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**MORE THAN JUST HAIR GROOMING**  
**BARBERS, BARBER STYLISTS,**  
**BARBER SHOPS**  
**REMEMBER**  
**WE SHAPE**  
**OUR COMMUNITY'S FUTURE**  
**Taking Grooming To The Next Level**



(l-r) Nate Crittendon, Owner and  
Troy D. Johnson, Manager at NStyle.

By Nate Crittendon

**T**he barber shop used to be a pillar in the African-American community. It used to be a place where men, young and old, could congregate to discuss everything from relationships to job opportunities. Similarly depicted in Joe Cube's urban movie classic, "The Barbershop" was a place where we established our identities, perfected our crafts and in most cases, learned to be better men.

The barber shop was a home away from home. It was a place that welcomed young boys as early as the age of 1, and sustained long enough to see those same young boys turn into full grown men. The same young men who came in kicking and screaming for their first hair cut, transformed into men who run cities, top the R&B charts and even better, are leaders of the free world, and it is because of this rich history, that it pains me to see the state of barber shops today.

For the sake of argument, let me throw this question out there: What would President Barack Obama say if he walked into your shop right now? Would he be in the midst of loud music, raunchy conversations, over-sexed energy and an overall absence of professionalism? Or would he, just like any of brother looking for a good cut, be immersed in a welcoming, professional environment that ultimately provokes him to return again and again? What's my point? You never know who you're grooming, so in every instance you should be putting your best professional foot forward. As barbering professionals, I see an over all lack in this area, and its sad to admit that what was once a highly regarded business is becoming more of a nuisance than a benefit.

At 18, I was lucky enough to know what I wanted to do professionally, and acquired the means to go to school for that profession. I was a hair stylist, and as I perfected my craft, an opportunity presented itself for me to explore barbering. What started as an amateur hair cut in my friend's basement, graduated into an opportunity that shaped the professional that I am today. More than 23 years ago, someone recognized my talent and chose to foster it, and today, I'd be remiss if I didn't do the same for those coming after me.

I share my history for no reason other than to be an example. We are professionals now, but there was a time when we weren't, and the only thing that catapulted us in the right direction was the barbers in our areas' barbershops who recognized their influence on every aspect of our community.

I remember being in the barbershop mimicking the skills of those I served as apprentice to. I remember the conversations centered around what being a man really meant. I remember the connections that people from various backgrounds made with one another. I remember rubbing elbows with every one from those who fell low on the totem pole, to those who were the most affluent. I remember the barber shop as a staple in the community.

Please be clear. This article was written as a reminder that as barbering professionals we have a responsibility to the community. We owe every customer that steps foot in our doors a clean, positive, professional environment, that lends itself to stimulating conversation and a friendly reminder that barber shops are more than just a place to get your hair cut; it is a haven of fraternity and a bridge to past eras that can ultimately affect our future for the better if we let it.

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Photography by Mark David Carter of MetroSalonPro, LLC. (202) 285-0371. Model: Safie De La Costa. Loc extensions avant garde hair design by Annette Roche of NAPP STAR in Odenton, MD (410) 799-3404. Style presented at Glynn Jackson's HAIR GAGA 2010 GOLDEN SCISSORS AWARDS at the DC Convention Center, Washington, DC. Cover design and layout by Mark David Carter.