for reasons of simplicity, it does not refer to an affiliation. Michael’s skin is the creamy color of coffee with milk and since his visit to Rwanda in 2004, he says that he could see the resemblance to Africans from this part of the continent. When Michael was preparing for this trip we had a conversation about how he could trace his roots since Africans, who were brought over as slaves, did not have birth certificates. He responded that there were people in Africa who can help with this search, but that many of them are not entirely honest. Today, he says of how this trip helped him connect with his roots, “I was able to see firsthand the potential of Africa by and for Africans without a parasitic relationship to colonial domination from the west and other imperial interests.” It was this experience that motivated Michael to start Global Family, or Global Fam for short, a not for profit that is currently living under the care of Education Without Borders, with the purpose of collecting computers for children in the schools of Rwanda and Burundi. In one interview, Crenshaw said he walked into a community center in Rwanda where the computer education program had only cardboard replicas of computers (Globalfam.org). The goals of Global Fam are to generate revenue through donations of money and/ or computers that will be sent to Africa. Michael does this through his performance, which he does every weekend and sometimes more, as well as the musical and artistic contributions of various other supporters such as the Dead Prez. Aside from the benefits of sending computers Global Fam hopes to “provide opportunities to communities and individuals across cultural and geographic barriers”. Global Fam shares duties between Michael Crenshaw and Morgan Delaney. The two were introduced to each other through a mutual student at one of their workshops and both have histories in education and activism. Their workload is shared in ways that mesh best with their “schedules as educators, artists, and activists as well as family-oriented adults”. Michael’s well-developed physique doesn’t stand a chance against his powerful perspectives on the world and his reasons for wanting to contribute aid to Africa, he says, “For centuries Africa has been plundered by the greed of a few at the expense of African people. Through structural adjustment programs, the World Bank and IMF (International Monetary Fund) have kept countries and populations in insurmountable amounts of debt just off the interest of loans that never truly benefit the people as a whole. Puppet governments and military dictatorships have been funded to protect corporate interests, many of whom are the same companies that financed the trans-Atlantic slave trade. So relative lack of access to power in America for blacks and working poor is directly linked to the stranglehold the profiteers have maintained through economic domination and violence. For Africans in Africa to not have access to clean drinking water, healthcare, and education while trillions in revenue are generated from the labor of African people and resources extracted from the continent is absurd. The same holds true for displaced Africans in America and abroad.” Michael is a lyricist and exceptionally fluent with words and so it is necessary to give his thoughts the space on paper that they deserve. Our conversation continued to discuss the similarity of our own country of the United States and the countries of Africa that Global Fam. is working to aid. Of this he says,I am a person of African descent living in the U.S., advocating for Africans in Africa. In doing so I am aware of a common history, and a common destiny. The legacy of the Western imperialist domination from the beginning of European colonial conquest to the present state of global monopoly capitalism is tied inextricably to the trans-Atlantic African slave trade. Systems of economic, militaristic, and racist, classist domination in which a small elite ruling class has enjoyed the mass accumulation of wealth, property, power, and prestige at the expense of billions of struggling poor people worldwide, would not have evolved into its present state without the enslavement and displacement of millions of Africans and their labor. This human resource and the profits generated by it also simultaneously fueled the death machine that unleashed genocide on millions of indigenous people in the western hemisphere from the North American Artic through central and South America as well as the West Indies. The enormous profits and wealth generated by this criminal march created the basis for the superpower of unchecked ‘progress’ that threatens the existence of life on the planet earth, period. As human beings it is our right and responsibility to attempt to be accountable for the atrocities of our collective past, to create a better future for the

human race and all life.” Yet, even with the high level of obligation and motivation, it is not condescension that emanates from Michael as you hear him speak. He has a clear understanding that each individual must work in a way that respects their life and their capabilities. He continues by supporting this, “Those who have suffered the most have a crucial role to play. Liberation of oppressed in the U.S. and abroad is a complex and vast undertaking with many approaches, ideologies and methods. I see my role as an individual as key in raising awareness personally, locally and universally and than doing things that enable myself and others to work collectively to bring peace and justice and opportunity to the communities and people affected by history so as to direct a common destiny free of the shackles that have truly hindered evolution. WE ALL DESERVE TO LIVE IN PEACE AND HARMONY GLOBALLY. It is our birthright as people. No one class should dominate another through violence and injustice for the sake of greed”. Michael says he has only hopes for his pursuit and that the challenges lie in time and maintaining integrity, but that through personal practice of meditation, education, and health he preserves a “sound body, mind and spirit.” Though, it is not always easy. I have known Michael Crenshaw for almost fifteen years, I have seen him through the raising of his daughter and he has been in my life through the upbringing of my son. I love and admire the information and diversity of the relationship and what it provides for our future. I asked Michael what advice he gives to adults and children and his first thoughts were that we should all educate ourselves, read, seek information, and study black history of both the Americas and Africa. He says it is important to “learn the connections between the oppression of African people and the current global power structure”. He lists suggestions such as reading the work of Malcolm X, Belle Hooks, Angela Davis, and Mumia Abu Jamal. And with a coy challenge, he says, “Find out who Fred Hampton was”. I don’t know, but I am not embarrassed, I am motivated. We should, he says, listen to “conscious revolutionary black music and connect the struggle of the African peoples to the everyday struggles in your life”. I like this thought, it reminds me that listening to music is not the same as hearing the music and allowing it it’s purpose, respecting it’s purpose and educating ourselves. As is expected from someone as eloquent and informed as this, he goes on, “Question unjust wars and bullshit political agendas of the elite. Think for yourself and link with others who want freedom for all humanity so that we may support a fair and just civilization on planet earth”. It is this type of commitment and integrity that motivates the revolutions that Crenshaw is speaking of. Maybe we will move slowly for a while but the momentum will pick up with leaders such as this guiding us.