

Jumping the broom

Written by Timothy Houston
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On June 22, 2013, my son Tim Jr. and his fiancé Shaunte will be joined together in holy matrimony. They are a beautiful couple with 2 beautiful children, Tim III, and baby Meia. The thought of my one and only son getting married has me looking forward to the day he jumps the broom. Although I have heard and used the term "jumping the broom" as a synonym for getting married, I never truly gave much thought to where the term originated.

Jumping the broom goes all the way back to 18th century Ghana. The ceremony is a part of African culture that has survived for hundreds of years. During the period of slavery in the United States, African-Americans were not allowed a traditional European-style wedding and continued on with the tradition of jumping the broom to symbolize marriage. Once slavery was abolished and African-Americans could marry legally, the tradition all but disappeared. It resurfaced in the 1980s when the book "Roots," by Alex Haley, and the subsequent television mini-series brought about an increased interest in Black history and traditions.

The term jumping the broom has also been linked to other cultures and time periods, and it has meant different things to different people depending on the culture. To those who came through slavery, the custom was believed to determine who ran the household. It was said that whoever jumped highest over the broom was the decision maker of the household, or whoever landed on the ground first after jumping the broom was believed to be the decision maker in the marriage.

Not all Blacks interpreted the term jumping the broom the same way. African-Americans in the south who were not a part of the Atlantic slave trade had a different view. To them, it was believed to represent the wife's commitment or willingness to clean the courtyard of the new home she had joined. Other sources have stepping over a broom as a test of chastity, and still others believed that putting a broom out was a sign that the housewife's place was vacant.

It today's terms, the phrase jumping the broom has evolved to symbolize sweeping the past behind you and starting fresh in a new life together. Today, the couple that jumps the broom has moved beyond the actions of the past to a step or more importantly, a leap in the right directions. This imaginary barrier serves as a reminder to the marrying couple that forward is the only direction possible.

To Tim Jr. and Shaunte, as their special day approaches, I wish them nothing but love. Whether you jump the broom physically, figuratively, or spiritually, leap high, land firmly, and let the peace of God, wisdom of your parents, and the love that is in your hearts be your guide to a wonderful, prosperous life together. To all the other couples out there jumping the broom, look forward, leap high, love long, and live prosperously.

Timothy Houston is an author, minister, and motivational speaker who is committed to guiding positive life changes in families and communities. To get a copy of my book, or for questions, comments or more information, go to www.tlhouston.com.