



Kenneth and Faatimah Gamble

When they wed in November of 1990, both Kenneth and Faatimah Gamble knew that they wanted to make a difference in the lives of others. However at the time, neither knew exactly how great an impact their union would have on not only each other, but a community at large. Both from humble beginnings, these Philadelphia natives grew up on opposites sides of the city. Faatimah, from North Philly, and Kenneth from South, their paths initially crossed as a result of community activism.

Decades prior to this meeting, however; the world had come to recognize Kenny Gamble as the co-creator of a genre of music in the 1970's called "The Sound of Philadelphia." He began his music career at a very young age as a singer. He would come to write songs for major recording labels like Epic, Columbia, Artistic and Atlantic Records. Inspired by Berry Gordy's "Motown Sound" Gamble used his industrious and entrepreneurial nature to succeed. As his career blossomed, he founded his own label, Gamble Records, which would subsequently lead the way for his most recognizable affiliation, Philadelphia International Records. Through Philadelphia International, Gamble and his songwriting/production partner Leon Huff, signed artists like The O'Jays, Patti Labelle, Lou Rawls, Teddy Pendergrass, The Jackson Five, Billy Paul, the Intruders, Jean Carne, Phyllis Hyman, Jerry Butler, Harold Melvin and the Bluenotes, and the Three Degrees to name a few. The success of these artists raised Philadelphia International to the top of the charts, making the label one of the most successful African American owned businesses in the country. Throughout the years, the pair that simply became known as "Gamble and Huff" literally put Philadelphia on the map as a contributing metropolitan to the recording industry. Today Gamble and Huff's catalog of music consists of over 3,500 songs and over 175 gold and platinum records. It is said that this Grammy award winning duo's music is played approximately every 13.5 minutes around the world.

While Kenny was making music history in his early years, Faatimah attended the Bok Technical School in South Philadelphia, developing friendships with individuals who would later introduce the couple to one another. This natural born manager used her leadership and education to take the Welfare Plan of a Philadelphia local union from a start-up to a \$1 Million dollar plan with over 4,000 members. During this time she was approached to audition for a role in a play for a local theatre group. Stunned by the process, she enrolled in a theatre program at the young and progressive Philadelphia

Theatre Company located just blocks away from Kenneth's thriving record company on South Broad Street. Coincidentally enough, the dance classes she participated in were held on the second floor offices of PIR, a space now occupied by University of the Arts. Neither Kenneth nor Faatimah knew their soul mate was so close and yet so far. Faatimah continued her work with the unions while pursuing her passion for theatre, fashion and modeling in her spare time.

Despite all his success, Kenneth knew that there was more he planned to do with his fame and fortune. For starters a great deal of music he produced carried a social theme and what was described as a "Message in the Music." Songs like "Wake up Everybody," "Love is the Message," "Aint No Stoppin' Us Now," and "Love Train" were written to uplift and inspire listeners during a changing societal era. In addition, "Clean up the Ghetto" a song performed by the Philadelphia International Records all-stars wasn't just an idea, but rather a personal mission of his. In 1979, he chaired a project called "Clean up the Ghetto" which involved the youth of blighted communities helping with the clean-up and repair of damaged or neglected properties. This movement eventually spread to Los Angeles, Atlanta, and Chicago, and similar events have been held throughout the country.

But right in his backyard, it was undeniable that the neighborhood Gamble grew up in had deteriorated to the point of what seemed like no return. Drugs, crime, and poverty had infested the streets of South Philly. Gamble knew something had to be done to take the neighborhood back but it wasn't until he met Faatimah that the plan he envisioned, later to be named the "Universal Plan" would come to fruition.

In 1981 Kenneth and Faatimah met by chance while sitting on a committee to raise funds for a Sickle Cell Anemia program for Children's Hospital. Taking a title from one of his hit songs, Kenneth commented, "Who are you? I wanna know your name." Faatimah's charm and civic-mindedness initially caught his eye; however it was their mutual passion for community development that would bond them for decades to come. They discussed the life of Mahatma Gandhi and the current state of urban strife and deteriorating living conditions in Philadelphia. By 1982, Faatimah attended Temple University to pursue a career in Real Estate. As their relationship progressed, this knowledge and experience was just what was needed to put a plan of action together for community change.

After marrying in 1990, the two began their mission of restoring South Philadelphia. In 1991 the Gamble's made the ultimate sacrifice by moving from their 11,000 squared foot mansion in the Philadelphia suburbs to the 15th Street neighborhood Kenneth once called his home. Initially they purchased 160 units and co-founded a community development corporation called Universal Community Homes. Since its inception this organization has enacted the "Universal Plan" that the Gamble's are so passionate about. This plan consists of physically rebuilding the community at scale; rebuilding the family, the core component of community life; creating a new education environment; rebuilding economic infrastructure with small business; challenging the institutional issues that "lock-in" the African American community (such as welfare); reconnecting the community to the larger regional economy; and implementing a long-term community wealth-building strategy through homeownership. Throughout the years Universal enacted this plan by not only providing affordable housing to hundreds of families in the City of Philadelphia, but with an Education Management Office that currently manages

four Philadelphia schools. The once blighted South Philly neighborhood gleams with hope in the form of schools, restored homes, businesses, and most importantly: families.

Faatimah later founded Sisters in Islam, radio talk show. It was the first in Philadelphia history to dispel the myths that are perceived of women in Islam. She also founded a sister-organization to Universal about a topic very dear to her: health and wellness. The Wellness of You, Inc. is a non-profit organization with a mission of introducing healthy lifestyle practices to underprivileged and medically underserved communities. For over ten years, this organization has produced workshops, programs, and events that encourage people to live well because as Faatimah believes “everything in life starts with proper maintenance of the body” and you can not rebuild communities without “building people from the inside out.” Her most sought after program is the Annual Wellness Breakfast for Men Only in which expert medical professionals offer valuable health information to men in the community to help them take charge of their health. The Tree of Life Awards is another annual event and is the first in the country to bring international and national health advocates to Philadelphia for a weekend of health related topics disseminated to those who are looking for new and innovative approaches to healing. The coveted Tree of Life Award is given to men and women in the medical field who are committed to making a difference in community health.

Several of Faatimah’s other programs are designed specifically for children such as the Children’s Wellness Health Fair which is a full day of health related games, activities, and exercises designed to develop a health consciousness in children early in their development; and the Character Building and Etiquette Programs for adolescent boys and girls of the Universal Institute Charter School, in which both Kenneth and Faatimah sit on the Board. These character building programs not only teach the lost art of etiquette, culinary, dining skills, and social protocol; but also educate about topics that concern young adults today, such as proper decision making, money management, health and fitness, communication, and public speaking. Because Faatimah is a former model, radio talk show host, and restaurateur; she thinks it is so important to teach children as many well-rounded skills as possible. It is through mind, body and spirit integration that she feels people can truly live their best lives.

Kenneth and Faatimah are also instrumental in the Philadelphia Millions More Movement. Kenneth, the Philadelphia Chapter’s Chairman, was a key figure in organizing the “10,000 Men: A Call to Action.” This unprecedented grassroots effort has a goal of deterring illegal behavior and increasing the safety and sense of community in Philadelphia neighborhoods. Last year over 10,000 men gathered in a town hall style meeting to begin plans to take back the streets of Philadelphia from criminals. Faatimah also co-chairs the Health and Wellness Committee of the Philadelphia Millions More Movement.

Kenneth and Faatimah have far from realized all of their dreams, however. In fact Universal Community Homes has expanded its community redevelopment initiatives with the creation of the “Philadelphia Entertainment and Economic Development Strategy.” The strategy calls for the development of a number of cultural attractions, entertainment venues, special events, and other vehicles that will help brand Philadelphia as “**The Home of Rhythm and Blues.**” The components of this strategy – the relocation of the Rhythm and Blues Foundation from New York to Philadelphia, the restoration of

the Royal Theater, the creation of the South Street Entertainment District and the establishment of the National Center for Rhythm and Blues – will work independently and collectively to energize the local music industry, attract visitors and artists seeking to be part of the excitement and heighten the public perception of Philadelphia as a true “music city.” Within upcoming years, Universal Companies will truly make Philadelphia “The Home of Rhythm and Blues.”

In light of all their successes and projects still underway, Kenneth and Faatimah Gamble view one of their biggest accomplishments as rearing four children and two grandchildren. Despite coming from modest beginnings to achieve international success, they remain humble and determined to do their part in improving the quality of life of those less fortunate.