



Kent Paul was born in the eastern Caribbean on the island of St. Lucia. He comes from a family of teachers and other professionals where education was valued. He attended Colleges in Texas as well as in St. Lucia. He now lives in the United States with his wife and three children. In his first book *Making history with Crosswords and Prozac*, he shares his journey from his island to the U.S. The book covers many topics: migration, the glass ceiling in the job market, racial discrimination, the insidious impact of psychological violence on an individual and his family, economic violence and iniquity, devastating deprivation (loss of property, income...) with its financial and social mobility difficulties, legal barriers, mental health problems (caused by the racial harassment in his work place), marital difficulties, etc. In his book, Paul is sending the message that it is fine to ask for help. The author demystifies what is related to mental health issues. Mainly, in his book Paul exposes the ordeal he went through in 2005 with other

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African-American colleagues at his work place. For years, he faced racial discrimination with a Toyota dealership in Gladstone (Oregon), the Thomason AutoGroup .

Kent Paul could easily be a bitter, angry [black man](#) given what he's been through, but it is not the case. Making history is the true story of his first real encounter with racial hostility and his multi-million dollar courtroom battle. In 2006, the salesmen Kent Paul, Marcus Arnold, Carlos Barfield and Jahaeel Hardy filed a lawsuit against Asbury Automotive Group, which owned Thomason Toyota during their employment . The suit claimed that they lost car deals because they were black. Paul and the three other African-American men plaintiffs won the race discrimination lawsuit against Thomason AutoGroup. The verdict of a \$19 million settlement was handed down by a federal jury in 2008. The jury awarded \$1.9 million to Hardy and Paul for emotional distress and \$2.75 million in punitive damages; \$2.1 million to Arnold and Barfield for emotional distress and another \$2.75 million in punitive damages. However, it is important to note that a final confidential settlement was done with the judge. Mr. Paul and the other plaintiffs are satisfied with the definitive compensation.

Through the metaphor of a crossword puzzle, one of Paul's favourite hobbies, he philosophically reviews the events of his life. His journey takes him from the Caribbean island of St. Lucia to the U.S., into a huge car dealership lawsuit and eventually to victory and vindication with the jury verdict. Paul expressed to the media that many concerned American citizens care about the downward spiral race relations have taken, and felt the need to tell his story to inspire people to take bolder and wiser steps in dealing with this issue. Despite the financial and emotional toll the trial took on Paul and his family, he has become a charismatic and positive man – all with the help of crosswords and Prozac.

What makes the story powerful is the fact it is about four African-Americans in the same workplace who fought the company. Often, in cases of discrimination and/or harassment in the workplace, it is one individual who complains and takes legal actions which makes the case weak. When several individuals with the same ethnic background go through this ordeal, they have less weight when trying to prove that there is a systemic problem. Paul's story is historical and unique because according to data 98% of racial discrimination cases never get to the courtrooms. He and his colleagues who were involved in the lawsuit showed boldness and courage. They fought a 4.6 billion dollar Giant and some of them even received threats and was harassed by one of the superiors.

Racism doesn't manifest overtly like before in America, however, it takes a much more subtle form that needs to be identified and fought. This is what Kent Paul and the three other African-Americans did with the help of these great jurists: **Keith Dozier, Aaron Baker and**

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Gene Hallman

. Historically, the U.S. federal and state governments have acted to abolish discrimination in the workplace, schools, sports, and public places, with statutes that include punishments for discriminatory practices. Fines and even prison time for individuals are possible consequences of discrimination under laws such as:

- The Civil Rights Act
- The Age Discrimination in Employment Act
- Immigration and Nationality Services Act
- Pregnancy Discrimination Act
- Americans with Disabilities Act
- California Fair Employment and Housing Act

There are many more relevant laws and provisions that serve to protect individuals from discrimination. Their enforcement depends on all people in American society refusing to engage in or tolerate discrimination. However, it is important to note that while Paul's combat was triumphant it wasn't easy because there was still a great concern about the conservatism on racial issues in the U.S. political and judicial systems, especially regarding the decrees of the conservative U.S. Supreme Court since the early 80s. In other words, there was a backward movement. Several major decisions in the mid- to late-1980s made it much more difficult (*Ward v. Cove Packing Co. v. Atonio*

490 U.S. 642 (1989), is one good example which speaks volumes) for

[Blacks](#)

in order to address racial discrimination cases and have these issues recognized as what they are.

Mr. Paul and the three other African-Americans were forceful and assertive because their motives and their integrity were questioned. They are soldiers for the eradication of racism. Their employer accused them of being only after the money. Their pain was not acknowledged, foible settlements were offered which translate a lack of awareness of this grave situation. To their opponents, their battle was not about justice. This was their strategy. Witnesses who testified on behalf of the four former salesmen stated that various employees:

- Used racial epithets against them
- Steered customers to white salespeople

Written by Patricia Turnier
Monday, 03 October 2011 06:17

- Described themselves as “rednecks” (one of the managers also presented himself as a « redneck » from Georgia with a third-grade education). The plaintiffs were subjected daily to “redneck” humor
- Talked about family members who “don’t like blacks” and “used to burn crosses.”

According to the press, many of the complaints were aimed at Jack Brennen, the General Manager of Thomason Toyota of Gladstone. A dealership employee also intentionally steered a white customer away from one of the plaintiffs because the customer "was a redneck and didn't want to deal with him because he is black," according to witness statements. In this regard, the suit alleged the company allowed "racial discrimination in assignments, customer referrals or credit for sales," as well as "retaliating against the plaintiffs for opposing racial discrimination. Among the complainants, Barfield was being passed over for promotions or raises.

Racism and psychological violence are less visible phenomena than open retaliation. It is real, but covert or hidden. As a legal concept, discrimination is negative treatment of people based on their membership in a socially distinct group. Such groups include:

- Gender (male, female)
- Race
- Ethnicity
- National origin
- Religion
- Age
- Sexual preference
- Disability
- Legal status (e.g., non-citizen)

Discrimination can also be defined as having occurred when the civil rights of a person are denied or interfered with because of his or her membership in a particular group. The discrimination can occur in many different aspects of life, such as:

- Employment
- Housing
- Education
- College admission

Written by Patricia Turnier
Monday, 03 October 2011 06:17

- Lending, banking, consumer issues
- Public accommodations

Racial discrimination is a very complex and multifaceted issue, it is a question of abuse of power. This grave issue can lead people to depression. Some studies have showed that the psychological damage from any form of harassment can be permanent and might even lead to suicide in some cases. The federal court in Oregon sent a very strong message: harassment and discrimination in the work place are forbidden. In addition, the plaintiff's attorney, Aaron Baker, said the jury sent Asbury a clear message: "they need to treat everybody in our community the same." The court wanted to make a statement by punishing a nationwide dealership that had a laissez-faire attitude and unacceptable behaviours towards employees. Barfield, according to a document delivered to the court, was prepared to testify "regarding Mr. Brennen's hostile comments stating that he would put a bullet in anyone's head who complains." In this regard, the dealership management was accused of failing to stop the racist comments.

There are many people experiencing racial discrimination in the workplace who suffer in silence. Kent Paul is not one of those people. He shares his pain and fought to seek justice. He broke the wall of silence by sharing his story. The readers can find information in the book which will help them deal more effectively with cases of harassment and the justice system. Kent Paul's book is an incandescent and powerful look at the life of a young African-American who resisted the social, cultural and economic forces that prevent many Black men from being providers for their families. Through Paul's work experience, the psychopathology of racial-harassment in the workplace is exposed in his book. Making history with Crosswords and Prozac is thoroughly informative with his experience of the contrast of St. Lucia and American societies, the struggles throughout the years. The difficulties encountered by the author shaped him. He and his family endured economic violence and privation but the experience only made them stronger. It is the beauty of their story.

Despite his struggles, Kent Paul didn't abandon his family. His children are currently honor students. Often, when times get hard, families are susceptible to break up but Paul didn't let that happen; he sought all the help required and was resourceful. He decided with his wife that they would stick to each other through this ordeal. Separation or divorce was not an option for the sake of their children. The narration in the book is lovely. It is seldom that one reads a book where a male author shares his innermost emotions so candidly without censure. He spoke from his heart. His authenticity is impressive and palpable. This brings a lot of originality to the book which you cannot put down once it is in your hands.

Exclusive Interview With The Author: Kent Paul

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Making history with Crosswords and Prozac is the kind of book which stays with the reader beyond the last page. This is the first foreign exclusive interview.

Mega Diversities

had the great pleasure to talk to Kent Paul on May 16th 2011 who spoke mainly about his book and what came out of it.

By Patricia Turnier, Editress-in-Chief and Legalist, LL.M.



PATRICIA TURNIER TALKS TO KENT PAUL:

P.T. I have to tell you something before I ask my first question. I love to travel, and for a while, I have always wanted to visit your home country. It seems so beautiful.

K.P. Well, thank you. It makes me feel honoured.

P.T. You were born and grew up in St. Lucia. Can you name us some of the words which best describe your country and its culture?

K.P. The history of my country goes like this: We were 7 times under English and times French rule. Both English and French passages had a tremendous effect on the culture. Saint Lucia's population is predominantly of African and mixed African-European descent, with a small Indo-Caribbean minority (3%). Members of other or unspecified ethnic groups, account for about 2% of the population. 95% of the citizens speak a patois, Creole (Kweyol) which is a kind of broken French. My country is a member of La Francophonie. It is important to mention that the predominant language in St. Lucia is English. So we have an Anglo-Saxon culture which translates itself through pragmatism with entrepreneurship, etc. St. Lucia possesses beaches, volcanic island(s), rainforests, waterfalls, etc. We also have nice villages located on the coastline. Tourism and farming are predominant in the economy of the island. We love music, and since 1991 each May, St. Lucia has hosted an internationally renowned jazz festival. It has been 16 years I didn't go back home, so it is a little bit difficult to be more specific. Nevertheless, I can say that we are friendly people. The citizens are pretty educated. In my family, several members are teachers and writers, others are in the medical field.

P.T. Before you came to the U.S., what was your perception of this country and its way of life?

K.P. I thought the world of this country. I wasn't exposed to American culture thoroughly; I had a more superficial contact with it. I worked temporarily in a resort in St. Lucia where I met American tourists. I became intrigued with the culture, its people. With time, I became more involved with its values and so on. However, for a very long time in the U.S, I was aware of the existence of racial stigma. I was curious about it. I was 19 at the time. Later, when I encountered discrimination at work, I was torn. It was a dilemma for me and I asked myself if I

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Monday, 03 October 2011 06:17

should go back home. I realized that it is not the same thing to see a culture from outside and experiencing it from the inside.

P.T. What made you decide to share with the public your difficult work experience by writing a book? Was it a cathartic and healing experience for you?

K.P. I thought my experience as an immigrant was important to tell. I had a perception of America before I arrived and it changed after, throughout the years since I settled here. While I was going through the case, I always knew that I would share what happened to me on the job because it was inconceivable. Also, the goal is to encourage people to not stay silent about this issue. They can get help and seek justice. Staying silent gives power to abusive employers. So for me to pen the book was definitely a cathartic and healing experience. Social and economic mobility can still be difficult for minorities, it is a direct consequence of racial discrimination and I wanted the victims to know that solutions and remedies exist. When I penned my book, I knew I wasn't alone going through this ordeal, and I also wanted the victims to be aware that there are out there people who had to work in a hostile and racially charged atmosphere.

P.T. I think that it is great and bold that you decided to open up about this very important issue. Now racism is more covert, likewise [racial harassment](#) or discrimination. Your book can be a vehicle to break the silence. It was very refreshing to read about an author who took the mask off.

K.P. Absolutely. Since my book is on the market many people confided in me. On a daily basis, people come up to me and share similar stories which happened to them. I realized more that there are a lot of people who are going through very difficult things at work and they are not willing to talk about it.

P.T. Talk to us about the meaning of your book's title.

K.P. There are several things I have to say about this. First of all, I do crosswords daily. It is challenging and I love that. Actually, I have a passion for it. Maybe one day in the future, I will create a crossword class. Crossword puzzles gave my mind a break from trying to solve the confounding riddle of why this dark cloud had entered my life. Historically, it has been proven that crosswords can be effective. For instance, according to Times, "less than two weeks after

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Monday, 03 October 2011 06:17

the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7th 1941,” Lester Markel, the Times’ Sunday editor, dashed off a memo to his superiors suggesting that they consider adding a puzzle to the Sunday newspaper. Adding crosswords to the paper allowed the readers to relax. Crosswords are a science because it requires research with the suffix and so on. The secret science of crossword puzzles is that they inspire people toward improvement. They provide sufficient shelter ahead of an upcoming storm to get your head into a game you can win if you just apply yourself. I had this axiom in my mind each morning. It helped me to grow stronger in both my inner ability to strategize and my mental moxie for resolve. Both were a prerequisite to survive the day I faced each morning during the awful years I went through. The conflicting lines that were crossed, the puzzlement my coworkers and I shared over the racist insults that were thrown at us in a dizzying hail day after day. After a while, I commenced framing all that frustration in the context of a puzzle, with many missing pieces that I believed would fit in time as the riddle of why this was happening would eventually be solved. I completed an entire crossword the day before the big verdict. It helped me to be mentally prepared for the outcome of the case. The name Prozac is part of the book title because I had this medication after I lost my job at the dealership. I was unemployed for a long time. We lost our house and things got out of control. I decided to get help and my physician prescribed this antidepressant. I was skeptical at first.

P.T. The unemployment rate for African-Americans is almost double compared to the rest of the U.S. nation and I believe that employers who harass minorities or any employee by creating a cutthroat work environment should be the ones on medication. Their unacceptable behaviour put you under tremendous stress and affected your health. They have no right to destabilize people. It is criminal.

K.P. Absolutely! In the black community, there is also a stigma associated with getting mental health care. We have to stop doing that to ourselves. There is a lot of pain because of what we went through historically. We can’t pretend that there is no suffering and deny it or mask the problem. We have to acknowledge that there are actual problems which exist.

P.T. If someone requires treatment, it is fine to get help. However, in cases of racial discrimination or harassment, systemic solutions are a must. As long as we focus only on the individual, institutional racism or structural iniquities won’t be questioned and addressed, it will continue to perpetuate itself. The status quo will remain. I believe also it would be even more effective if they made discrimination in housing, employment, or education a criminal offense and not just a civil one. Discrimination should be criminalized.

K.P. This is a very interesting point.

P.T. Did you want to add something else about your book's title?

K.P. Yes, definitely. The making history part of the title refers to the \$19 million verdict. It was a first in Oregon's history. Our jurists told us it was an historic amount, so it was imperative to put this aspect of my story in the title. So, the historic amount, the crosswords and Prozac all intertwine in my life story. I tried to make the title as straightforward as I could. In other words, it had to be consistent with my experience. Actually, it is a friend of my wife who inspired me to find the title. We were brainstorming key words for the name of the book and he suggested to make it simple. I thought it was a great idea. The title tells the entirety of what I share in the book.

P.T. You talked a little bit about my next question beforehand. Nevertheless, can you share with our readers more specifically why you used the metaphor of the crossword puzzle to pen philosophically in your book the events of your life?

K.P. When I look at my life, I see it as different pieces which need to be put together. My outlook on life, I see it through the context of crosswords and Prozac. I do many crosswords daily. I wasn't able to see things correctly (about my life) until I was able to put the pieces together. The pieces were mainly: Prozac, my family and the case. When I put these things together, it created for me a new outlook on life. When you put all the pieces in your life together it makes sense.

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