

# COVER STORY

IN DEPTH PROFILES ON THE WHO'S WHO

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All photos courtesy of the office of Mayor Cory Booker

## Tweet Your Heart Out! Mayor Cory Booker<sup>®</sup>

By Aliza Davidovit

Most politicians, with self-puffery, are prone to broadcasting all the great causes that they live for; some declare with bravado, like George W. Bush, what they are ready to kill for. But few care to share, as does senatorial candidate Cory Booker, what they are ready to die for. (And yes you can end a sentence with a preposition when it reads as good as *that!*) And though Newark's beloved and ambitious young mayor, 44, doesn't plan on going anywhere anytime soon, it's actually something he has thought about since his early days in public service in the '90s. "In order to help people, I moved into a very dangerous neighborhood where violence was persistent, and I had to ask myself deeply and honestly are you ready to die in the service of others?"

*"God never promised us a long life, but it's our choice to make it a good life and a meaningful one."*

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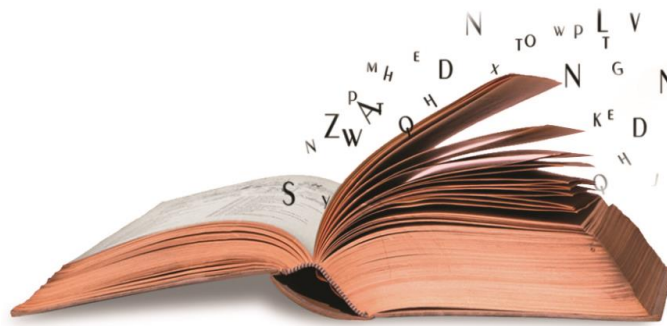
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ALIZA DAVIDOVIT

# THE WORDS THAT SHAPED ME

A journalist's brilliant,  
touching and hilarious journey  
through the dictionary and *life*.



*"Sometimes very, very funny. Sometimes extremely touching.  
All in all, a terrific book!"*

— Larry King



After Booker, a Yale Law School graduate, cross-examined *himself*, he concluded that the answer was a decisive *yes*. “How many people gave their lives for me to be here?” says Booker, the 3<sup>rd</sup> black mayor of Newark in 177 years. And though he has actually received substantive death threats,” he says, “I don’t think twice about putting myself in physical danger in the service of other people. It is a noble way to die. God never promised us a long life, but it’s our choice to make it a good life and a meaningful one.”

And though his life has been replete with meaning and ranked an A+ on many fronts, his parents gave him a “C.” That is they gave him a name starting with the letter “C” to match the rest of the family. His mother is named Carolyn, his father Cary, and his brother Cary II. And though his parents didn’t know it, the name “Cory” means “the chosen one.” And that fact got the first of many hearty laughs out of Cory Booker. It was comical to even suggest to him that he has been *chosen* for a mission. “I am wholly the product of family and faith and a great community and people who made big sacrifices,” the Rhodes Scholar says.

For him, it is not about being chosen but rather about choosing: He chooses to serve others where he can. The record reveals: He chose to run into a burning building and rescue a woman; he chose to let victims of Hurricane Sandy crash in his place; he chose, as mayor, to shovel snow for a complete stranger who needed help; he chose to go on a 10-day hunger strike to draw attention to the dangers of drug dealing; he chose to live on a food stamp diet to raise awareness about hunger. One incident he did not choose however, was when a kid was shot and fell backwards into his arms and died. And while some skeptics or foes would say Booker’s just putting on a righteous show, others might say that it is a much better show than the one Anthony Weiner is putting on. “You have choices to make every day,” Booker told Bill Moyer in a 2008 interview. “Will you do everything you can despite the circumstances to generate love and light? Or will you give in to the darkness around you?”

Perhaps Booker’s heroism was influenced by his favorite childhood toys, action figures like Superman and Batman. His many childhood bumps and bruises indicate that he too thought he could fly and scale buildings. “I was so daring and got into so many accidents,” he shares with [Davidovit.com](#). “I was a regular in the emergency room. You name it and I jumped off of it, from roofs to ledges to everything. I also rode my dirt bike over many-a-risky ramp.” Today, if he had to caution the young boy he once was, he might advise him to wear a helmet. As for those plastic superheroes of his youth, there may be no saving *them*. Booker’s parents are in the midst of moving and he suspects his one-time companions, now collectables, may have met a lackluster Hefty-bag end. “I sure hope my parents saved them,” he says with a chuckle.

Sadly, some of Booker’s real-life heroes didn’t meet lackluster ends, men such as Dr. Martin Luther King or Malcolm X. Both were shot to death fighting for liberty and decency among men. “I am part of a generation that stands on the shoulders of

giants,” Booker once wrote in an op-ed on the Huffington Post. “My generation of Americans, the scions of daring dreamers, the children of the fearlessly faithful and the offspring of many of history’s most audacious actors -- we, together, drink deeply from wells of freedom, liberty and opportunity that we did not dig.”

Another Booker hero who also led a nation to literal and figurative wells and who split waters in two was Moses. “Even at the risk of angering God and at the risk of losing his own life, Moses interceded on behalf of his people and advocated for them when God was bent on destroying them,” Booker says. “That is genuine brave leadership.” And that is exactly what Booker intends to do as a senator, pick up the peoples’ fight, not against God, but against poverty, discrimination, sexism, racism, institutional injustice and other misanthropic goliaths.

He embraces traditional Democratic Party values, such as promoting access to quality health care, marriage equality, civil rights and civil liberties, women’s right to choose, protecting the environment and gun control. Where he most stands apart from the pack on domestic issues is his education-partnership with New Jersey Governor Chris Christie and his support for school vouchers. On healthcare, the Mayor sees a real value in a single-payer system, however believes that we must support the president in the implementation of the Affordable Care Act. His opponents feel vouchers siphon money away from the public school system. And while Booker pointed out in Monday’s debate that his congressional opponents actually voted for bills that included similar programs for Washington, D.C., it is Booker who managed to get a \$100 million check from Facebook’s Marc Zuckerberg for Newark’s school system. And jabbing back at those who criticize his cooperation with a Republican governor Booker said, “Christie and I disagree on just about everything. But despite our differences I have to work with the governor to get things done...as a senator you have to find ways to work with people you disagree with.” With that kind of hand-offering attitude it is hard to imagine why *Condé Nast* magazine just ranked Newark as the world’s most unfriendly city.

Nonetheless, Booker must be doing something right because he’s in the lead. If he wins the main election, he will become New Jersey’s first Black senator and the ninth Black Senator in American history. As regards the current primaries, a Quinnipiac poll showed Booker with 54 percent support, leaving him 37 points ahead of his closest rival, Frank Pallone. [Booker has 1.4 million Twitter](#) followers. His opponents, Sheila Oliver has 218, Congressman Frank Pallone 9836, and Congressman Rush Holt 5805. With such a disparity, they are undoubtedly *tweeting* their hearts out. From political posts to Bruce Springsteen lyrics, Booker’s followers are energetically interacting with his 140-character Twitter communiqués.

Words mean a lot to Booker, and he well recognizes how the right ones can make a difference in people’s lives. In college he worked for a crisis call center, The Bridge, and it was his voice at the end of the line which often talked people out of the most desperate moments of their lives. “It taught me about the

need for kindness and compassion because we are all more fragile than we lead on," he shares. He delivers commencement speeches, mentors kids, and aims to build them up and inspire them. He says that nobody gets where they are on their own: "We are the result of the conspiracy of love." And if he ever conspires to write a book that impactful quote will be its title. Booker says that good leaders don't teach you how to follow; they teach you how to lead. Thus every youngster he meets he urges them to find the leader within.

Those same lessons were ingrained in him by his biggest heroes of all, his own parents. They did not have it easy. Echoing author Susan Straight, he told Oprah in an interview that his father's *been in sorrow's kitchen and licked all the pots*. Initially, when his parents moved to Harrington, NJ, they were barred from buying a house because they were black. But they fought back and prevailed. They also shattered corporate discrimination. His parents were among the first black executives at IBM, ironically a company which allegedly helped institutionalize the apartheid regime in South Africa.

It was growing up in Harrington, NJ, where Booker was exposed to a diversity of religions, races and ethnicities. Learning more about his neighbors opened up his mind, wised up his heart and nurtured his sensibilities. Quoting an unknown source, Booker said, "The tragedy of men is that men know so little of men."

*Good leaders don't teach you how to follow, they teach you how to lead.*

One community in particular that he did come to know very well is the Jewish community, ever-fortified by his close friendship with Rabbi Shmuley Boteach. It was he that first took Booker to Israel. And surprisingly, in a country filled with some of the most amazing sites in the world, Booker says his favorite part of the country is its people--of every faith. When it comes to his politics, Booker recognizes that the role of Jerusalem is central in the Jewish historical experience. "For over 3,000 years Jews have maintained a continuous presence in the ancient city, and Jews around the world have looked upon it as a source of hope, faith and inspiration," Booker says. He believes that the final status should be negotiated between the parties in accordance with the agreement reached at the Oslo Accords. And when it comes to Iran, he said he'd have Israel's back. "The Iranian regime has repeatedly shown its true colors by brutally oppressing its own people, threatening to wipe Israel off the map, denying the Holocaust happened, and funding terrorists such as Hezbollah, a group which is committed to continuing its killing of Americans and to Israel's extinction," Booker says with passion. He goes on to express that allowing such a regime to acquire a nuclear weapon is plainly unacceptable. "We must always consider military force as a very last resort, given the risks, particularly in this instance, to our troops, our national security, and to our allies in the region, namely Israel. But we must make clear to the Iranian leadership that we are prepared to use every option--including military action--to prevent the regime from acquiring



nuclear capabilities." When it comes to Syria, Booker is well aware that the Assad regime is in league with Iran, the single largest state sponsor of terrorism and in league with Hezbollah. But the problem with America arming the group opposing President Bashar al-Assad is that it is comprised of a full range of characters--some terrorists and others pro-democracy, Booker said in Monday's debate. "Assad must go in a sober deliberate way. We need to make sure we support other areas that are being destabilized because of Syria." Booker, however, did make one unprecedented confession to us about the Middle East: The unmarried Mayor Cory Booker, who is listed as one of America's top 40 bachelors, fell in love while in Israel--with *hummus* (not to be confused with Hamas).

Actually Booker's eclectic taste in food could possibly hurt the number one woman in his life, his mom. He said that he has tasted some awesome kugels that rival his own mother's culinary expertise. When asked how his mother would feel if he brought home a nice Jewish girl, the mayor cracked up, and said, "I'm 44 and single. My mom would be thrilled if I brought any girl home." *Upon hearing about his mother's fine cooking, this ever-hungry Jewish writer, offered to help him out on that front.*

As regard his own religion, Booker is a deeply spiritual Christian. He doesn't believe in making a time for work, a time for play and then a time for God. He believes that God should permeate everything you do all the time, especially in how you treat people and conduct yourself in all your relationships. He says when you look into the eyes of a child or a senior or even an adversary, you need to make sure you are seeing the divinity in them. And that shouldn't be too hard if he makes it to DC where our pompous pack of politicians all see themselves as *gods* too!