BLACK CHILD JOURNAL

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**Front and Back Outside Cover Design by Denise Billups, Senior Designer, Borel Graphics**
Dear Editor:
I congratulate you on your Fall 2015 edition of The Black Child Journal. As a retired college instructor and community college program director, I remain active in the study and the promotion of African-American educational research and instruction. Enhancements in these areas must begin with the Black child for preparation of the challenges as a Black adult. My position is “The stronger the sprig, the mightier the tree.” Please continue to help with the nourishment and cultivation of coming generations of Black folks.

King E. Carter
Retired Educator
Los Angeles, California

Dear Editor:
As I read the articles in the Fall 2015 edition of The Black Child Journal, I was moved to consider the power of the words written by Black people; especially those who have fought the battles of Black liberation in the Americas and throughout the globe. African people and our descendants are well known for excelling with respect to the use of multiple modes of self-expression. Yet, the power of our written expression has often been treated peripherally and therefore, so has Black Social Thought. Articles in the Fall 2015 edition and their focus on Self-Determination, remind me to highlight the overlooked vitality of Black scholar-activists; especially those who have been the architects of Black Social Theory and Black Political Philosophy. With regard to that I am especially moved by Paul Hill’s tribute to Yosef Ben-Johannan. I am no less affected by the memorial tributes to ancestors who served on the advisory board of the Black Child Journal.

Clearly, the written word has been valued deeply by these sages and the evidence of this among Black liberators is prolific and profound.

The words of these freedom fighters resonate within me as I regard the advice of Dr. Jacqualyn Green. Her work in the Fall 2015 Edition of BCJ is a personal highlight because she associates the liberation messages of Self-Determination with Positive Health Practices. I salute this illuminating work done in the spirit of David Walker, Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. DuBois, Ida Wells-Barnett, Pauli Murray, Martin Luther King Jr. and others. Dr. Green’s advice contributes to the estate and trust of Black philosopher-kings.

Many thanks to BCJ for its contributions to Black Social Thought. No longer should this legacy be regarded lightly. I look forward to the next edition - Sincerely, Justin White

As Salaam Alaikum, Brother Paul Hill
A very good article in the Fall 2015 Edition: ‘Looking from the Bridge’. Just one weakness. You left out The Black Panther Party (BPP) which was formed in 1966. Also, there would not have been any of these organizations mentioned in your article if it wasn't for The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) which formed by Ella Baker and others out of the Sit-Ins to eventually lead the desegregation movement in the south. From SNCC came the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in 1964 and later in 1966 came the Lowndes County Freedom Organization which actually first used the symbol of the Black Panther in the November 1966 election; obtaining 900 votes in the county election there. The BPP in the north formed as a result of various groups in the North working with SNCC. Remember, it was SNCC that raised the slogan of Black Power. So you don't want to jump over historical development. It's a good article to educate young people. I would just suggest a second draft. Hope my remarks are taken with the principles of unity - Muhammad Ahmad
The *BLACK CHILD JOURNAL* is honored to have as its first guest editor Mr. Ronald Hill, a nationally recognized administrator in the fields of Aging and Community Development. Mr. Hill’s over forty years of experience as an administrator, community activist, and scholar makes him the ideal person to edit this important edition of the *BLACK CHILD JOURNAL*.

A graduate of Ohio State University and Cleveland State University, he also has a graduate certificate in Gerontological Studies from Cleveland State University. Mr. Hill also served as chief executive officer for the Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging in Cleveland, Ohio and was president of the Board of the Ohio Association of Area Aging in 1987 and 1998.

Highly respected in his profession, Mr. Hill has been the recipient of many awards, among them being the 2003 Dean’s Distinguished Alumni Award from Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs at Cleveland State University and the 2004 Dr. Arnold L. Heller Memorial Award of the Menorah Center for Senior Living.

As guest editor, Mr. Hill was actively involved in every aspect of this edition, which is a companion to the 2015 winter edition entitled *THE BLACK CHILD - FAMILY AND COMMUNITY*. Since this latter edition received many positive responses, we decided to expand the narrative because of its importance to the Black community. In this regard, it should be evident to all of us that positive intergenerational relationships are crucial in the lives of Black children as they traverse the various passages in the Human Developmental Cycle. The need for these relationships are greater than ever before because the Black family is still being attacked by the vestiges of chattel slavery. As the result, a disproportionate number of our children continue to be the fodder for our crippled welfare system and the industrial system of mass incarceration.

The articles in this edition of the *BLACK CHILD JOURNAL* provide empirical and scientific information that will assist parents and human service providers with strategies and methodologies that can enhance relationships between generations.

In closing, the *BLACK CHILD JOURNAL* deeply regrets the recent transition of Dr. Francis Cress Welsing, who has served on our advisory board since its inception in 1986. The 2016 winter edition of *BLACK CHILD JOURNAL* will pay tribute to this extraordinary scholar and activist who spent her life time helping us to acknowledge and respect our indomitable heritage as people of African descent.

In the interest of our children
Useni Eugene Perkins

“WE THE BLACK COMMUNITY MUST RECONCILE OUR DIFFERENCES AND PLACE AS OUR HIGHEST PRIORITY THE CARE, PROTECTION, WELFARE, EDUCATION AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF OUR CHILDREN, TO DO ANY THING LESS IS INEXCUSABLE AND WILL CONSTITUTE AN ACT OF RACIAL SUICIDE.’
CO-PUBLISHER'S STATEMENT

We are guilty of many errors and many faults, but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the fountain of life. Many of the things we need can wait. The child cannot.

-Nobel Laureate Gabriela Mistral

The Spring, 2016 Edition—Guardians of the Generations” of the Black Child Journal is a continuation of the Winter, 2014 Edition’s focus on family and community. The Spring, 2016 Edition focuses on child development in the tradition of interdependence of the generations for safety and well-being based on African survival characteristics and strengths still evident among contemporary Black families in America. In our community, the concept of family is not limited to biological kinship. Strong kinship bonds have included the parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins and the rest of one’s relatives—both living and beyond; as well as those of the community who are not blood and kin. The reliance of African-American families on kinship networks for financial, emotional and social support can be traced back to African cultures, where emphasis was on extended families, rather than the nuclear family. Kinship care is acknowledged as critically important in family preservation and stability and in keeping the child connected to family traditions, goals, and values.

Grandparents, particularly, grandmothers in the African-American community have historically provided needed care for their grandchildren. Before there was a child welfare system that only recently addressed the needs of African-American children, there were grandmothers who served as the safety net for their biological, informally adopted grandchildren and other minor relatives. They cared for grandchildren and others whose birth parents were unable to care for them. In his 1939 book, The Negro Family in the United States, sociologist and author E. Franklin Frazier, described Black grandparents, especially grandmothers as the Guardians of the Generations*. African-American grandmothers became the anchors for many families and preserved their roots. Grandmothers represent the generations of unsung sheroes of our families and communities. They have historically provided the indomitable care, protection, welfare, and socialization/education of the black child; and continue to safeguard and promote childrearing values and practices, and community solidarity from generation to generation.

This edition of the Black Child Journal is dedicated to those community elders and guardians of the Black family and community. It provides an opportunity for a broad spectrum of practitioners, scholars, policy makers and others to address the successes and challenges of community elders and guardians in providing child and youth care, socialization, and education within the family and community—past and present.

For the sake of the child, family and community let the discussion and actions begin—'let the circle continue unbroken.'

ONWARD AND UPWARD

paul hill jr

Editor’s Statement

*How strange, I remember thinking, how utterly strange were the ways of the Castilians—just by saying that something was so, they believed that it was. I know now that these conquerors, like many others before them, and no doubt like others after, gave speeches not to voice the truth, but to create it.*

**But now, games are being played. Many Europeans know full well what the real rules are in the world.**

An anthropologist was once allowed to participate in an ancient, premodern ritual among indigenous peoples and saw, or rather experienced things that he did not believe possible. He asked how could such a thing be and wanted to know what really happened so that he could understand from a scientific point of view. The people, in turn, understood quite well what he was asking and the village elder replied that explanation was not possible because by forming such a question he had lost/left the time and space whereby such things as he had experienced take place, that such things cannot be “objectively” witnessed or observed.

The anthropologist wanted to impose oppressor time and space—from which gives rise to the “colonial gaze”. The oppressor’s time is now very long but he would make you believe that our time began with that of the oppression. It can get very complicated as the oppressor’s imposition upon the “other” is pervasive and sometimes forceful, even murderous and one must not obscure the main point: *The Guardian of the Generations* carries with him or her the ability to create the conditions whereby the oppressor’s frame of reference recedes and is replaced by frames of reference that exist separate and apart from oppressor time and space. It is the when and the where the ancient rituals, contexts and spiritual presence of traditional African mores, values, norms of our ancestors reside. Quite remarkably, very few outsiders, Black or European-American are invited or allowed to participate as these space-time frameworks are sacred. And therein, our children and our youth receive the guidance and wisdom whereby the next generation of “Jegna” is raised in the ways to create space out of nothing and to bend time back upon itself where the spirit of the ancestors reveals itself.

When we locate rituals in the context of spiritual value of African society, we find the consistent and constant recognition of those who came before us. The ancestor is one who lived a life of commitment and service to her/his people, land and culture.


Michael C. Edwards, ED. D.
Guest Editor’s Statement

“All children have within them the potential to be great kids. It’s our job to create a great world where this potential can flourish.”

In this edition of the BLACK CHILD JOURNAL, we again turn our attention to the critical role that families and communities play in the lives and healthy development of Black children. Previously, in the Winter, 2014 Edition, the Journal focused on the interrelationship between the Black child, family and community. It is primarily through these relationships that Black children receive the protection, nurturing, and socialization that they need to develop into strong and healthy individuals. In that Edition, opening statements by the publishers and editor provided a historical and social context for understanding the multiple challenges facing contemporary African American families and communities as they struggle to tackle the issues that reduce the quality of their lives and impede the healthy development of their children. Publishers Useni Eugene Perkins and Paul Hill Jr. and Editor Michael C. Edwards wrote about historical and ongoing patterns of racial discrimination and economic injustice that result in significant challenges for Black families. They also talked about racially segregated, impoverished communities characterized by crime, substance abuse, unemployment and limited community services. This background was valuable in contextualizing the plight of Black children in underprivileged neighborhoods where family instability and neighborhood ills can undermine and impede their development often putting them at high risk for physical, psychological, and developmental harm. The articles in that Edition covered a range of topics related to the difficulties facing Black children disadvantaged by economically deprived families and neighborhoods. In all communities, poverty presents a chronic stress for children and families that put them at risk for social and academic problems as well as poor health and well-being. The articles reveal not only problems, but inherited strengths, intervention strategies and successes that have been witnessed in communities around the country.

The broad picture painted in that Edition demonstrates both the complexity as well as the urgency of doing more to better support Black children, families and communities. Responding to the strong need for knowledge development around these issues, the BLACK CHILD JOURNAL is dedicating a second edition to Black Child, Family and Community. This Edition brings together an array of articles from learned researchers, practitioners, and academics. Each article critically examines an aspect of the Black child, family and community connection, with the intent of strengthening and contributing to the body of knowledge. The Edition identifies promising best practices and raises awareness of the important role that parents and families play in successful Black child development.

In Fanon Hill and Deborah Wasserman’s article, “Tactics that Work: African-American Diaspora Space Families and Guardians of the Generations”, the authors share the evaluation findings of the Youth Resiliency Institute’s Journey Project funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation as part of its initiative to encourage family engagement in early childhood education. The Project’s stated purpose is to support successful early care and education among low income Black children in three urban communities, by reinforcing their families’ resiliency and culturally relevant engagement. A
key part of the evaluation involved crafting concepts, (guardians and diaspora-families) for describing the family engagement tactics employed by the the Journey Project. Hill and Wasserman clearly conceptualize those terms, tactics, and the community evidence that support them. The article elucidates the experience, observations, and critical understanding that lead to these findings. The evaluation affirms the existence and importance of guardians and diaspora-space families to the education and care of young children in Black neighborhoods. It also validates the family engagement tactics used by the Project and provides valuable insights into how families function in our communities.

In William Oliver’s article, “Compromised Parenting and Community Violence in the African American Community”, he expounds on the significance that compromised parenting plays in undermining community social organization, and the quality of parenting that is necessary to deter youth from participation in high risk activities commonly associated with violent crime offending and victimization. He also offers recommendations for an empowerment agenda for confronting compromised parenting that includes structural and cultural prevention and intervention strategies designed to strengthen African American parenting.

In “Community Parenting: Recreating an Approach to the Success of Black Youth”, Jacqualyn F. Green begins by identifying key elements that contribute to the successful development of young Black men and women, and then offers recommendations for engaging “community parents” in an effort to re-invent needed supports, guidance and direction for young people.

Taken together, each of these articles contributes to our critical understanding of the positive relationship between family involvement and child development. Gaining more knowledge about attitudes, behaviors, and processes that contribute to the strength and resilience of African American children and adolescents is particularly important for the parents of Black children given the social realities that exist and the challenges that affects their daily lives. The findings presented by the articles’ authors illustrate the importance of strengthening parenting skills and supporting family engagement. Moreover, they provide a valuable framework to inform and reinforce parent/family involvement programs. As has been demonstrated, many of these parents, including surrogate grandmothers, the traditional “guardians of the generations” more than ever, need culturally appropriate support to rear the next generation of African American children.

Acknowledgements

There are a number of individuals to whom we owe a debt of gratitude for their role in making this Edition of the BLACK CHILD JOURNAL possible. First, we want to acknowledge that this Edition builds on the earlier work of the Winter, 2014 Edition authors. Their insights and experience in advancing social welfare for Black children, families and communities have helped illuminate the historical context and policy considerations underlining the issues covered in this Edition. Together with everyone at BLACK CHILD JOURNAL, we thank the contributors to this Edition for their expertise, and the invaluable contributions they made to this issue. We also applaud their ongoing work and commitment to Black children.

Ronald Hill
Raise Awareness
Inspire Change
A TRIBUTE TO
DHRATHULA “DOLLY” MILLER
QUEEN MOTHER OF GARY, INDIANA
SUNRISE: FEBRUARY 4, 1920
SUNSET: DECEMBER 25, 2016

The BLACK CHILD JOURNAL is honored
to dedicate this edition to DHRATHULA
“DOLLY” MILLER for her timeless
commitment and compassionate spirit to help
empower our people to a greater appreciation of
our heritage, history and culture.

In traditional African Societies the name
QUEEN MOTHER is given to an elder who is
greatly revered for her wisdom, knowledge and
unyielding compassion for her people and
community. Moreover, it pays reverence to one
who is the “KEEPER OF THE CULTURE” and
exemplifies a community’s highest standards for
moral and spiritual consolation. The life and
legacy of Queen Mother Dolly personified all of
these attributes.

Born in Terre Haute, Indiana, she began
a long and distinguished career as an educator,
librarian and community activist after receiving a
master’s degree in educational media from
Purdue University in 1968. She later worked in
South Carolina, Maryland and the Library of
Congress before becoming a permanent resident
of Gary, Indiana.

In Gary, Queen Mother Dolly’s multiple
talents became quite evident and in 1976 she
founded the Gary Historical and Cultural society,
Inc. She also played a major role in helping
Richard Gordon Hatcher become the first Black
mayor of a major city. Under Mayor Hatcher’s
administration she became the first elected
African American City Council woman at large in
the Gary City Council. However, Queen Mother
Dolly real passion was helping the residents of
Gary to write their own stories. She understood
that authentic history must be articulated by those
who lived it and not by elitist intellectuals to write
their stories.

In this regard, she was an avid writer who
wrote about Gary in the first person. Additionally,
her passion for history and culture motivated her
to provide a plethora of cultural activities for the
Gary community. In doing so, her foremost
commitment was to the children of Gary. With
her daughter Naomi Millender, she co-founded
the Gary Civic Symphony Organization and also
sponsored “Summer Entertainment “programs
for children.

Queen Mother Dolly also gained national
recognition for hosting an annual Black Writer’s
Conference in Gary for over twenty years. These
conferences attracted such prominent writers as
John O. Killens, Sonia Sanchez, Eugene
Redmond, Haki Madhubuti and Dr. Margaret G.
Burroughs.

The awards and honors she received
during her life’s journey are countless and attest
the respect and appreciation the community had
for her. But more importantly, the foot prints she
left as Queen Mother of Gary Indiana will always
be cherished and serve as an inspiration to
generations yet unborn.

In the interest of our children
Useni Eugene Perkins
DR. JOSEPH McMILLAN—Dr. McMillan was a nationally recognized advocate and scholar on child development. He also was the director of Early and Middle Childhood Education at the University of Louisville and coordinated the university’s National Black Family Conference for over thirty years.

DR. MORRIS F.X. JEFF, JR.—Dr. Jeff served as the director of the New Orleans City Welfare Department and was the co-owner of the Counseling and Diagnostic Family Institute of New Orleans, Inc. He also was the founder of the Louis Armstrong Boy’s Home in New Orleans and was a past president of the National Association of Black Social Workers.

PROFESSOR EARL DURHAM—Professor Durham was a graduate of the University of Chicago where he also taught in its School of Social Work. He also taught at the Jane Adam’s School of Social Work and was the director of Designs for Change, an advocacy group for school improvement.

DR. VIVIAN GORDON—Dr. Gordon authored several books and was the first director of African Studies at the University of Virginia. She also chaired the African and Afro-American Studies Department at the State University of New York in Albany and was a visiting professor at Wellesley College.

TOUSSAINT PERKINS—Mr. Perkins was a gifted graphic artist, studied under the late Dr. Margaret G. Burroughs, and under the nationally recognized artist, Eldzier Cortot. The second son of the famous sculptor Marion Perkins, he had his work exhibited at the South Side Art Center in Chicago, Atlanta University, Vincent Price-Sears Art Gallery and the Milwaukee Arts Council. The BLACK CHILD JOURNAL’s original logo was his creation.

DR. EFFIE O. ELLIS—Was universally recognized for her work as an advocate for the improvement of maternal and infant health care. She believed that all persons regardless of the circumstances to which they are born are entitled to adequate health care, safe housing and education by which to develop and learn the things one needs to know for a productive life from infancy through adulthood and old age. A graduate of Spellman and the University of Illinois Medical School and a teaching fellow of the Harvard Medical School where she made significant contributions to the specialty of Pediatrics.

MAY WE CONTINUE TO HONOR THEIR DISTINGUISHED LEGACIES WITH OUR INDEFATIGABLE COMMITMENT TO BLACK CHILDREN
BLACK CHILD JOURNAL

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Who am I?
How did I come to be who I am?
Am I really who I think I am?
What is my purpose?
Escaped slaves who were emancipated when they reached the North in the mid-1860s in Freedman's Village, Virginia. Getty Images/Hulton Archive.
Elderly African American couple posed outside of building, near Hampton Institute, Hampton, Va. Johnston, Frances Benjamin, 1864-1952, photographer http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3c18921
Tactics that Work: African-American Diaspora Space Families and Guardians of the Generations

Deborah Wasserman, Ph.D.
Lifelong Learning Group

Fanon Hill
Youth Resiliency Institute

Abstract

This article emerges from a formative evaluation of the Journey Project, funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation as part of its initiative to encourage family engagement in early childhood education. To frame the Foundation’s guiding evaluation questions in ways that made sense in the context of the communities involved, we introduced two terms: “diaspora-space families” and “guardians of the generations.” The essential evaluation finding was to identify that guardians exist, that diaspora-space families almost naturally form around them, and that the Journey Project was seeking to support their important, holistic role in the education and care of young children. Diaspora space-families function as extended “fictive kin” families—providing parenting and grand-parenting with unconditional love and care while passing on values, culture, and heritage. They also function as organizations, seeking to engage family units and provide services. Much of the Journey Project’s first year was involved with engaging these diaspora space families as families and helping to strengthen them as organizations. Findings presented herein were drawn from interviews with 13 key informants; notes from two community logic model construction sessions; network mapping; and regular meeting notes between the evaluator and the project director.

Keywords: family engagement; fictive kin; program evaluation; Africentric; Self-Determination; Urban communities
Tactics that Work: African-American Diaspora Space Families and Guardians of the Generations

Family engagement constitutes an essential element of children’s academic success. The fact has been recognized and accepted as relevant across cultures and academic settings (Weiss, Lopez, & Rosenberg, 2010). However, the ambiguity around the nature of that engagement needs to be examined. Organizers of the Youth Resiliency Institute’s (YRI) W. K. Kellogg Foundation-funded Journey Project have sought to engage families at a grassroots level in three urban communities. A first-year formative evaluation, designed to address specific funder-provided evaluation questions while being responsive to The Journey Project’s underlying philosophy and approach, revealed important explorations of the concepts of “family” and “family engagement” in three urban, primarily African-American communities. We, the authors—the Journey Project’s evaluator and program director—worked together to create a meaningful guiding narrative from interviews with 13 key informants; notes from two community logic model construction sessions; and regular meeting notes. The narrative required new definitions and even new terms: “diaspora-space families” and “guardians of the generations.”

The Journey Project’s stated purpose is to support successful early care and education among low income black children by supporting their families’ resiliency and culturally relevant engagement. The project’s first-year activities took place in three inner city neighborhoods: East Cleveland, Ohio and Cherry Hill and Albermarle Square, both in Baltimore City, Maryland. This first phase was one of bonding, training, and creating a shared vision. The essential evaluation finding was to identify that the guardians exist, that diaspora-space families almost naturally form around them, and in year one, the Journey Project was seeking to support their important, holistic role in the education and care of young children. Diaspora space-families function as extended “fictive kin” families—providing parenting and grand-parenting with unconditional love and care while passing on values, culture, and heritage. They also function as organizations, seeking to engage family units and provide services. This article shares our findings with personal statements from each of us: an introduction from the evaluator and a conclusion from the Journey Project director.

Introduction with Evaluator’s Personal Statement

Our responses to the Kellogg Foundation’s guiding evaluation questions needed to be understood from the context of the communities involved in the project. From the start, the project had followed the mantra: “to engage families, we must start with the families.” Thus the evaluation needed to follow suit. Careful consideration to honoring the voices of family members in these three neighborhoods, telling and reflecting on their stories, focusing on positive outcomes, while carefully crafting a mechanism for sharing the lessons learned, was essential to the project’s implementation and therefore to the evaluation.

I came to the Journey Project from a long dedication to understanding program effect and value from the perspective of Self-Determination Theory. Because of “self-determination” as a central Kwanzaa principal (Kujichagulia) and my commitment to understanding the power of self-determination as trumping any program outcomes achieved without it (Wasserman, 2010), I became, in 2008, the evaluation area Lead for the National Rites of Passage Institute. Through that position I met Fanon Hill and the Youth Resiliency Institute. Prior to this project we worked together to apply a self-determination theory-based model to two years of programming at the Cherry Hill summer camp (Wasserman & Emery, 2013).

From the beginning of my discussions with Fanon about family engagement in the Journey Project communities, I believed I understood the meaning of common words like “family” and “engagement” and “education.” In my world (I have a Ph.D. in family science), “family engagement in early childhood education” was in line with the definition provided by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Halgunseth, Peterson, & Stark, 2009). Family engagement involves: families (i.e. immediate
caretakers) as advocates and partners in decision making about their child’s education; two-way communication between the school or care facility and the family; involvement of family members empowered with acknowledgement and use of their unique gifts, talents, and skills; a commitment to learning-environments in the home; collaboration in establishing goals; and schools committed to ongoing and comprehensive promotion of family engagement. From this perspective the path to answering the Kellogg evaluation questions would be straightforward. But the Journey Project did not reflect the definition. Why was the Journey Project activity focused on two families at the Cherry Hill recreation center and why were they holding events with the Baltimore City Police Academy? Or on a room full of children in Albemarle Square? Or an Africentric Rites of Passage-based youth development and cultural arts program at the Heritage Middle School in East Cleveland, Ohio? Where was the early childhood education? Where were the families? My part in this article’s narrative emerges from the answers I found to these questions.

**Family Engagement**

My definition of “family engagement” overlooked an understanding of “family,” as it functions in these communities, and perhaps many African American communities. In each of the three communities, the Journey Project accomplished its first year outcomes by identifying, empowering, and engaging a family not referenced in the accepted NAEYC definition of family engagement. As evidenced in the Journey Project’s community-defined vision (Figure 1), which emerged through a PhotoVoice process (Strack, Lovelace, Jordan, & Holmes, 2010; Wang, 1999; See photo in Figure 2) involving key stakeholder voices, engaging this aspect of the Black “family” is part and parcel of family engagement in these communities. In this visioning process key Journey Project participants engaged in a PhotoVoice activity based on the question, “What helps or hinders our ability to support our children’s learning?” They each brought three images (drawings or photos) of their response to the question. The mural in Figure 2, the end result of the PhotoVoice activity, shows a “Journey Tree” with strong history and culture at its roots, sheltering thriving Journey communities, with the “dead wood” being cut out and burned. Responses to the mural then transformed into the “vision” in Figure 1.

Through the lens of my preconceived definition of family engagement, I felt confused. I found the visioning process to be rich and inspiring, as did the others in the group. The sense of pride and identity among the participants as they held the mural for pictures could have burst the walls that contained us. But I was concerned. We had failed to focus on creating a vision statement and logic model that would address the topic of family engagement in early childhood education. Even a year later, key informant answers to my questions seemed to not directly address the topic as I envisioned it. I was missing something important.

I had heard Fanon’s words about “starting with the families.” I had met Ms. Shirley Foulks in the context of the Cherry Hill Summer Camp and again at a National Rites of Passage Institute conference. I knew the respect people experienced when they spoke of her, but I hadn’t yet come to know her power. Nor had I met or experienced the personal strength of Ms. Libby Disharoom or two other dedicated “mothers,” Ms. Q. and Ms. X., at Albemarle Square. I knew the influence of Elder M– as a type of Pied Piper in East Cleveland and what his African drumming group instruction provided for many of the youth he served through the National Rites of Passage Institute. I also had worked with Paul Hill, Jr. and the National Rites of Passage Institute (NROPI), abbreviated to fictive initials. Real names have been used with the permission of their owners.

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1 Except where key informants are public figures or need to be acknowledged for their important contribution to the Journey Project, names have been
even writing about how rites of passage programming generates community development through youth development and vice versa (Blumenkrantz & Wasserman, 1998). But, despite my family science background, I had no understanding of the fluid definition of family in the communities; nor any understanding the importance of the ad hoc roles these broader extended families perform.
Diaspora-Space “Families” as Tactical Response to Strategies of Exclusion.

During interviews and visits I started to see what Fanon had known and used in his family engagement and community organizing work—outside of what is typically thought of as “family” or “community,” there exists another condition or “space” for the children, adults, and even institutions in the communities. Whether found in a home, a church, a school, a community center, or elsewhere, the spaces meet the arguably universal need for a “nest” where people feel nurtured and self-determined (Deci & Ryan, 2000). They also meet the need for healthy survival in a hostile environment. Curiously, the spaces appear to be embedded in the communities with leadership passing from one generation to the next, from mother or father to daughter or son.

To deal with the inconsistencies I was finding not only between the data and academic definitions, but within the project itself, I found Michel de Certeau’s (1984) distinction between strategy and tactic to be useful. According to de Certeau, tactics differ from strategies. Definitions and consistency emerge from strategy; I was hearing about tactics. De Certeau defines strategies as planned, goal-oriented activity stemming from a powerful “place” or “locus” in relation to satellite places, organizations, people, etc. that surround it or compose it as a place of power (de Certeau, 1984). Using an analogy, consider for instance, the game of chess: the chess players are strategists—they set up the board to win the game; tactics come from pawns within that strategy, moving (if it were possible) to meet their own needs. I would have no problem answering the Kellogg questions if I could have identified planned strategies. In contrast, tactics are actions that emerge, often brilliantly and witfully, from the survival needs of the satellite “other.” De Certeau describes them as:

. . . determined by the absence of a proper locus. . . the space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. . . It does not, therefore, have the options of planning general strategy and viewing the adversary as a whole within a distinct, visible and objectifiable
space. It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of “opportunities’ and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids. What it wins it cannot keep. . .. In short, a tactic is an art of the weak. (de Certeau, 1984, p. 37)

Based on this distinction between strategy and tactic, I recognized that more often than not, families function tactically. I also came to understand that Fanon had designed the Journey Project to further the Kellogg Foundation’s important family engagement goal by leaving behind strategies and the narratives that accompany them. Instead, the project is based on identifying and empowering tactics that work. From this perspective, the Journey Project’s goal is to move successful community tacticians and their methods to an acknowledged place of empowerment and self-determination where they can organize structures and counter-narratives to further the well-being of the people with whom they identify. Therefore, part of our evaluation strategy was to look for these emergent structures and empowering counter-narratives.

To be clearer about the “strategies left behind” and the “tactics that work,” I provide a Journey Project example. As part of fourteen “strategies” in the Baltimore City Schools’ Family and Community Engagement Policy (Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners, 2015), the Curtis Bay Elementary/Middle School was offering “Donuts for Dad” and “Muffins for Moms” sessions. These programs were part of a comprehensive school success strategy designed by the Baltimore City power structure to (I paraphrase) ensure successful students while aligning with social, political, and economic interests. Cherry Hill parents clearly wanted the best for their children. Sometimes, they said, that means physically sitting with a child in the classroom to enforce the rules and assure that a child pays attention; sometimes it means having a neighbor do it—or someone else the child respects. Sometimes it means having them stay home from school to take care of siblings or even moving to a different neighborhood. It seldom means muffins with mom. Not attending these meetings, never mind suggesting a tactic that might work better, generates ill will and narratives of deficit at the school: the parents don’t care; how can the children find success in the absence of appropriate parental support? Bound by their strategic policies, roles, and definitions, the schools become hostile territory to the often ad hoc tactics families must employ. Engagement and caring are as prevalent in their communities as the mainstream. But by necessity, tactics—the way engagement and caring manifests—lies outside of strategic definitions of family engagement. The Journey Project’s work was to identify and organize the tactics.

In each community Fanon identified and used nurturing spaces as essential tactical structures, which, to borrow de Certeau’s terms, “dance” almost “playfully” around the more strategic definitions of “family,” “community,” and perhaps even “village” (to reference the phrase of taking one to raise a child). From a cultural-historical perspective, we recognized that caring, nurturing spaces emerge from long standing tradition, and strong communal roots. Both have survived through generations of families that have been broken apart and reconfigured as the result of oppressive conditions that would be strategically threatened by coherent, functional African-American nuclear families and efficiently organized community structures. So the informal, safe spaces emerge both by necessity and by tradition. My thoughts about the central role of the “spaces” as “family engagement” resonated with Fanon. Indeed, for the past six years, he had been working on language for this “phenomenon”. He called the phenomenon “Diaspora Space” and defined it as follows:

Diaspora Space functions as a cultural, identity-giving ‘center of gravity’ allowing for simultaneous existence of multitudinous centers across settings where vulnerable children learn and develop. Through the perpetuation of “Diaspora Spaces”, cultural
identity is remembered, preserved and passed down through language, ritual, art and other practices thus honoring the traditions of academic achievement, healthy cultural identity, expectations for success, etc. that have incubated Black families in America. (Fanon Hill, personal communication, March 9, 2015)

I adopted the concept of “Diaspora Space” as I analyzed the interviews for the Phase One evaluation. In this article, we use it to reference the powerful relationship structures being recognized and empowered in each of the communities. Because of how they function in the lives of young children and with organizations that affect young children, we call them Diaspora-Space families. The experiences, observations and understandings that led to this term constitute the contents of this article.

To assist the reader with the terms and concepts we have adopted and use in this article, we include a glossary of terms (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Table 1. A glossary of terms used in this article. A Glossary of Terms</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Counter-narratives</strong> are explanations of cultural organizations that contrast with the narrative explanations created by a more powerful group's understanding of itself as central.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Diaspora Space</strong> is a phrase used by Journey Project director Fanon Hill to describe a cultural condition (social, psychological, physical) that functions as a cultural, identity-giving 'center of gravity,' allowing for simultaneous existence of multiple centers across settings where vulnerable children learn and develop. Through the perpetuation of “Diaspora Spaces”, cultural identity is remembered, preserved and passed down through language, ritual, art and other practices thus honoring the traditions of academic achievement, healthy cultural identity, expectations for success, etc. that have incubated Black families in America.</td>
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<td><strong>Diaspora space families</strong> is a term that references a group of caring, nurturing relationships within and between individuals from blood-line families. Often terms used to refer to bloodline relationships (i.e., sister, brother, Auntie, Mama) apply to any of these relationships. These relationships and the system that emerges from them serve to communicate the diaspora space messages as listed above.</td>
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<td><strong>Guardians of the Generations</strong> are strong central figureheads around which a Diaspora Space family functions. These central figures hold in common seven characteristics: (1) they are committed to passing through the generations a sense of family and community (as expressed in the Kwanzaa principal of unity); (2) they command respect and provide counter-narrative; (3) they are committed to the authentic selves and self-determination of the children and adults in their communities; (4) they provide unconditional love with straight talk and high expectations; (5) they function in a parental role to both adults and children; (6) They feel personally and naturally committed to the role (and may have had a parent who functioned in a similar position; and (7) They are spokespeople for the children in their care.</td>
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<td><strong>Self-determination</strong> is a measure of the quality (and indirectly, the quantity) of human motivation based on level of satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs for sense of competence (I am able to achieve what I set my mind to achieving); sense of relatedness (I care about others, they care about me); and sense of autonomy (my choice-making process is free from tension, pressure, or ambiguity; I make choices in line with my sense of self). These basic psychological needs have been shown to be consistent across developmental age groups and cultures -the behaviors and conditions that engender them differ. These needs persist at a community level and are expressed with plural-subject statements such as We are able to achieve what we set our minds to achieving, we care about each other; and the choices we make for ourselves and our community align with our sense of who we and what we want when we are free from tension, pressure, and ambiguity.</td>
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The Journey Project Guiding Narrative: Family, Diaspora Space Families, and “Guardians of the Generations”

The Kellogg Foundation’s first evaluation question required us to describe the number of families the project served in its first year. On the surface, our answer was simple: three diaspora space families participated—one from each community. But we needed to describe what we meant by the term; how we described these families; the specific characteristics that caused them to be “targeted”, and evidence for why the “families” are essential to a family engagement effort. During this first year, individual family units also participated, but primarily in a role of strengthening the core of the larger Diaspora space family entities.

We present, therefore, evidence of the existence of the Diaspora space families. After providing a deeper understanding of how in these communities, the idea of “family” fluidly extends beyond a typical family unit, we address the nature of the “families,” loosely identifiable by the reach of strong central figureheads. Following Mr. Paul Hill Jr.’s (East Cleveland Journey Project Director) explanation of the “guardians of the generations” (described below) we refer to these leaders as “guardians” and describe seven characteristics that emerge from the data to define them. Then we describe each of the three diaspora families in the project and identify the characteristics that generally define their role and the tactical ways they are functioning within their communities.

“Family” as referenced among key informants

On the whole, key informants from the three communities described tactics. Often, in keeping with what de Certeau refers to as the "wit" of the tactician, they infused familiar strategic terms with their own definitions, not particularly concerned with how those terms have been defined in the past, but instead, how they serve flexibly to meet the need being faced right now. In this way, the terms “family,” and those associated with it, flexibly apply to a broad range of relationships. Often, but by no means usually, “family” referred to a family unit—people related by blood or adoption. But informants also used family terms to extend often far beyond the biological or adopted relationships. As one key informant shared:

“For me, thinking about what other people might think, I would think that family is just within that one household, but personally, I look at family not only as what’s in the household, but you know, sometimes I might have extended family even within that same neighborhood and church—family members or coworkers.”

The East Cleveland Superintendent of Schools put it similarly when asked to define family engagement:

“I don’t define it singularly necessarily by virtue of who a child is living with and who has front line responsibility for raising that child. That of course is the root of family, but it certainly extends itself to the larger community, the school community, the city, the community at large.

East Cleveland City Councilman A--- B--- articulated his understanding of engagement:

“Not the traditional family. It’s all the other aunts. Sometimes within the family, mother isn’t functional or father, but the grandmother and aunt and uncle are. A lot are lost to the system because the mother and father aren’t functional. Sometimes the family extends beyond — but other people. Family and community intertwine. You need the family, but the community is the environment. If the family’s not as functional, then the neighbor next
Often these extended family relationships were loosely defined. In a single conversation, the Cherry Hill matriarch, Ms. Shirley Foulks, could be referenced as Ms. Shirley and Mama Shirley. On the other hand, the Albemarle Square matriarch was referenced as Ms. Mary or Ms. Libby and only infrequently as “Mama.” In reference to others, the relationship also seems to be acceptable if defined as family by one person or the other as I heard when Mama Shirley described her transportation to the Cherry Hill recreation center:

*I have to walk a block and a half to get the bus. So right now*

These extended family relationships can reach across whole communities – as when Ms. Q. from Albemarle Square described “unity” as the joining of the “Cherry Hill family” and the “Albemarle Square family.” Nor does a child need to be in a nuclear family to be parented, as demonstrated when Ms. Q. went on to say,

*All those kids are my kids. Who says that more than Ms. Libby? That they’re our babies. They’re MY babies.*

Thus, from the perspective of the people in these communities, engaging family extends beyond the caretakers in a given child’s household. In keeping with the tactical maneuvering of communities defined as “other” in the strategic makeup of America’s urban structures—tactics exist that navigate prevailing and disempowering narratives with ad-hoc extended family “safety nets” (borrowed from the words of East Cleveland key informant, Ms. B----, described below) and guardians of traditional wisdom to guide the ships. In its first year, the Journey project identified, engaged and was in the process of empowering broader “Diaspora-space families.”
Description of Diaspora Space Families

Based on the evaluation’s interviews and site visits, we have come to understand Diaspora space families as characterized as having at their center, charismatic caring adults, and often elders, committed to the wellbeing of the children they reach and who reach out to them. Diaspora Space leaders and the safe spaces they create show up in children’s lives sometimes emerging through kinship and fictive kin relations2 and other times from a caring neighbor, or two elders who run a drumming/cultural heritage experience at school, or three caring women who hang out in a room full of books and art materials at a housing project’s administration center, or another who with no funding provides a summer camp experience in the local rec center. As will be shown, these “spaces” function as families-passing on and nurturing traditions, values, cultural identity. They generate important counter-narratives to the incessant mainstream messages that portray these individuals, families, and communities as dysfunctional.

Diaspora Space Family “Guardians”

We found that, across the three Journey Project diaspora space families, all had strong, highly respected personalities at their center. Paul Hill Jr. referred to these central leaders as a “natural” progression of “guardians of the generations” or “natural and indigenous pillars of support,” emanating from a long tradition of “the grandparents or elders in the community who provided whatever was necessary to safeguard and define what was in our best interest.” Mr. Hill provided the understandable evolution of this role, both how it emerged as central to a community and why, today, people in such roles are becoming more difficult to find.

When you look at pre-slavery and post-slavery—those communities in black towns that existed—[The guardians] existed out of survival and through cultural memory and self-determination. . . And that was part of our strength—those natural things we had to do for ourselves and the roles that were assumed by adults and the guardians being elders within the community. What was once the rule, now is the exception. [Those roles have become] “institutionalized and professionalized . . .. What used to be natural is no longer natural. It’s externally provide for us by folks who don’t even live in our communities. It’s done from outside. I’m not saying all of them don’t have our interests in mind, but then again you used to have individuals in the community and from the community who were caring and had high expectations.

Today these guardians still exist. But according to Mr. Hill, they are the “exception, rather than the rule.” He went on to describe their role today:

If I’m going to talk about family engagement in a low income African American community, I can’t talk about it without giving homage and great importance to the role of the guardians. You can’t engage families without them.

2 Much has been written about African American kinship relationships, especially in the social work and sociology literature. Less frequent, but available, is literature about the importance of black community “networks” (Taylor, Chatters, Hardison, & Riley, 2001) and fictive kin relationships (Chatters, Taylor, & Jayakody, 1994), especially as related to positive youth development (Jarrett, 1995) and leadership development and education (Strmic-Pawl & Leffler, 2011),
When asked, “Do you think of yourself and Elder M-- [both central to the East Cleveland Journey Project] as those natural pillars?” he responded, “Exactly. We fit right in there. [That’s] our generative role and responsibility in the community.”

In a community meeting, Fanon highlighted these roles and their importance to a family engagement effort when he talked about the important role of mothers and grandmothers in the Journey Communities:

*One thing I've been learning from Journey Project lead families in Albemarle Square and Cherry Hill is the role that black mothers, grandmothers and great grandmothers play as matriarchs in the community. Ms. Q---, Ms. X---, Ms. D---, Ms. Libby, Mama Shirley, they are matriarchs respected by everyone in the community, including drug dealers, who I have witnessed bow down and leave corners when challenged by these matriarchs.*

Through key informant descriptions and stories, it was possible to construct seven general characteristics of “guardians” (two from East Cleveland, two from Cherry Hill, three from Albemarle Square). The detail that accompanies each characteristic, listed below, was important to the evaluation because it demonstrated that (1) that the project recruited strong partners and (2) how “guardians” are central to generating parent engagement and early childhood education in the communities.

1. They are committed to passing through the generations a sense of family and community as expressed in the Kwanzaa principal of unity (*Umoja*). This sense of unity reflects both community and family along with flexible and permeable boundaries. For instance, in the course of the interview with one of the guardians, even the evaluator, Deborah, is included in the family:

*If Ms. M--- was here, she can put the icing on the cake too. cuz she has a lot of family. She's the grandmother, the great grandmother and all that too. And like I say, down here, the kids, the parents, they know each other, and they're-I feel it goes like this-if you're my neighbor, you get sick, and won't see you for a couple of days, I'm like [she knocks three times on the table] “Where's Deborah?” ‘Oh she's sick.’ ‘Let me take her some soup or something.” You know. ... That's why we have family. You need anything, call on your neighbor. Don't let 'em be in the house sick. So that's what we need to instill in our younger kids. Our kids grow to be youth. Then young adults. Then old adults. Then they have kids. And that's how the generations keep going on and on.*

2. They command respect and provide counter narrative. In their interviews, the guardians peppered their speech with counter narrative to the stories of deficit to which the people in their communities have been exposed, and too often accept as their own. For instance, one of the guardians described how she responds to her neighbors:

*Why don't you go to the center with me? I say you might like it. They say, ‘I ain't raising nobody else's children.’ But you don't look at it like that. Why would she say that? They just sit, they won't be doing nothing, gossiping and watching TV. I enjoy myself with the kids. I say you all don't even go to work—and you ask why I come to the center? Get involved! You know?*

As Fanon referenced when he spoke of these women as matriarchs, young people listen when a guardian provides an inner voice they may
remember and even pass on. That inner voice derives from advice like the kind another guardian described:

   And I tell 'em, “don't never knock where you come from. Don't stand on a corner and be a corner young man or woman. Use this brain that you have. Don't let no one tell you 'Oh, I can buy the latest [tennis shoes for you].' No, [you say,] 'My mama can, or I can get a job and buy my own tennis shoes. Cause if he put that money in your hand, you know it's not honest money. He's gone take your freedom from you. And they gone break your mother's heart. So go to school, get an education, and further your education.

   So when I look at the kids out here now doing wrong and I tell them, “Your mama don't want you out here like this. You go find a job. Burger King. McDonalds. You gotta crawl before you walk. Anybody can't be a billionaire first. You have to work somewhere low key before you get high.”

3. They are committed to the authentic selves and self-determination of the children and adults in their communities. Among the guardians, there is recognition that every child and adult has her or his own gifts that need to be identified, recognized, and nurtured. Moreover, while others can provide support, each individual person needs to take primary responsibility for taking care of these gifts and using them wisely. As illustrated by the comments below, this pervasive belief seeps into Ms. X—’s way she talks to the children at her center or Mama Shirley’s ideas for the journey project:

   We’re not for no jealousy down here cuz’ everybody's just as good as the next person. Each and every moment y'all have your own spec-i-ality [pronounced in three parts for emphasis]. Y’all have something different that you can do better than the other one can do. So don’t feel bad that you cannot do that.

   I want the families to marry themselves. We’re going to do that . . .. We’ll have a ceremony. They’re going to write some vows to themselves, and they’re going to take better care of their selves and do right by their selves. It’s going to be a nice little ceremony. They have had some issues and stuff and I want them to love their selves, be kind to themselves, because you are your first love that you got.

4. They provide unconditional love with straight talk and high expectations. Paul Hill, Jr. described “guardians” as different from social service providers. One important quality was their commitment to having “high expectations.” Among Journey Project guardians, these expectations were couched in a deep-seated, forgiving, and unconditional love as heard in the following example from my interview with Ms. Shirley as she described a conversation with one of the Journey Project mothers:

   ‘You have the ability to get yourself in and out of trouble and that’s your choice; I’ll always be here routing for your best self. . . .’ I let her talk all she wanted to talk, and what her hopes were what she wanted to accomplish. She said, ‘I know you were upset with me.’ I assured her, ‘I’m not upset, I’m disappointed. I love unconditionally. Whether you're right or wrong, I'm still going to love you. But I'm going to tell you about yourself.’ And that’s what I did and I said, ‘you'd better get it together and I’m here to help you and to walk with you.’ She said she could do it.
In response, Deborah as the interviewer added, “If you talked to me that way, you would also be a role model for how I could talk to my kids.” She laughed heartily and said:

I been told that. In family meetings, one on one, in a rap session with the older children, Yeah, I've been really blessed with that gift, thank God, and I try to use it as needed.

Continued examples of straight talk nested in unconditional love emerged with the other guardians whether talking with adults (in the first example below) or small children:

I tell anybody I'm a lot like my mother told my brothers, “I ain't put you there, I ain't gon bring you home. Don't call my house. I ain't paying no bill like that.” So people say, “Q., you're hard.” I ain't hard. I love 'em dearly, but guess what? I'm learning from my mom.

We was raised when you walk in the building [you say], 'good morning', 'good evening', 'good afternoon.' They walk in [she mimes kids not saying anything]. I say, ‘Oh excuse me, let's walk back out.' They say ‘Why, Miss Q. what's up?’ I say, ‘Because we didn't sleep in the same room or same bed last night.’ They walk back out; I open the door. I say [as a greeting] “Now what's going on? Oh, come on in.” Then I say, “OK, let our day begin. Now, this time you do it”.

5. They function in a dual parental and social service role to both adults and children. Throughout their comments, key informants demonstrated that, in addition to organizing social services, guardians function parentally as parent and grandparent to the adults and children around them. When asked about the relationship, one informant responded “She's like my mentor, my mother, my counselor, all in one.”

In the grandparent role the guardians provide needed respite to stressed parents:

I knew her mind and body were going through something and she still had to deal with the children. And when she was going through that I was dealing with the children mostly when they came to the meeting Tuesdays and Thursdays so they wouldn't be getting on her nerves.

Everybody don't have a one hundred percent day every day, you know, I felt that when they come here and mom may not have had the best day at work or where ever and by the time the kids leave here, just for the hour they spent here and they go home and say, “Mama, I was at the Center and they don this or that,” and she's probably thinking like, what the kids tell the mom what they learned from us at the center. That can make the mom at ease and then she relax in knowing that Brother Hill taught them something and she can say, “Oh is that what you learned? Oh, I know what you learned today. I feel much better,” you know, get that breath of air.

And when necessary they provide parents with network support or stern advice:

Yes, just like the church they went to. I went to the pastor and explained about the project and explained about our families, and I explained the issues and behavior problems in their children and they needed the spiritual side to complete the help we're trying to do for them. I went with them and introduced them
and then had them start going. People come to help you when they really know you need the help. But if you sit in the church and you’re not going to say nothing, then you’re not going to get nothing. So I thought it would make it easier on them if I went ahead and broke the ice. So they’re doing fine, they’re going to the bible study.

P— was calling all hours of the night, all hours of the morning. She called me one morning at 9:00. Her children were out of school. She said “Ms. Shirley, [her son] was talking in a --- manner and he’s down in the kitchen eating all my banana ball. . . .”

And I’m looking at the phone and I’m listening to her and I said to her, “P—, I know you’re upset, but why are you telling me this? Aren’t you home?”

“Yes.’

“Aren’t you the mother?”

“Yes.’

I said, “Where’s your husband?”

“He in the room . . . . “

“Well then he’s home and he’s the father. Isn’t that your little boys? And you be the boss. You take time, calm down and think about what you need to do or say to your little boy. Not only about [his language], but stealing. Now you got your work cut out for you but I want you to calm down and then I want you to address the issue. You know as parents we need to do this stuff.”

There were also stories of them working directly with the children. One parent recalled how the guardians talk with her children:

So, a few weeks ago, he got in trouble in school and actually, all three of them, I was surprised. And we came to the meeting, I said, “the children had a bad day.” Mama Shirley say, “Ok, lay it on the table, what’s up?” Mr. Fanon say, “I don’t like this, what’s going on, Dr. J—?” But you know, they sit with ‘em. Talk with ‘em. And then, for a while, they do the right thing. Until they do something else wrong. Whatever problems they have they work with them on that.

Some guardians’ comments brought attention to their awareness of the sensitivity their role as parent/grandparent requires when balancing/sharing it with the parental figures in the family unit. The comments below illustrate how one spoke of a gut-wrenching meeting with a mother at her child’s funeral. At Albemarle Square’s drop-in center, a guardian spoke of how important the home-parent is to the children:

Even when I saw a guy killed— I lost one. And his mother whispered in my ear on his funeral day— she say, I think R— loved you better than me. I just hugged her tight. And I didn’t really know what to say. But I say, “No child loves anybody better than they loves their mom.” She gave him life. I loved him, but she gave him life.

They make bracelets and things like that. They get in here painting and they make their artwork. They’re happy. Then they come back and they always— one thing they always— we say we’re gonna make them cards, the first card they want to make “Can I make my mother a card?” “Can I make my mother a bracelet?” “Yes, we tell ‘em ‘yes’. Every day they draw something to their mother. Every day we have art
time it’s always “to my mother,” thanking their mother. You know that’s powerful.

6. They feel personally and naturally committed to the role and often have a parent who functioned in a similar position. Curiously each one of the guardians described their own parent as functioning in a similar role. Acknowledging the activism of his own parents, Paul Hill was not surprised that all the guardians spoke of carrying on a legacy of family service and trust: ‘It’s part of their lineage,” he said. “Such community elders and guardians just didn’t come about by happenstance.” The Journey guardians expressed their “lineage” in ways that show a generative commitment to their role and its impact in benefiting Journey Project children, youth and families. As shown in the quotes below, with the lineage comes a commitment to education, a natural affinity for the role, and a commitment to the role whatever the financial circumstances:

After my mother, like she said about her mother, my mother was the mother hen of her neighborhood. She took on other people’s kids. And I’m proud to say, her kids finished school. All of us finished school, got their education like we’re supposed to get our education.

Even to the day when something goes on in the family--my sisters, and my nieces and my cousins--they come forward to me, they tell me, “Well, what a Suzie.” I say, “Wait a minute, you all, I’m not Suzie--that was my mother--I’m not Suzie.” Why y’all come ask me? They say, “You’re nothing but your mother all over again.”

I’m the baby of the bunch and I say, ‘Why you always coming to me?’ They say . . . ‘You act like the Grannie of the bunch. . . .’ I was like, ‘Why?’ They say ‘Cuz you act like you’re the old wise one.’ I say, ‘OK, I’ll take that’ . . . and I say, ‘Cuz I got that from my old, wise lady-my mother.’

If you’re going to do something, do something from the heart. Don’t do something because you’re trying to get some gain out of it. My mother was a community person. My mother did a lot of community work she would help anybody who was in need. Child, adult, bird, anything. When she did something she did it from the heart.

My mother and father were both community developers themselves. My mother started a women’s rites of passage program. She was a director of the YWCA of East Cleveland. It’s kind of like if your mom’s a doctor, you become a doctor. My mom worked with battered women. So, seeing the example, it’s second nature. I knew it as a child. You imitate your parents a lot. What their gift is, sometimes you have a similar gift. My parents would advocate for education. These were things that were taking place in my home. They were important. So growing up with it, you do it without even thinking.

7. They are spokespeople for the children in their care. The guardians speak out and advocate for the parents and children in their care. Key informant Paul Hill, Jr. likened their voices to that of East Cleveland guardian Inez Moore who, in 1977, took to the United States Supreme Court and won 5-4 in Moore v City of East Cleveland that an ordinance which restricted housing to a single family as a nuclear, rather than an extended family, was unconstitutional and a violation of the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. With similar ferocity, as she was
talking about pending neighborhood and school reorganization, one Journey guardian told me, “That’s what we are... we’re spokespeople for the children.”

“Not because you’re getting paid...” Deborah said, checking, verifying this volunteer effort and its motivation. To which the guardian responded,

“No, that’s the last thing on our minds. We will guard these children for life. Y’all not gon’ do this to our kids. You’re not going to do this to our community. No we’re not going to let you. No you’re not.

Guardians such as grandmother Inez Moore and the other mentioned guardians exemplify the enduring spirit and strength of grandparents and the Black family and community in providing the indomitable care, protection, welfare, and education/socialization of the black child past and present.

The Journey Project’s Three Diaspora Space Families.

The Journey Project has identified the “guardians of the generations” and individuals and recruited them into the project. In this first phase the Journey Project work has been to identify “guardians,” acknowledge their work, help to enhance and formalize the spaces they have created around themselves, and begin connecting them with each other and to the resources around them. In this section we briefly describe each of the neighborhood diaspora spaces. Specific plans for affecting both recruitment of families into their folds and affecting conditions for their children’s education will be addressed later in this report.

Cherry Hill

The Cherry Hill Journey Project centers around Ms. S----. Together with Fanon, as the community organizer, they have identified two families as “lead families” that form the basis for the Cherry Hill Diaspora Space. The parents in both families, one of whom serves as a guardian in her own right were key informants for this report. These families come together two evenings a week at the Cherry Hill recreation center. Ms. S---- had been a substitute teacher at Cherry Hill’s Curtis Bay elementary school for 22 years. During that time, she had run a summer camp and an after school program and held the role of PTA president. “I did some of everything,” she explained. Why she left speaks to her role as diaspora space family guardian. She recalled, “They come talking about that we couldn’t hold the children and stuff and they wouldn’t even let you touch them, I can’t work like that.” She continued running the summer camp and afterschool program until they ran out of funds. To keep it open, she lobbied the Cherry Hill Tenants Association President with no satisfactory response and so ran for and won election to the Presidency herself. Her recollection of how she kept the camp/afterschool program running for the ten years of her presidency (she resigned this past year) reflects her fortitude, dedication, and commitment:

“I never got the funding, but I got a bunch of promises and a bunch of lies. But I still ran a zero budget program. I ran it with love...And I've got some children in college and some out. I got one that is coming out in May... Whatever they needed, I found a way to get it. If they were hungry I fed him. If they needed shoes, I bought em. When you do it with love and you really care, it works. I kept it private. I didn’t try to break up the families, but I didn’t work with the parents. That’s why that was my vision--to try to work with the entire family. But I worked with them children and got them children across them stages.

A 2006 article appearing on 2011 blog of one of Cherry Hill’s successful residents references Ms. S----’s efforts and described her as supporting her Future Leaders in Training program with “her own meager resources and donations from friends...
Eventually some of the “donations” came in the form of Africentric Rites of Passage programming from the Youth Resiliency Institute.

**Albemarle Square**

At Albemarle Square, eight years ago, Ms. Mary Disharoom and two helpers (both of whom are key informants for this report) arranged permission for a room where students could meet. These leaders function as advocates for the children in this housing project. They provide the young people with sense of place and culture and a trusted “family” voice, helping them to stay focused on the importance of education.

Ms. Disharoom had been an active proponent of the children in Albemarle Square long before it assumed that name almost ten years ago. When the area was the Flag House Courts public housing, she actively campaigned for improved conditions. Now renovated into multiple city blocks of townhouses, Albemarle Square’ housing mixes private ownership, rentals, and affordable housing for people with low incomes—many of whom were residents of Flag House Courts before it was demolished. One of those residents, outspoken in demanding that the Flag House area be cleaned up, is a Journey Project guardian. Unfortunately, she was not well enough to participate in the interviews for this report. She is assisted by two additional guardians (Ms. Q— and Ms. X—). Together they run an

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afterschool drop-in space in a room provided by the administration.

Difficult relations with homeowners (who have globe lanterns outside their doors instead of light bulbs) are palpable—with affordable housing renters feeling second class, in relation to the amount of attention and services they receive from the privately run housing administration. The space where these three women greet children with art supplies and books each day after school is public space (other residents use it at night) but the daytime use is held closely guarded by these women. So too are policies that affect where their children go to school, how far they walk to get there, etc. Closely monitoring the City’s school/urban planning decisions has long been a part of their all-volunteer commitment to the community’s children and families. This monitoring continues to be crucial to their efforts.

**Figure 5.** Journey Project family organizers bridge the generation gap while learning how to make African xylophones with Youth Resiliency Institute master artist-in-residence Abu the Flutemaker in Baltimore’s Albemarle Square community.

**East Cleveland**

Journey Project family engagement is beginning at Heritage Middle School. In keeping with the “start with the families” mantra, the East Cleveland successful “tactic” has been Rites of Passage programming which just last year found a foothold within the school system by responding to the community need—middle school adolescent boys. This year the program has expanded to include girls. Four groups—younger girls, older girls, younger boys, and older boys meet once a week for educational reinforcement, anger management, healing circles, and the performing of cultural arts through African dance and drumming. In the process, they become part of the Journey Diaspora Space Family – with guiding elders, extended family events, sense of culture and heritage, and caring adults watching
out for their academic, emotional and social well-being. These young people, many, themselves, less than five to ten years from becoming parents of young children, experience first-hand, and some for the first time, what it means to be family and how adults function in the best interest of the children in that family. As Paul Hill, Jr. said about this age group, “Early adolescence is key to creating a secure and authentic social self. This is our last opportunity to ground them. Once we lose them here, it becomes very difficult . . .”

In many ways East Cleveland functions as a neighborhood with similar challenges and culture to the Journey neighborhoods in Baltimore. But unlike the Baltimore Journey Neighborhoods, East Cleveland is, in and of itself, a city with its own city government and school system (at least for now; there is a political effort to merge it with Cleveland). In an internet blog, the former Mayor wrote, “it’s like an urban Mayberry. Everybody from the city knows each other. It’s a tight-knit community.” To which Paul Hill, Jr. added, “It is not perfect, but a special close knit community that has suffered the tragedy of urbanization and neglect.”

As such, the Journey Project has some strong proponents in the city’s governing structure. And unlike the Baltimore Journey families, the East Cleveland’s Journey Project’s guardians began with two male elders. Paul Hill, Jr. is former director of thirty-three years of one of Cleveland’s oldest and largest neighborhood based child/youth development and family organizations. His organization provided rites of passage in Greater Cleveland for almost thirty years. He is well respected in the national and international rites of passage community. Elder John Mitchell, a former Cleveland teacher and retired principal, has worked alongside him—some of the five and six year olds who joined his African drumming group fifteen years ago still perform with him and serve as role models for the young people who come to Journey activities as part of their “Heritage Middle School Day”. Recently with the addition of young ladies to the program a female staff has been retained to assist with the young ladies and family engagement. Rhonda Lovejoy is a seasoned social worker with over twenty years’ experience within public education and neighborhood based child and youth organizations. At its core, Rites of Passage programming embodies the fluid definition of community and family that drives the Journey Project (Blumenkrantz & Wasserman, 1998; Hill Jr., 1992). Indeed, Rites of Passage programming is generally at the core of the Journey Project philosophy and programming.

Because of the strong practical and scholarly base for the work in East Cleveland, Superintendent Myrna Corley is highly aware of the power of the role and potential power of Rites of Passage programming in her schools. Her intention, she said, is to have it as available as possible throughout the East Cleveland school system. Superintendent Myrna Corley says children likewise appreciate and benefit from the relationship. She explained the important extended-family role the Journey Project itself plays in Heritage Middle School:

> There are unfortunately a number of children who don’t have primary family engagement. So to have a project like this gives them a familial spirit in terms of working collectively and in cooperation.

Councilman Nate Martin is similarly aware and supportive of the need for this diaspora space family influence on the youth in East Cleveland-especially in middle school. In his interview he particularly spoke of the importance of the intergenerational quality of the program. As Paul Hill, Jr., explained, at Heritage Middle School, the people working together represent five different generations—he and Elder Mitchell being from the second and first respectively, Rhonda Lovejoy and the master drummer from the third, volunteer helpers from Elder Mitchell’s original drumming group the fourth and the middle-schoolers the fifth).
Conclusion with the Journey Project Director’s Reflections

For the sake of conducting a program evaluation responsive to the community being served, we needed to create words and definitions for describing the tactics the Journey Project was identifying and amplifying. In this article we have shared those definitions and the community evidence that supports them. The process of defining and codifying logically suggests the next strategic steps of forming goals, objectives, and action steps, and documenting the degree to which they are accomplished. But that approach is risky and perhaps even inappropriate for the Journey Project.

Fanon’s role is to organize and empower the tactics that work in the context of the rich wealth of culture, heritage, and experience that spawn them. It is not to formalize them into strategies. By definition, strategies don’t belong in these communities. Turning the tactics into strategies could serve the wrong masters. Thus, as a community organizer, Fanon must walk cautiously, precariously balanced on the fence between tactic and strategy. The Diaspora space families and their guardians need and deserve the support for strengthening their impact and reach while staying true to the tactical wit that creates them.

An illustration of this precarious walk emerges when considering, for instance, supporting the important role of guardian. No strategy exists for passing on the role and associated tactics when a guardian, often elderly, is ready or preparing for transition. What kind of strategic support might the Journey Project put in place to help sustain these rich efforts that take hold? As a Rites of Passage-based organization, might the Project provide Rites of Passage around assuming the guardian role? Wouldn’t it serve these communities to help institutionalize these tactics that work so well? But whom would this kind of strategy serve? What political structures could or would be served by coopting a tactical definition and then benefitting from strategies of holding the definition in place? For these communities, strategic use of the identification and definition of these roles could serve to rob them of tactics that work – and then send them skittering to find new ones. On the other hand, as we have shown, these roles and definitions are solid and strong; they emerge from a rich cultural history and memory that has survived all kinds of strategic rule.

Reflections from Fanon

The strategy-tactic question presents me and, I assume many of the Black Child Journal readers, with an important challenge. What do we do with our insights into how family functions in our communities? A firmly held conviction runs throughout this article, and it is this: any family
engagement effort that does not begin with families will ultimately fail. Any process intended to improve community must include the people it is intended to serve and the tactics that they employ.

Black children and youth who do not happen to live in a two-parent home are too often discussed as though not connected to any actual family structure at all, ignoring and, by implication, invalidating a broader network of family relations that can be part of a child's successful development. Today in Cherry Hill Public Homes in Baltimore, Maryland, Journey Project lead family organizers have recruited over 17 families who now participate in Journey Project programming. Lead families tapped into community protocol, history, and authentic narratives to initiate new families into a distinct sphere of activism.

Sadly, hyper-fixation on the Black family as dysfunctional continues to occlude the politics and efforts of Black families representing themselves. Using a Self-Determination theory-based approach to evaluation (Wasserman, 2010) offers a corrective to this problem by, 1) contributing to the general knowledge base about methods to promote family and community well-being in low-income Black communities and, 2) recognizing that people's ideas about what outcomes matter in evaluation are often shaped by White privilege, internalized superiority and racism.

We must begin to see the Black family with fresh eyes. Black families in the diaspora have survived and thrived with strong family ties defined in their own terms. It is now up to us to identify and empower emancipatory family engagement tactics employed by Black families living in our most disinvested communities.

References


http://www.lewismuseum.org/sites/default/files/styles/large/public/search_0.jpg
"Fire that is surrounded by elders cannot burn you." - Afrikan Proverb

We Are Our Ancestors  
(An Anthem for the Maroon People)

We are our Ancestors  
They live through our being  
Though unseen  
They are not dead  
Not history’s forgotten  
Brought to life only through those  
Seeking fame from our name

Our forefathers  
Our foremothers  
LIVE!  
They are not dead  
Not skeletons on moldy shelves  
In books seldom read

Our Abeng still blows freedom calls  
Summoning the ancestors here  
Awakening the past  
Conquering ancestral death  
Breathing life in our ancestors

Our drums echo ancestral heartbeats  
Ritually  
Speaking to us, through us  
With us

Vibrating freedom sounds  
Arousing the ancestors  
Our dreams conjure them nocturnally  
Guiding/confiding/whispering  
Plotting/plodding

Revealing clues to us  
About us  
Clues about them  
Ensuring freedom’s continuity  
Through their blood legacy in our genes  
We are our ancestors

From: "I-Lan' in di Sun" by Nana Farika Berhane (2014), Queen Omega Communications Year 1995, Washington, DC
The Brown Madonna

COMPROMISED PARENTING AND COMMUNITY VIOLENCE IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

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Abstract

The disproportionate rates of interpersonal violence among African Americans promotes fear and is eroding stability in many disadvantaged African American communities. This paper seeks to provide a contextual analysis on how various structural and cultural factors converge to provide a fertile setting for the disproportionately high rates of community violence (e.g. assault, aggravated assault, robbery, and murder) occurring among African Americans. A specific focus of the paper is on how various structural factors and problematic parenting and parenting practices are associated with violent crime offending and victimization. The paper also includes an intervention agenda that places emphasis on strengthening families through parenting education and support.

Introduction

One of the major challenges confronting African Americans in contemporary America is the disproportionate rates of violent crime offending and victimization among adolescents and young adults. While there is a broad body of research which documents how the African American family structure, including its connections to extended family and fictive kin and organized religion, has provided African Americans with the capacity and flexibility to cope and adapt to adverse social conditions from the time of slavery, Jim Crow segregation and up to the present (Hill, 1968; Stack, 1974; Guttman, 1977) this paper suggests that throughout the African American experience the capacity of African Americans to effectively parent their children has been challenged and compromised due to various structural realities. However, what is argued here is that post 1970 up to the present as a result of the dismantling of the institutional system of overt racial discrimination and the exodus of advantaged African Americans from the inner city an increasing number of African American parents lack the individual and community-level resources to facilitate effective parenting. As such, the central premise of this paper is that compromised parenting functions as a significant factor mediating exposure to intergenerational structural pressures and the high rates of violent crime offending and victimization that occur among African Americans, particularly African Americans who reside in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. The term “compromised parenting” is operationalized here to refer to the weakening or erosion of the capacity of parents to provide nurturing, supportive, and effective care which results in pro-social development of children as they transition from childhood to early adulthood. Among academic researchers, elected officials, human service providers, community stakeholders and others who are concerned about the high rates of violent crime offending there are many who argue that structural challenges (e.g., persistent racial bias and discrimination, chronic unemployment, and concentrated poverty) combine and function as a major catalyst leading to racial disparities in the rates of violent crime offending and victimization (Wilson, 1987; Oliver, 2003; Unnever & Gabbidon, 2011). Hence, I argue that to fully understand the various factors contributing to the high rates of violent crime offending and victimization among African Americans, structural challenges, community-level social conditions, and problematic individual and cultural adaptations must be considered. Furthermore, the examination of micro-level social-cultural processes (e.g., worldview, role enactment, norms, and oppositional lifestyle patterns) is important to the study of racial and class variations in the patterning of community violence given that the type of violent incidents which plague both urban and rural black
communities (e.g. firearm violence, gang violence, drug-related violence, robbery and domestic violence) tend to occur in a situational context in which problematic role enactment, lifestyle patterns, and norms which condone resorting to violence as a means of resolving disputes are an essential feature of the situational context and interpersonal dynamics associated with violent confrontations among African Americans (Oliver, 1998, 2003; Wilkinson, 2007; Jacobs & Wright, 2006).

**Violence and African Americans**

As of 2014, African Americans constituted 13% of the U.S. population, but are disproportionately represented among violent crime offenders and victims. For example, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (2014) reports that in 2014, African Americans of all ages accounted for 31.9% of persons arrested for assault, 31.9% of persons arrested for aggravated assault, 29.9% of persons arrested for rape, 51.3% of persons arrested for murder, and 55.9% of persons arrested for robbery. Furthermore, it is important to note that violent crime in America primarily involves an intra-racial victim-offender relationship pattern. That is, violent crime victims are generally targeted by members of their same racial or ethnic group. For example, in 2014, 91% of Black murder victims were killed by Black offenders. Similarly, the majority of White murder victims (83%) were killed by White offenders (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2014).

African American youth under age 18 constitute 17% of all youth under the age of 18. However, African American youth are disproportionately represented among violent crime offenders and victims. For example, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (2014) reports that in 2014 African American youth under age 18 represented 50.8% of youth arrested for murder, 42.7% of youth arrested for aggravated assault, 68.6% of youth arrested for robbery and 33.9% of youth arrested for rape.

The disproportionate representation of African Americans among violent crime offenders and victims is most dramatically illustrated in current homicide data indicating that, for every age range, African American males and females have higher rates of death resulting from homicide than any other racial or ethnic group. In 2010, for instance, Black males, all ages combined, had a homicide rate (8.7/100,000) nearly three times the White male rate (3.3/100,000). The most telling indicator of racial disparities in homicide rates is evident in the disparate rates of Black and White males ages 15–24. The National Center for Health Statistics (2013) reports that in 2010 Black males in that age range had a homicide rate (71/100,000) that was 17 times greater than the rate (4.1/100,000) among White males (National Center for Health Statistics, 2013).

The problem of violence is not limited to African American males; African American females are also disproportionately represented among homicide victims compared to White females. For example, in 2010, Black females, all ages combined, had a homicide rate (5/100,000) two and a half times greater than the homicide rate (1.8/100,000) of White females. Furthermore, among the age range 25–44, in which females are most likely to be murdered, African American females had a homicide rate (7.4/100,000) that was three times greater (2.4/100,000) than that of White females (National Center for Health Statistics, 2013).

African American youth accounted for 16% of American youth under age 18 between 1980 and 2010 but constituted 47% of juvenile homicide victims during this time period (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014). Furthermore, in 2010 nearly half (47%) of juvenile murder victims were black and 47% white. However, given the fact that black youth constituted 17% of the juvenile population in 2010 they were 5 times more likely to be murdered compared to white youth who were underrepresented among juvenile murder victims given their 76% representation among youth in the general population (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014).

**Effective Parenting Practices**

Parents have the primary responsibility of instilling moral values and guidance and providing emotional and economic support for children (Kumpfer & Alvarado, 1998). Research on crime and delinquency consistently reports that parental support has been found to be a protective factor and one of the most powerful predictors of reduced delinquency, drug use, gang involvement
and violent crime offending among youth and particularly African American youth (King et al., 1992). Research on well-functioning families tend to manifest a number of protective factors including: supportive parent child relationships, positive discipline methods, monitoring and supervision, families who advocate for their children and parents who seek information.

**Comprised Parenting- Structural Challenges**

Exposure to adverse structural pressures has been a major factor compromising the capacity of African Americans to parent their children beginning with the slave trade and American slavery (Stampp, 1956). In this section of the paper I have identified three distinct structural challenges that provide a context for compromised parenting in the African American community. These specific challenges include: (1) historical and contemporary patterns of racial discrimination, (2) deindustrialization and globalization, and (3) chronic unemployment.

**Historical and Contemporary Patterns of Racial Discrimination**

Institutional racism and various forms of racial discrimination have functioned to precipitate intergenerational disadvantage among African Americans (Feagin, 2000). According to Feagin (2000: 28) the association between institutional racism and intergenerational disadvantage occurs ... “When black men and women do not have significant access to inherited savings or resources such as good education or important job skills because of blatant or subtle discrimination they cannot prosper like privileged whites, and they and their descendants will likely retain a serious long-lived disadvantage relative to whites.” As such, slavery and Jim Crow segregation have functioned to limit the capacity of African Americans to protect, provide for, and nurture their children (Wilson, 1989). One of the most significant outcomes of intergenerational exposure to institutional racial discrimination (i.e., limited access to education, vocational training, employment, and political empowerment) is racial disparities in household poverty. For example, in 2012, African Americans (27.2%) were nearly three times more likely than were whites (9.7%) to be live in poverty (U. S. Census Bureau, 2012). In addition, African American youth are disproportionately likely to experience poverty compared to white youth. For example, 75% of White children never experience poverty while growing up. In contrast, only 23% of Black children never experience poverty between birth and age 18. Furthermore, exposure to poverty can be very consequential. Children who are poor at birth are significantly more likely to experience poverty as an adult, drop out of high school, and have a teen non-marital birth compared to those children who are not poor at birth (Ratcliff & McKernan, 2010).

**De-industrialization and Globalization**

In addition to race-specific structural challenges in the form of racial discrimination, African American parents’ parenting has been compromised by largely race-neutral transformations in the American economy which, given policies and practices that have blocked access to legitimate opportunities, have more punitive consequences for African Americans. The term deindustrialization refers to a process in which innovations in the modes of manufacturing and production (e.g., the shift from goods-producing to service producing industries, increasing polarization of the marketplace into low-wage and high wage sectors and relocation of manufacturing outside of the inner-city) has led to the loss of significant numbers of low-skill, high wage manufacturing jobs, particularly in the nation’s inner cities and metropolitan areas (Wilson, 1996). The U. S. economy has also been negatively impacted by globalization or the outsourcing of jobs to third world countries that offer American companies access to non-unionized workers willing to accept lower wages than American workers (Wilson, 1996). Deindustrialization and globalization are examples of structural challenges that have contributed to compromised parenting given that race-neutral transformations in the economy have adversely impacted the capacity of lower and working-class African American men and women to secure low skill, high wage manufacturing jobs which provide sufficient wages to support independent living, marriage, and effective parenting. This is evident in that the unemployment rates of African Americans are routinely higher than that of whites.
Chronic Unemployment and Family Life

Historically, Blacks have had persistently higher unemployment rates than other major racial and ethnic groups. According to the U. S. Department of Labor in 2014 African American men (12.2%) had an unemployment rate more than two times that of white men (5.4%). Similarly, in 2014 African American women (10.5%) were two times more likely than were white women (5.2%) to experience unemployment (U. S. Department of Labor, 2015). Furthermore, once unemployed, Blacks are less likely to find jobs and tend to stay unemployed for longer periods of time. Blacks remained unemployed longer than Whites or Hispanics in 2011, with a median duration of unemployment of 27.0 weeks (compared to 19.7 for Whites and 18.5 for Hispanics). Nearly half (49.5 percent) of all unemployed Blacks were unemployed 27 weeks or longer in 2011, compared to 41.7% of unemployed Whites and 39.9% of unemployed Hispanics (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012).

There are many factors that are associated with the high rates of unemployment among African Americans, including deindustrialization and the general availability or lack of availability of jobs, lack of desirable vocational training and racially-biased employment discrimination (Wilson, 1996). Another important factor that may explain some of the slow growth in positive labor force participation for Blacks is that they are more likely to live in economically depressed areas with fewer opportunities for employment. Living in these areas means that Blacks live farther away from jobs and are surrounded by other unemployed persons who are less likely to refer them to jobs. Furthermore, racial disparities in unemployment have been attributed to racial variations in levels of educational attainment. However, the role of educational level in explaining racial variations in unemployment is confounding given that African American unemployment rates are higher than those for Whites at every educational level (U. S. Department of Labor, 2012). For the purposes of this paper two explanations will be highlighted which have implications for compromised parenting: loss of jobs due to 1) deindustrialization and globalization and 2) employment discrimination.

A major consequence of deindustrialization and globalization is the dramatic increase in Black male joblessness since the 1970’s. The transformation of the American economy as a result of innovations in the modes of production and the outsourcing of jobs to low wage countries has led to massive dislocations of American workers and particularly African American men (Wilson, 1996). A second factor that has persistently impacted employment among African Americans is employment discrimination based on race. Studies have found that employers have discriminated against conducting interviews with both black men and women by screening them out of the applicant pool based on the racialized nature of their first names or their hairstyles. Furthermore, there is a significant wage gap that exists between African Americans and whites. African American men employed full time earned on average $653 per week in 2011, 76.3% of the average salary earned by white men. Similarly, black women earn on average $595 per week or 84.6 percent of the average salary earned by white women (U. S. Department of Labor, 2012).

A number of studies have found an association between the high rates of black male joblessness with declining rates of marriage (Wilson, 1996). In addition, the high rates of black make joblessness have also been found to be associated with racial variations in “never married” and “never married parenthood” (Wilson, 1987). In contrast the research indicates that black male employment is positively associated with marriage rates. That is, black men who have stable employment are more likely to marry compared to black men who do not have stable employment (Testa & Krogh, 1995). Furthermore, while the employment status of a man is unrelated to his risk of becoming an unmarried father, employment status is strongly associated with whether young men will marry the mothers of their children (Wilson, 1987, 1996). A national study conducted by Sum and Fogg (1990) found that more than 50% of young black (ages 18-29) with annual earnings of over $20,000 were married in 1987. However, the marriage
ratio declined as income declined. For example, Sum and Fogg (1990) found that among black men with annual earnings less than $20,000, those earning $15,000-$20,000 39% were married, 29% of those earning between $10,000-$15,000 were married, 7% of those earning between $1,000 and $5,000 and only 3% of those reporting no earned income.

In a study designed to uncover the effects of a criminal record on employment hiring decisions, Pager (2002) found that whites without a criminal record (34%) and whites with a criminal record (17%) were more likely to receive a call back for additional interviewing than blacks without a criminal record (14%). Furthermore, whites with a criminal record (17%) were more than three times more likely to receive a call back than blacks with a criminal record (5%).

**Malevolent Public Policy**

Since the inception of America, both as a colony and later as a race and class-biased constitutional democracy, public policy and particularly public policy as codified in law, has been used to subordinate African Americans to a position of inferiority and to correspondingly privilege the White population (Higginbotham, 1978). It was during the colonial era that colonial law was used to perpetuate life-time servitude in contrast to the limited indentured servitude among European indentured servants (Higginbotham, 1996). Two of the most salient judicial decisions that crystallizes the use of law to subordinate African Americans is the decision of the Supreme Court in Dred Scott v. Sanford (1857) and Plessy v. Ferguson. In the Dred Scott decision, the Supreme Court held that an African slave was still a slave even if for a period of time he/she had resided in a free state. In the rationale explaining the decision, Chief Justice Taney explained that when the founders declared their independence from England and made reference to “We the People” this affirmation did not mean the Africans. He goes on further to note... “that Negro has no rights that a white man is bound to respect.” In Plessey v. Ferguson (1896) the court held that separate was equal and that racial discrimination in the operation of public accommodations did not violate the Constitution.

What is significant about the Dred Scott and the Plessy v. Ferguson decisions relative to African American parenting is that these cases represent early efforts to institutionalize depriving African Americans of an opportunity to achieve equal access to opportunity via the conventional means of education, vocational training, and general access to citizenship rights as delineated in the Constitution of the United States. There are two distinct public policies that have emerged in the modern era that function to compromise the capacity of many African Americans to effectively parent their children, including: 1) the selective prosecution of the war on drugs and 2) punitive welfare policy.

**The Selective Prosecution of the War on Drugs**

Since the inception of the War on Drugs in the mid 1970’s punitive efforts (e.g., zero tolerance policing, racial profiling, mandatory minimum prison sentences for drug offenses, habitual offender laws, and the denial of public benefits to individuals convicted of drug violations) to address illegal drug use and drug-related crime have been selectively targeted toward African Americans despite the fact that whites represent the majority of persons arrested for drug violations (Alexander, 2009). In 2014 whites represented 68.9% of the 1,216,255 of people arrested for drug violations, whereas African Americans represented 29% (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2014). Despite the fact that African Americans represent less than 1/3 of persons arrested for drug violations, law enforcement efforts to address the drug problem have been concentrated in disadvantaged African American communities. This is most evident by findings derived from studies of racial profiling which consistently indicate that African Americans and Latinos are much more likely than are whites to experience pedestrian and/or traffic stops based on the assumption that they are more prone than are Whites to be engaging in drug or weapon violations. However, studies of police stop and searches indicate that while Blacks and Latinos are disproportionately stopped and searched they are equally likely or less likely than Whites to be in possession of contraband leading to arrest. For example, in a study of pedestrian stops in New York City it was found that 175,000
police stops were made over a 15-month period. When race of persons stopped was examined it was found that whites represented 12% of persons stopped despite representing 43% of the population. In contrast African Americans represented 50.6% of persons stopped despite representing 25%. What was problematic beyond African Americans being stopped at rates that exceed their representation in the population, was that African Americans were less likely to be arrested for the possession of contraband or other matters (10.5%) compared to 12.6% among whites (New York State Attorney General). What these and other studies suggest is that African Americans are disproportionately targeted by law enforcement based on the assumption that there is an association between race and criminal offending, particularly the commission of drug and weapons violations. What is consequential about racial profiling and stop and frisk practices is that these punitive law enforcement practices that are selectively targeted toward African Americans lead to disproportionate rates of contact with the criminal justice system which has collateral consequences which erode their capacity to parent.

**Incarceration**

A major consequence of the selective prosecution of the War on Drugs is the mass incarceration of African Americans. Given their 12-13% representation in the general population, African Americans are disproportionately represented among persons arrested for most violent and property crimes in the United States. For example, in 2012 African Americans represented 27.8% of the 8 million persons arrested. With respect to selected serious violent and property crimes, African Americans constituted 32% of persons arrested for aggravated assault, 55.9% of persons arrested for robbery, and 51.3% of persons arrested for armed robbery. Regardless of whether the disproportionate representation of African Americans among persons arrested is the result of racial bias in the prosecution of the war on drugs or intentional involvement in criminal behavior (Oliver, 1998; Dunlap & Johnson, & Rath, 1996; Wright & Decker, 1997) African-Americans are disproportionately represented among persons subject to supervision by the criminal justice system. Hence, supervision by the criminal justice system, particularly incarceration compromises the capacity of African American parents to nurture their children to become well-functioning adults.

African-Americans have been disproportionately targeted for drug arrests, drug prosecution and drug offense incarceration. For example, between 1980 and 1997 drug arrests tripled in the US. However, African Americans were over represented among those incarcerated for drug violations, while they constituted only 1/3 of drug violation arrests. Between 1986 and 1996 Whites experienced a 115% (rate 20/100,000) increase in drug convictions. In contrast Blacks experienced an increase of 465% (rate of 279/100,000) (Schilradi, Holman, & Beatty, 2000). Furthermore, African American men and women consistently experience higher rates of incarceration than whites. In 2012, African American men had an incarceration rate (2841/per 100,000) that was nearly 7 times greater than the incarceration rate of white males (436/per 100,000). Similarly, African American women (113/per 100,000) experienced an incarceration rate more than 2 times greater than that of white women (49/per 100,000) (Carson & Golinelli, 2013).

Parents held in the nation’s state and federal prisons reported having an estimated 1.7 million children. Of the estimated 74 million children in the U. S. under age 18 on July 2007 2.3% had an incarcerated parent. African American children were nearly 7 times more likely (6.7%) than white children (0.9%) to have an incarcerated parent. African Americans are disproportionately represented among incarcerated parents. For example, more than 4 in 10 incarcerated fathers are African American compared to 3 in 10 incarcerated white fathers (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). While White women represent a plurality of incarcerated mothers, African American women are disproportionately represented among incarcerated mothers (28%) given their representation in the general population. Of the estimated 147, 400 children with a mother in prison, about 45% had a white mother, 30% had a black mother and 19% had a
Hispanic mother (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). The incarceration of a mother is more likely to have a direct impact on a child given that incarcerated mothers are more likely (77%) than men (26%) to report that they had provided most of the daily care for their children (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008).

Incarceration often compounds compromised parenting that pre-dated an individual’s incarceration. In her study of incarcerated mothers, Enos (2001) found that many of the women she interviewed self-reported that they had engaged in a broad range of behavior which had eroded their capacity to provide effective parenting including: child neglect, child abuse, and exposing their children to adults engaged in illegal drug use and drug-related crime. Many of the respondents indicated that they had lost custody of their children to family members or the formal child welfare system, which are indicators of compromised parenting (Enos, 2001).

Imprisonment erodes parents’ capacity to parent their children beyond the enforced separation of parents and children. All prisons have policies that limit the number of visits and who can be on an inmate’s visitor’s list. In most states, state prisons are located great distances from the large metropolitan centers in which the overwhelming majority of African Americans reside. Most parents in state (62%) prison were being held at correctional facilities located more than 100 miles from their last place of residence prior to incarceration (Mumola, 2000). For parents in federal prison, 43% were held more than 500 miles from their last place of residence, compared with 11% of those in state facilities (Mumola, 2000).

The War on Drugs has been implemented in a manner that disproportionately has an adverse impact on African Americans not only on the front end including an emphasis on targeting African Americans for arrest through the use of racial profiling and the biased and discretionary application of punitive sentencing schemes but also post incarceration through the enactment of federal and state laws which serve to hinder successful prisoner reentry. A major example of this is the enactment of federal laws designed to impose gratuitous punishment against individuals convicted of drug violations by denying federal Pell grants (i.e., funds to pursue higher education during and following incarceration), laws prohibiting individuals convicted of drug violations from being able to secure public housing or to reside with someone, including a family member who has a public housing lease and federal laws which seek to terminate parental rights in circumstances in which a child of an incarcerated parent has been in foster care for 15 of the last 22 months (Allard, 2002).

**Punitive Welfare Policy**

The provision of public assistance to the poor in the United States is often uninformed by a consideration of the manner in which institutional racism, class bias, and structural shifts in the economy contribute to poverty. Rather, since the 1970’s public welfare policy has been informed and shaped by a punitive characterization of the poor as being undeserving of public aid as a result of their individual failings, that is, lack of effort, lack of morals, poor work skills, (Wilson, 1987& 1996). Consequently, according to Wilson (1996: 155), “Beliefs that associate joblessness and poverty with individual shortcomings do not generate strong support for social programs intended to end inequality.”

A major example of how racial bias and punitiveness has informed public policy is in the area of welfare reform. One of the punitive policies emerging from welfare reform during the 1990’s involved converting Aid for Dependent Children (AFDC) cash payments to discretionary block grants administered by the states. One of the consequences of this change was that the AFDC benefit, now known as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), was not sufficient to cover the costs of decent and safe housing. In most metropolitan localities the public assistance benefit is less than the fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment. Another example of a punitive public assistance policy was the Personal Responsibility Act in which House Republicans sought to terminate eligibility for cash benefits and public sector jobs for mothers who accumulated five years of AFDC receipt over their lifetime, regardless of whether or not they could find work. Further, the bill would prohibit the provision of
cash assistance to poor children whose mothers were under the age of 18 and would eliminate any increases in AFDC benefits to women who had more than two children while receiving public assistance. Even for those who receive it, TANF's cash value is now very low. In no state does TANF cash benefit alone bring a family up to even half the poverty line. In 32 states and the District of Columbia, TANF for a family of three with no other income is now below 30% of the poverty threshold (Edin & Shaeffer, 2015). However, a comprehensive study of the effects of welfare reform suggests that most of the reforms that were introduced in the 1990's had positive effects on employment and earnings. Moreover, it appears, that despite the vitriolic characterization of the poor and particularly the Black poor during the time in which welfare was being debated by Congress, it appears that welfare reform has been responsible for a portion of the increase in work and earnings among single mothers (Grogger, Karoly, & Klerman, 2002).

Comprised Parenting-Individual and Problematic Cultural Adaptations

Exposure to adverse structural pressures is but one source of compromised parenting in the African American community. Another major source of compromised parenting impacting the capacity of African Americans to parent their children includes (1) problematic enactments of manhood and womanhood and (2) teenage parenting and premature childbirth.

Problematic Enactments of Manhood and Womanhood

The internalization and enactment of problematic constructions of manhood and womanhood function to erode the capacity to effectively parent. Since the 1960’s an evolving body of ethnographic research examining the lives and lifestyles of African Americans who reside in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods has been published (Liebow, 1967; Hamnerz, 1969; Rainwater, 1972; Stack, 1974). One of the consistent findings in the urban ethnographic research is that exposure to adverse structural pressures (e.g., institutional racism, racial discrimination obstructing access to education and employment, political disenfranchisement, and more recently deindustrialization and globalization) have provided a catalyst, context, and rationale for some African Americans to adopt and enact problematic manhood and womanhood identities. For some lower and working class African American men this has involved active pursuit of self and social esteem through enactment of roles which place emphasis on toughness and sexual conquest in a manner that is uniquely ritualized by African Americans. In the modern era, African American youth popular culture has emerged as a primary site for exposure to and dissemination of problematic constructions of masculinity (Kitwana, 2002; Kurbin, 2005). Most common among the problematic manhood roles that are salient in African American youth popular culture are the gangsta-thug, the player, and the party dude. These specific constructions of manhood place a great deal of emphasis on the representation of toughness, sexual conquest, materialism, and obsession with the pursuit of fun. These roles tend to downplay the importance of education, vocational training, legitimate employment, marriage and commitment to providing for and nurturing one’s children (Madhubuti, 1990; Kitwana, 2002; Oliver, 2007). In addition, adoption and enactment of these roles increase the potential for detachment from children, relationship conflict, and involvement in violent confrontations with both men and women (Oliver, 1998; Kitwana, 2002; West, 2008). African American youth popular culture, rap and hip hop often functions as a major site for the construction and dissemination of narrowly construed stereotypical images of young African American women (Pough, 2004; West, 2008). While there is diversity in the types of female images represented in hip hop, including positive images of Black women as assertive, attractive, independent, and deserving of a man’s respect (Roberts, 1994), what is problematic is the omnipresent portrayals of young Black women as hyper-sexed, promiscuous, devious, violent, and willing to do anything to gain access to money and other material resources (Pough, 2004; West, 2008). Over the course of the past twenty years portrayals of Black women by many male artists and some female artists in the lyrical content,
video images, and the public personas of some female artists in gangsta rap, have functioned to perpetuate and reformulate historic black female racial stereotypes (e.g., Jezebel and Sapphire) and to reformulate and promote new stereotypes (e.g., “skeesers,” “chickenheads,” “bitches,” gold-diggers, strippers, and “ride-and-die chicks,”) that render African American girls and women vulnerable to acts of disrespect, aggression, and violence perpetrated by males who have internalized misogynistic messages that provide justifications for engaging in acts of violence against African American girls and women (Pough, 2004; West, 2008).

It would be academically negligent to not acknowledge that throughout the evolution of hip hop and rap that some female artists have promoted a positive counter narrative with regard to the construction of Black female identity and role behavior to express their independence, to have their voices and issues heard, and to present personas of womanhood that have more functional utility for young Black females to emulate and to serve as a foundation for effective parenting (Pough, 2004).

**Teenage Pregnancy and Premature Childbirth**

Giving birth to a child as a teenager is not optimal behavior and preparation for parenting. Teen pregnancy has been found to be associated with termination of education, under-employment, chronic poverty, residence in areas of concentrated poverty, and dating violence (Wilson, 1987, 1996). Teen birth rates vary by race. For example, in 2014, African American teens had a teen birth rate (34.9 per 1,000) two times that of white teens (17.3 per 1,000) (Hamilton, et al., 2015). Furthermore, the Office of Adolescent Health (2016) estimates that 16% of African American adolescent females will give birth by their 20th birthday compared to 8% of white adolescent females. It is important to note that since 2007 the teen birth rate for African American females has declined by 44% compared to 36% among whites. There are several factors that decrease and/or increase the risk of teen births that have significant implications for African Americans. For example, school involvement and commitment to academic success reduces the risk of experiencing teen births. In addition, residence in middle income communities characterized by high levels of employment has been found to reduce the risk of teen births. It has been found that adolescents who are enrolled in school and engaged in learning (including participating in after-school activities, having positive attitudes toward school, and performing well educationally) are less likely to have or to father a baby (Hoffman & Maynard, 2008). In contrast, there are several factors related to type and quality of parenting that have implications for experiencing teen births. For example, adolescents with mothers who gave birth as teens and/or whose mothers have only a high school diploma are more likely to have a baby before age 20 than are teens whose mothers were older at their birth or who attended at least some college. Second, adolescents who reside in low income neighborhoods or neighborhoods experiencing concentrated poverty along with high rates of unemployment experience higher rates of teen births than adolescents who reside in middle income neighborhoods and high rates of employment (Hoffman & Maynard, 2008).

Furthermore, children born to teenagers face a number of challenges. Such children are more likely to have poorer educational, behavioral, and health outcomes throughout their lives, compared with children born to older parents (Hoffman & Maynard, 2008). In addition, some researchers have examined the relationship between type of family household and school attendance. This research indicates that there is a positive association between residence in a single parent family and poor school attendance. Ferrell (2009) found in his study of family composition and student academic success, attendance, and suspension that the highest number of absences was found in the single-parent households. The highest number of tardys was found in the single-parent households. In addition, fatherless children are at greater risk of drug and alcohol abuse (Hoffman & Maynard, 2008).

Teenage pregnancy also functions as a major pathway leading to the high rates of single-parent families among African Americans. For example, in 1958, about 14% of births to female’s ages 15–19 were to unmarried women. By 2010, that proportion grew to 88% (Martin, et al., 2010). While single-parent families are not inherently
problematic, single-parent families must often confront challenges that erode the capacity to effectively parent children. What we know is that there are significant racial variations in children residing in single-parent families. The U. S. Census Bureau (2016) reports that in 2014 African American children (66%) were more than 2 ½ times more likely than non-Hispanic white children (25%) to reside in households headed by single-parents. What is significant and also has implications with regard to parenting is that 50% of African American children reside in single-mother households compared to 23% of all youth nationally and 18% of white children. Furthermore, in 2010, two-thirds (66%) of U.S. children under age 18 lived with married parents. This proportion was highest for Asian (84%) and white non-Hispanic (75%) children, lower for Hispanic children (61%), and lowest for black children (35%). Most children who live in single-parent families reside with their mothers. Family structure is associated with labor force participation. For example, of all children living with two parents, 97% had at least one parent in the labor force, and 61% had both parents in the labor force. Among children living in single-parent households, those living with their fathers only were more likely to have the parent in the labor force than those living with their mothers only (86% vs. 74%). According to the U. S. Census Bureau (2015) national census data for 2014 African American children were nearly 3 times more likely (38%) to experience poverty compared to white children (13%). Hence, the economic well-being of children is related to family structure. In 2010, 22% of all children under age 18 lived below the poverty level. However, children living in two-parent families were less likely to live in poverty (13%) than children living with only their fathers (22%), only their mothers (43%), or neither parent (43%) (Martin, 2010). Family structure is also related to the proportion of children in households receiving public assistance or food stamps. Overall, 4% of children in 2010 lived in households receiving public assistance and 19% lived in households receiving food stamps. However, in 2010 children residing in single-parent mother only households were more likely to receive food stamps (43% vs. 11%) or public assistance (10% vs. 2%) than children residing in two-parent families.

**Substance Abuse, Child Abuse, and Neglect**

Substance abuse, including the chronic use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs during pregnancy has been found to lead to impaired neurological functioning in infant children and toddlers. Signs of neurological functioning include poor motor functioning, attention deficit disorders, and erosion of cognitive functioning. As such, compromised neurological functioning erodes the capacity of infants and toddlers to communicate their needs and to regulate their emotions and behavior (Olds, Hill, & Rumsey, 1988). Parental substance abuse has also been found to be associated with child neglect and abuse, which subsequently increases children’s risk of academic under-achievement and persistent behavioral problems that lead to delinquency, adult criminal behavior, anti-personality disorder, and violent crime and criminal trajectories in adulthood (Olds, Hill, & Rumsey, 1998; Maxwell & Widom, 1996). Exposure to parental substance abuse, particularly illegal drug use increases children’s exposure to adult criminality such as theft, illegal drug possession, drug trafficking, prostitution, intimate partner violence and acts of community violence (Dunlap, Johnson, & Rath, 1996). According to Dunlap and colleagues (1996) in substance abusing families, parental preoccupation with the acquisition and consumption of drugs diminishes the time that parents have to address the needs of their children. Parental substance abuse has been repeatedly associated with child neglect, family isolation, child abuse, child sexual abuse, inadequate supervision of children, and parental modeling of aggressive and violent behavior. Children exposed to parental substance abuse have limited exposure to positive role models and adult supervision most likely to encourage them to adopt cultural values, behavior patterns, and skills necessary to effectively enact conventional roles. Parental substance abuse promotes family isolation which in terms increases children’s risk for abuse and neglect (Dunlap, Johnson & Rath, 1996). Furthermore, exposure to parental substance abuse and related family disruptions are
likely to lead youth to spend an inordinate amount of time participating in unstructured and unsupervised youth peer groups which has been found to be associated with delinquency, gang membership and violent crime (e.g., robbery, aggravated assault and firearm violence) (Curry & Decker, 1998; Wilkinson, 2003).

**Structural Challenges, Compromised Parenting, and Community Violence**

The central premise of this paper is that compromised parenting, regardless of whether it is precipitated by race-based structural challenges, by problematic individual behavior and/or cultural adaptations, undermine community social organization and the quality of parenting that is necessary to deter youth from participation in high risk activities commonly associated with violent crime offending and victimization. Compromised parenting places many African American youth, particularly those who grow up in communities and neighborhoods adversely impacted by high rates of unemployment, concentrated poverty, and over-policing, in the position of having to negotiate the transition from adolescence to adulthood without adequate guidance, support, and supervision from their parents or other caretakers. In neighborhoods and communities where compromised parenting is an entrenched feature of daily life the closure and connectedness of informal and formal social networks is eroded. That is, there is an inadequate system involving parents, grandparents, extended family, other neighborhood families, community institutions, and children that is characterized by an extensive set of obligations, expectations, and social networks which function to facilitate the control and supervision of children and adolescents (Coleman, 1990). In contrast, when parental and family closure is present through the relationship of a child to two adults or more whose own relationships transcend the child’s immediate household (e.g., in extended family, fictive-kinship, friendships, and other forms of routine acquaintance) the adults have the potential to observe the child’s behavior in different settings, communicate with each other about the child/children embedded in mutual networks and establish normative expectations that will be collectively reinforced by adults invested in the child’s growth and development (Coleman, 1990).

Furthermore, as a result of the dismantling of overt racial discrimination, advantaged working and middle-class African Americans have had increased opportunities post the early seventies to leave racial ghettos and pursue housing options in more well to do neighborhoods. What is consequential about the geographical exodus of economically advantaged black families from inner city neighborhoods is that this social process has removed an important source of social influence with regard to how to effectively enact functional parenting and how to organize family life in a manner that encourages positive outcomes (e.g., academic achievement, lack of contact with the juvenile and criminal justice system, and refraining from problematic substance use (Wilson, 1987). Hence, the basic institutions of a neighborhood or community (e.g., families, religious institutions, schools, community centers, etc.) are more likely to remain inadequate if the core of their orientation and support comes from economically disadvantaged residents and parents whose parenting is compromised.

Given the lack of connectedness of social networks in disadvantaged and distressed neighborhoods, youth exposed to compromised parenting are at increased risk of experiencing adolescent to adult transitions in which they are influenced by an inordinate amount of time spent engaging in unstructured peer group activities situated in various street corner settings. Hence, African American youth and young adults who have been reared in communities adversely impacted by racially biased structural challenges and malevolent public policies that erode the capacity of parents to parent in an effective manner are at increased risk of seeking emotional support, protection, and social esteem from street-oriented peers and social networks (Decker, & Van Winkle, 1996). As noted by Perkins (1975), the streets, for some African American youth and young adults has emerged as a significant community institution, often functioning as an alternative site of gender socialization (Oliver, 2006). Furthermore, internalization of “the code of the streets” (i.e., values and norms that regulate
interpersonal interaction in street-corner settings) and enactment of street-based manhood and womanhood roles that are valued in the streets places individuals at-risk for violent crime offending and/or victimization (Oliver, 1998; Wilkinson, 2003; Jones, 2010). Lacking access to conventional means of upward mobility and access to material goods, the streets and street-based means (e.g. property crime, drug trafficking, & robbery) are often perceived by disadvantaged African American youth and young adults as viable means to enact individual and collective resistance in response to blocked access to success and traditional means of achieving status (Jones, 2010; Rios, 2011).

**Confronting Compromised Parenting: An Empowerment Agenda**

When asked what should be the focus of the Human Rights Movement, Paul Robeson said... “that the battle front is everywhere and there is no sheltered rear.” Essentially, he framed the problem as having multiple causes and therefore required multiple solutions. A similar approach is required if we are to be proactive in our approach to develop and implement prevention and intervention strategies designed to strengthen African American parenting. As such, what is needed at the very minimum is an empowerment agenda that includes an emphasis on the development of structural and cultural interventions.

**Structural Strategies**

- Pressuring local, state, and federal political leaders to fund employment opportunities targeted toward African American youth who reside in areas of concentrated poverty including funding for summer and year round public and private sector employment opportunities.
- Pressuring local, state, and federal political leaders to train African Americans for high growth jobs in emerging industries (e.g., industrial maintenance, information technology, transportation, logistics, and allied health care professions.
- Pressuring local, state, and federal political leaders to require that the U. S. Department of Labor’s Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs enforce affirmative action and non-discrimination obligations of federal contractors and subcontractors. This is important because one-in-four American workers is employed by a company that does business with the Federal government.

- Pressure local, state, and federal political leaders to support President Obama’s proposal to target Low-Income, Long-Term Unemployed in order to connect long-term unemployed, low-income adults to subsidized employment and work-based training opportunities.
- Pressure local, state, and federal political leaders to support President Obama’s plan to fund efforts to train inner city residents in construction skills that can revitalize Distressed Urban Neighborhoods through grants that primarily fund the preservation, rehabilitation and transformation of HUD-assisted public and privately-owned multifamily housing.
- Pressure local mayors to establish an Office of Community Reentry to coordinate the delivery of reentry services at the local level (e.g., housing assistance, vocational training, substance abuse and mental health referrals, and family reunification) directed toward individuals who are transitioning from prison to the community.

**Culturally-Focused Personal and Community Development Strategies**

While structural reform is essential to interrupt the adverse manner in which the political, economic, and macro-culture functions to compromise African American parenting, African Americans must not assume that elected officials will work to dismantle a system which privileges large sectors of the majority community when significant numbers of African Americans experience high rates of school suspension and expulsion, lack marketable vocational training, chronic unemployment, concentrated poverty and incarceration in both juvenile and adult
correctional institutions. As such, it is critical that African Americans prioritize organizing indigenous community resources to facilitate intervention and change to disrupt problematic individual and cultural practices that contribute to compromised parenting. Listed below is a listing of first steps that should be considered.

- Organize indigenous community resources (e.g., religious institutions, community centers, neighborhood associations, and civic organizations) and community partners (e.g., public and private agencies) to implement a broad range of community-based initiatives designed to enhance parenting skills and to strengthen families. Examples of such programs include best practice and culturally sensitive parenting education models, school and community-based teen pregnancy prevention programs which target adolescent boys and girls, prenatal and early childhood nurse home visitation programs, and responsible fatherhood programs.

- Organize the community to prioritize efforts to confront and eliminate school-based zero tolerance disciplinary practices which result in disproportionate rates of school suspension and expulsion among African American youth. This effort should also encourage and organize African Americans to become more engaged in the operation and support of public schools.

- Organize a community-based campaign to speak out against and boycott popular culture artists who persist in depicting Black men as thugs and players and Black women as sex objects available for exploitation.

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Community Parenting: 
Recreating an Approach to the 
Success of Black Youth

Jacqualyn F. Green, Ph.D. 
Green Enterprizes

Abstract:

It is not unusual to hear discussions, particularly from African American elders, regarding how things have changed. Older adults often refer to the increased level of difficulty in attempting to raise children and grandchildren in a safe environment that nurtures and motivates young people.

How can positive values be instilled considering the strong influences of the media, peers, and the stance taken by Child Protective Services, should parents attempt to punish or spank a child? Safety concerns have been heightened due to increased violence on the streets, in homes, and even in schools. Greater mobility in families has often resulted in family members living across town or in different states, altogether. These changes have compromised the level of support available to Black youth. How do these differences affect African American children? More importantly, what is needed today to ensure the positive socialization of Black youth? In Africa, the village provided vital tools for survival and successful, independent, adulthood. For many years, in the United States, the African American village fulfilled a similar function. With fragmentation of the village and numerous detrimental influences confronting Black children, how do we re-energize and mobilize the community?

This article proposes to accomplish three objectives: (1) to review positive narratives regarding successful African American youth and adults, (2) to identify key elements, which contribute to the success of young black men and women, and (3) to offer recommendations for engaging “community parents” in an effort to re-invent needed supports, guidance and direction for young people.

Introduction

“Things have changed,” is a statement that is frequently heard, particularly when older adults talk about the state of the world and the state of African American youth. Black Grandparents are more likely than their white counterparts to be heavily involved in the care of grandchildren (Simmons & Dye, 2003). A MetLife survey (MetLife, 2014) on grand parenting found that approximately thirty-six percent (36%) of the African American grandparents participated in the daily caregiving of their grandchildren. Another sixteen percent (16%) of Black grandparents provide care several times per week. Many (62%) are involved in the care of one or two grandchildren.

Numerous phenomena contribute to the increased level of involvement of grandparents. Several causative factors were cited in the winter 2014 edition of the Black Child Journal: The Black Child Family and the Community. These include single parenthood, incarceration rates, HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, and mental illness. In addition, unemployment, underemployment or part-time employment may interfere with the ability of the parents to adequately care for children (Green, 2014). With the growing role that African American grandparents have, they are in a prime position to provide needed supports to their grandchildren. For these older adults, however, the challenges of today may appear daunting. Influences such as social media, increased violence, and the involvement of social agencies in determining how parenting should be conducted, are all factors influencing interactions between youth and older adults. The availability of both financial and family resources may also be limited. Grandparents may have fewer financial and emotional resources to address the difficulties and situations faced by young people today. This reality suggests that a wider net needs to be cast to provide youth with needed support. Community
parenting is a concept that may be responsive to the complex situations that young people face each day.

**African American Successes**

When attempting to understand an issue, the tendency is often to spend an inordinate amount of time examining the problem. Subsequently, if time allows, a brief period might be allocated to solution finding. Rather than to focus on the problem, this author, in contrast, identifies successes in the African American community and highlights a few successful youth and adults in an attempt to glean the learnings from such success for application to a larger community.

**Substance Abuse**

Ninety percent (90%) of African Americans 12 or older do not use illicit drugs and ninety-three percent (93%) do not have substance abuse issues (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2014)).

**Fathers in Families**

Most Black fathers who live with their children (70%) are involved in the daily caregiving activities. Eighty percent (80%) of black fathers living with their children read to young children. African American dads are more likely than other fathers to assist with bathing, dressing, diapering, and toilet training of their offspring (U.S. Health and Human Services, 2013). According to the NCAA, Black fathers had the highest rates of helping children with after school activities and homework than fathers of any other race (Center for American Progress, 2015).

**Business**

Significant growth has occurred among black business owners. In 2007, Census Bureau Deputy Director Thomas Mesenbourg reported that “Black-owned businesses continued to be one of the fastest growing segments of our economy, showing rapid growth in both the number of businesses and total sales during this time period.” At that time, Black owned businesses approached nearly two million. Black business growth has continued, resulting in a 35% increase to 2.6 million in 2012. (United States Census Bureau, Survey of Business Owners, 2007, 2012). African American women owned businesses grew by three hundred and twenty-two percent (322%). Black women are the fastest growing entrepreneurial group in the United States (Haimerl, 2015).

**Education**

African Americans have made substantial educational gains. Most African Americans (80%) over the age of 25 have graduated from high school. Between 1992 and 2011, the number of African American college students nearly doubled. While only two million were enrolled in college in 1992, by 2011, approximately four million African American students were in college. The number of Blacks with a Bachelor’s degree, increased from 17% in 2000 to 19% in 2011 (US Bureau of the Census, 2011).

**Other**

Social media may be responsible for an increase in awareness of criminal behavior. This may contribute to a tendency to believe that crime is increasing. In actuality, however, crimes are decreasing against African Americans. Fewer blacks are victims of violent crimes. While the United States seems focused on the “right to bear arms”, fewer black high school students are carrying weapons (Harrell, 2007). Bureau of Justice Statistics)

Another positive outcome is tied to the Affordable Care Act introduced by President Barack Obama. At this time, more African Americans have health care than in the past. This change has numerous implications for the state of individual health. Access to health care allows one to implement a preventative approach, may contribute to a more positive health status and
lend to a greater potential for positive outcomes and longevity.

Selected African American Youth Successes

One method of diminishing a people’s worth is to focus upon the problems and to overlook or downplay the successes. Many African American successes have been ignored, while difficulties within the black community are magnified. Children, as well as adults, need to hear of the successes within their community and among their people. A few selected success stories of youth and adults are shared here.

Medical

Tony Hansberry has accomplished an amazing feat. Tony Hansberry II, age fourteen (14) has developed a technique for reducing complications that might arise in hysterectomy surgery. He attends Darnell-Cookman medical magnet school in Florida. Hansberry suggests that success is not difficult if you have a passion for what you are doing (Successful Black Youth, 2012).

Education

Stephen Stafford is a thirteen (13) year old sophomore at Morehouse college. He is currently majoring in pre-med, computer science and mathematics. This astute young man suggests that students are usually initially interested in school and have the ability to learn, but many are not challenged and consequently lose interest (Successful Black Youth, 2012).

Literature

Chental-Song Bembry was a fourteen (14) year old South Brunswick High School Student in New Jersey when she began her writing career. She is an author of a series of books called the Honeybunch Kids. Now, at age eighteen (18), she has been quite successful and provides tips to other youth regarding how to get started in the entrepreneurial business of book writing and sales (Black Enterprise, 2011).

Aviation

Jonathan Strickland and Kelly Aryadiki, both sixteen (16) years of age, are trendsetters in the aviation field. Jonathan was the youngest black pilot to fly solo with a helicopter and six airplanes in Canada. He is also the youngest black pilot to fly a helicopter internationally. Kelly Aryadiki, is the youngest black female to solo four airplanes on the same day (Successful Black Youth, 2012).

Business

Leanna Archer, was only nine (9) years old when she founded a hair care line. She capitalized upon her great grandmother’s recipes and products used by the family. Her products have been quite successful and she has also expanded her business to become a motivational speaker. At age 18, today she is involved in both philanthropic and humanitarian efforts (Successful Black Youth, 2012).

Selected African American Adult Successes

Athletics, Sales

Chris Brewer, fifty-two (52), a prior Broncos football player currently works as a regional sales director with ESPN. He often shares his life experiences with young people. He describes failure as part of the game and states that success depends upon one’s learning from the failures that occur. This important message may assist students who might otherwise feel that failure is final and that their dreams may be over, due to one mistake (McGhee, 2014).

Law

Raymond Dean Jones, is a sixty-eight-year-old (68) graduate of Harvard University. During his judicial career, he served fifteen years as a judge on the Colorado Court of Appeals. He acknowledges that throughout his time on the bench, he primarily encountered people who made poor choices. His message to youth is to understand that the decision by the court was “not an end but an opportunity.” Those in his court
room would have a choice, in the future, for a new beginning on a positive path (McGhee, 2014).

**Sales, Media**

Jim “Daddio” Walker, seventy (74), was a general manager at a Denver radio station for seventeen (17) years. He acknowledges that he was told that he could never own a radio station. His message about being led by your dreams and not letting others discourage you is one that he shares with youth. Prior to his career at the KDKO radio station, he worked in sales (McGhee, 2014).

**Business**

Ephren Taylor, twenty-eight (28), started or acquired over 100 businesses in his career. Poverty was a motivator for Ephren. He began to demonstrate his talents, when at age twelve, he designed a videogame. His parents could not afford to buy videogames. His accomplishments include being the youngest African American CEO of a publicly traded company, a Wall Street Journal Best Selling Author of “Creating Success from the Inside Out”, and the youngest regular contributor to Fox Business News Network. Taylor was named as one of the top “ten people making a global difference “by the Michigan Chronicle. He, too, believes that setbacks are part of the journey to success (Successful Black Youth, 2012).

**Science**

The civil rights movement influenced sixty-nine-year-old (69) Freddie Dixon to strive for success. She is chairman of the department of Biology and Environmental Science at the University of the District of Columbia. Dr. Dixon attributes her success to strong support systems, positive role models, and mentoring experiences. Although it took some time for Dr. Dixon to attain the occupational fit that she desired, her patience paid off. She continues to motivate and mentor young scientists (Jordan, 2006).

**Entrepreneur**

Danielle Smith age thirty-five (35) was inspired to begin her business when she was unable to find a cleaning service willing to work in her hometown of Detroit. She began “Detroit Maid” in 2013. She experienced numerous ups and downs during her journey into entrepreneurship. Her parents’ restaurateur skills and an organization called Build Institute helped her to launch her endeavor. Using her success, she has been able to partner with homeless services to help those who are transitioning to get a fresh start in a clean home with essential supplies.

**Author, Motivational Speaker**

Lucinda Cross age thirty-eight (38) is a writer and public speaker, who has turned her difficulty with the law into a foundation for growth and inspiration. At age eighteen (18) Lucinda was sentenced to the federal penitentiary for nearly five (5) years. During her speaking engagements, she addresses the mental strain of solitary confinement and the impact of institutionalization. She uses her mother’s words “Do not let your environment shape who you are” in her message to youth and young women. Her goal is to teach women how to benefit from personal experiences and tap into their gifts (Cross, 2014).

**What contributes to black youth success?**

**Affirming Positive Values**

Demonstrating and articulating positive values is an important contributor to youth success. Travis Reginald made it to Yale despite the odds. Born into a single family by a teen mom, he attributes his success to his mother’s value of education. That value inspired Travis to read incessantly. (Reginald, 2013). Parental values, as well as those of significant adults can shape the life trajectory of a young person. Positive or negative values can alter the course of the youth. Values could include a myriad of categories from religion, food, substance abuse to education, hobbies, money, and relationships.
Home Schooling

Dr. Juwanza Kunjufu (2005) found that students who were home schooled averaged approximately 30% to 40% higher on test scores than those in public school. Typical home school test scores approached 77 in math and 82 in English. Dr. Kunjufu attributed this discrepancy to two primary characteristics. He cited expectations and love as critical components of student success. Dr. Kunjufu indicated that students in public school have reported feeling stereotyped as lacking the necessary academic skills. Some students feel tolerated, but not accepted. African American students tend to be relational, which suggests that the quality of the student-teacher interaction may contribute to student performance (Crossman, 2014).

Self Esteem & Messages Received

Young people are affected by the messages that they receive about themselves. These messages might come from parents, friends, teachers or others. Youth and adults often hone in on the negative messages received, despite the number of positive messages that might have been given during the same time frame. A study conducted by Constantine and Blackmon (2002) found that parental racial socialization messages which reflected both cultural knowledge and pride were positively associated with the self-esteem of Black youth.

Self-Esteem & Knowledge of Cultural History

Self-esteem and self-confidence are often shaped by what people are told about themselves and their history. Many African American youth experience a loss of self-esteem during the third or fourth grade, when students begin to study what is referred to as “Black History.” Black History month typically begins with tales about the enslaved Africans on plantations in the United States. This is not Black history; rather, this is United States slave history! Black history would include the many accomplishments on the continent of Africa, which preceded the kidnapping of the enslaved Africans as well as contributions of African Americans in the United States.

Self-Esteem and Media Images

Television and movie images often present African Americans as buffoons. The number of black comedies on television and on the big screen far exceeds the amount of shows that portray positive black family images or programs that provide either enlightening or uplifting messages regarding African American people. Burrell (2010) describes the lack of positive television shows in the following manner: “black relationships and families are seen as hopelessly at odds, dysfunctional, violent and unsubstantial.” These perceptions can be altered if young people do not view such shows or do not view them alone. Joint television viewing offers an opportunity for dialogue regarding what may be correct, incorrect or stereotypical.

Spirituality

Religion refers to belief in God and a formal system of worship and a doctrine. Church members make a commitment to practice a particular belief system, participate in ceremonies and observe rules and attend religious services (Webster, 2011). To quote Emplen (1992) “Spirituality refers to the propensity to make meaning through a sense of relatedness to dimensions that transcend the self in such a way that empowers and does not devalue the individual. This relatedness may be experienced intrapersonally (as a connectedness within oneself) interpersonally (in the context of others and the natural environment) and transpersonally (referring to a sense of relatedness to the unseen, God, or power greater than self and ordinary resources).” Religion and spirituality play important roles in the lives of African Americans. Spirituality is often a source of strength when addressing relationship problems or personal challenges (Lietecq, 2007). Spirituality is a particularly helpful tool in dealing with intense emotions of anger, sadness or even happiness. Spirituality can provide a sense of hope and peace.
Nearly ninety percent (90%) of African Americans indicate that religion is very important to them and identify a religious affiliation (Pew Center, 2009). Age disparity exists in religious affiliation. While nearly twenty percent (20%) of African Americans thirty (30) years of age and under are unaffiliated, only seven percent (7%) of those sixty-five and over (65+) are unaffiliated. Among those who report being unaffiliated, religion is identified as very important to them. Nearly eighty percent (80%) report daily prayer (Pew Center, 2009).

Most African Americans from eighteen to sixty-five and up (18-65+) belong to historically Black Protestant churches (Pew Landscape study, 2008). Sixty percent (60%) of African Americans with high school diplomas and sixty-three percent (63%) of those who have not graduated from high school tend to belong to Historically Black Protestant Churches. Black college graduates participate in Historically Black churches as a slightly lower rate of fifty-three percent (53%). Religion refers to belief in God and a formal system of worship and a doctrine. Church members make a commitment to practice a particular belief system and attend religious services.

Many grandparents view their role as supporting religious or spiritual practices in young people. An AARP study (Bittner, 2012) found that eighty percent (80%) of African American grandparents identified spirituality/religion as primary in their role with youth in their family. Young people with a firm grasp of faith, connection with God, or understanding about the creator or a Higher Power may have added tools in dealing with stress, conflict, or life’s challenges. K.V. Cook (2000) found that youth who viewed church as central to their lives, particularly those churches with multiple functions, tended to be less stressed and exhibited fewer psychological problems. The black church plays numerous significant roles within the African American community. The black church is a valued entity of the community. The church may provide elements of socialization, value transmission, role modeling and may offer life lessons. Churches often are filled with older adults; however, the values shared are often passed down to the youth. This transmission of values makes the church a logical partner in community parenting.

Racial Identity

Often young people and adults are put off by being associated with anything “African.” This is possibly associated with both the negative and primitive images of the continent. Pictures of starving babies and huts are presented as representative of the continent. Africa, however, has a variety of structures, from huts to mansions, much like the United States. However, the mansions in Africa are not shown on TV. Many remain unaware that African Americans come from a long line of powerful and skilled people. The systems of science, mathematics, architecture, astrology, philosophy, medicine, and religion, originated in Kemet (Egypt). As Kemet was the cradle of civilization, Greeks, Persians, Arabs, British, Romans, and others came to the continent of Africa to study at the feet of those knowledgeable people (Browder, 1992; James, 2002). The continent was raped and ravaged by these invaders, who then claimed the stolen legacy. Youth armed with this information may feel more positive about themselves and their potential.

Coping Mechanisms

African American youth are faced with a multitude of stressors. These may come from home, school, the community, or peers. Stressors are varied and complex and may be financially based, racially based, internal or external. Stressors may be ongoing or short-term. They may also be manifested in intense or subtle ways. How students cope with stressors is related to both self-esteem and success. A recent study conducted by Blackmon, Coyle, Davenport, Owens, & Sparrow, (2015) found that African American youth use unique coping strategies that distinguish them from other ethnic groups. The
researchers learned that previous racial socialization messages encouraging cross racial interactions were typically associated with spirituality and group coping skills. Ethnic socialization messages which supported involvement in African American cultural activities were associated with youth who were spiritually centered, group oriented and engaged in ritual-centered coping.

**Racial Resilience**

This work is consistent with the findings and proposed student success model of this author in a previous publication, *Racial Resilience* (Green, 2005). Dr. Green proposes a model for university success. Elements that are often included in retention models include eight (8) background characteristics:

1. education (setting, study skills, grades & experiences),
2. student abilities,
3. academic readiness,
4. financial readiness,
5. family influence,
6. peer group,
7. neighborhood, and
8. community.

These attributes are coupled with academic integration, which involves:

1. grades and study habits,
2. intellectual development and
3. classroom experiences.

Another area for consideration is social integration, which involves:

1. peer group support,
2. student faculty interactions and
3. extra cultural activities.
The institutional type, which pertains to whether the educational setting is a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) or a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) is also considered.

Dr. Green adds, however, a unique racial component, which includes three key aspects that are seldom considered:

(1) **Student Racial Resilience** is defined as the ability of the student to effectively cope with, endure, address or confront racial conflicts and/or subtle racist behaviors, which may surface during college enrollment. Student success may be related to an ability to remain engaged and to realistically appraise, overlook or effectively address situations with racial overtones. This might occur in the classroom or in the wider academic environment.

(2) **Faculty/Staff Racial Responsiveness** also includes the ability of the faculty administration and educational environment to appropriately anticipate and respond to racial challenges that may be presented by students, the academic environment or the wider community. The ability to effectively interact with
diverse students and to work toward successful outcomes for all students indicates a responsive individual. Examples of such responsiveness might include the implementation of a culturally relevant curriculum, or advocating for non-majority students during class.

(3) Institutional Racial Responsiveness is the ability of the educational institution to adequately address the needs of a racially diverse student body. Recruitment procedures and retention data would be areas of concern for a responsive institution. Diverse faculty and instructional material, as well as supports for faculty of color might be additional considerations.

While the Green Model for Student Outcomes is a model for college success, the perimeter could be altered to include grade school or high school success. The Green Model for Student Success is illustrated in figure 1.

Resurrecting the Village: The Parenting Community

This article initially presented the complexities involved in attempting to provide safe and nurturing environments to enhance the success of African American youth. Older adults are often positioned to be intricately involved in helping their offspring to raise their offspring. Many factors contribute to this phenomena including single parenthood, illnesses, HIV/AIDS, chemical dependency, incarceration and mental illness, as well as economic issues related to unemployment, underemployment or part-time employment. These additional opportunities for older adults to be more involved in childcare do not come without some limitations. Older adults, while well intentioned, may have both physical and financial restraints. They may be uncertain regarding how to navigate in a technology filled world. There may also be some uncertainty as to how to maintain balance in attempting to co-parent along with adult children, in a world where safety at home, in schools, and in communities has risen as an ongoing concern. These changes require that African American people gather all of the resources at their disposal to provide a safety net and viable pathways to success for Black youth. It takes a community!

According to McRoberts (2001), community is typically defined in political terms, designating a particular geographical location. Social scientists tend to define community as a group of people with diverse characteristics, who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings. Community has both geographical and psychological boundaries. This view is similar to that espoused by psychologist, Wade Nobles (Nobles & Goddard, 1993), who defines elements of community as including - a place, shared sense of experiences and conditions, a common world view, similar values and a sense of belonging. Thus, community encompasses more than a location, but also requires connections with people who have a shared worldview and similar values. This more complex definition of community is essential to providing a solid foundation for parenting Black youth. African Americans have made incredible gains. Yes, we have further to travel, but progress has continued despite conditions created to impose limitations on Black people. As youth successes were considered, a variety of areas were represented. Young African Americans are making incredible contributions to this country and to the world. The youth included in this article demonstrated success in education, the medical field, aviation, literature and business. While only a few youths were selected to showcase, these snapshots of success are indicative of the vast capabilities of Black youth. These successes provide information and inspiration that all African Americans, and particularly African American youth, need to hear.

Several adult success stories were provided, which often demonstrated the determination to succeed against all odds. Several of these successful individuals were told that they could not accomplish what they were striving to do. Others had limited resources and questioned whether their goals would be possible. Most had
difficulty along the way and relayed messages in their contacts with others regarding how failure could lead to success. Areas of law, sales, media, business, science, motivational speaking, writing and entrepreneurship were represented. A common thread held by each of these successful adults was the determination to share their experiences and ideas and to mentor others. Such efforts are a key aspect of community parenting. Just as in life, there is no end to the parenting role. Once parenting begins, it continues. Needs might change, techniques might need to be updated, however, the need for parents remains essential. Our community could benefit from mobilizing those individuals in our communities who are making a difference, who are willing to share their experiences and who have a passion for helping others. Let’s revisit the contributors to Black youth success and determine the roles that community parents could assume.

**Affirming Positive Values**

Community parents could be composed of numerous adults with a desire to positively influence others. Kunjufu (2005) considers parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, other relatives, as well as, ministers, deacons, teachers, mentors and community leaders, as effective resources for providing a safe, nurturing environment for youth. Additional advocates for youth could include African Americans who work at social service or community programs, librarians, custodians, postal workers, and others who have a skill to share. For instance, a custodian could share about the value of hard work. The postal worker could explore the benefits of being on time. Librarians make wonderful tutors for young people.

The African American community needs organization to be able to take advantage of existing resources and skills. Thinking outside the box is needed. An African proverb that fits this situation is “when the music changes, so does the dance.” The music has changed; therefore, our dance needs to change, as well. It is unlikely that intact, homogeneous African American communities will be reestablished. Consequently, it is important to expand the horizons, beyond neighborhoods. Technology may be invaluable to the process of bringing people together, perhaps for a “chat”, to share successes, learnings, and recommendations with young people. The technology is here, now, which could allow the communications to occur across neighborhoods, across zip codes, areas codes and even borders. Scheduling time for a mentoring session or a tutoring session, or to discuss a problem, can be rather simple to organize.

**Home Schooling**

Home schooling is another opportunity to use the resources within the community to benefit Black youth. Many in our parenting community need to work, so the prospect of staying home all week might not be a suitable arrangement. However, if 30-45 people were involved in the particular parenting community, an individual might take off one day or one half day per month to fulfill a teaching commitment. Individuals with particular skills or interest areas could be designated to teach specific topics or lessons. Rather than to complain about how the school system does not serve African American youth well, an alternative to the public school system might prove to be a viable solution.

**Self-Esteem & Messages Received**

A quote from Susan Taylor, former editor of Ebony magazine is quite telling. She states “Whatever we believe about ourselves and our ability comes true for us.” The messages that we tell ourselves and the messages that we take in from others affect how we feel, what we do, and what we think we can accomplish. In a world full of “put downs,” “put outs” and “tear downs”, the African American community, and particularly Black youth need to see and hear phrases that will build them up. In Africa, particularly in Tanzania, much of the clothing is made with positive quotes written on the shirts or skirts in Kiswahili. During the 60’s in the United States, there was an abundance of t-shirts, which portrayed positive sayings. Those need to resurface. Community parents could work with youth to create t-shirts, post cards, or stickers with positive statements.
such as: “You can do it,” “You’re worth it,” or “You are the descendent of Kings and Queens!” Those uplifting statements might empower those who wear the shirts, but might also lift the spirits of those who read the words. Imagine the effect that such a small act could have upon how people view themselves!

**Self Esteem & Knowledge of Cultural History**

If African Americans knew who they really were, they would carry themselves quite differently. African Americans are the descendants of kings and queens. Slaves were not taken from Africa—people with families, homes, businesses, farms, and skills were ripped away from their homes and all that was familiar to them. African Americans would benefit from learning about the middle passage, from visiting the Freedom Center in Cincinnati or the African American Museum in Detroit. A tour of the Rosa Parks Museum in Alabama, the DuSable Museum in Chicago, or even the Motown Museum in Detroit would provide informative aspects about Black accomplishments and events. We need to know our history. Community Parents could organize trips to those locations, which would educate youth and the adults also. The Internet could be utilized for book clubs and discussions could be held regarding historical and informative books like the *Mis-education of the Negro, the New Jim Crow*, or children’s books like *How the Zebra got his Stripes* or *The People Could Fly*. Community parents could organize trips to the movies or in designated homes to watch Selma, Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom or other movies about Black History. These powerful ways of sharing information could alter how Black youth view themselves and the world.

**Self Esteem & Media Images**

TV, radio, videos and movies provide a variety of challenges. Community parents are encouraged to screen the films using an “ethnic” lens. If you feel that a song or movie is offensive to young girls, or to African Americans, it should be given a certain rating that could be shared with other community parents. Some media events might be determined as non-negotiable, and youth would not be allowed to view certain movies or television shows, or websites. A helpful lens to use might be: “Does this present an image that uplifts our people? If not perhaps we shouldn’t watch it or if we do, let’s talk about what was true or misleading in the movie or art form. Many have turned to video games as primary sources of entertainment, childcare, and perhaps companionship, as well. This typically solitary activity lacks spontaneity, creativity, physical activity, and prevents adequate stimulation, which would allow the achievement of necessary developmental tasks. Consequently, a breakdown in communication skills, relationship building, and a lack of ability to deal with conflicts, as well as, a limited desire to gain additional knowledge has resulted. It is counterproductive to think that young people can spend hours shooting at figures on some type of screen and will not consider that as an automatic response when confronted in the streets. Community parents are challenged to break this mold, to go back to activities that promoted conversation, creative ways of thinking or provided information. Games such as checkers, chess, puzzles or playing cards can serve to stimulate thinking and lend to creativity. A game like Connect Four forces one to use logic. Monopoly provides the backdrop to teach about finances and economics. Again, using the Internet, young people could play games about black history. Imagine that! They could challenge one another regarding historical facts.

**Spirituality**

Spirituality and/or religion has always been a significant part of life for African Americans. The principles espoused at the church need reinforcement at home. Community parents could also utilize the Kwanzaa principles as rules to live by. The seven Kwanzaa principles are: (1) Umoja - unity, (2) Kujichagulia -self-determination, (3) Ujima -collective work and responsibility, (4) Ujamaa - cooperative economics, (5) Nia - purpose, (6) Kuumba - creativity and, (7) Imani - faith. These principles can be daily practices. Young people could learn a few words in the east African Kiswahili language and read about Dr. Maulana Karenga, who established Kwanzaa, in 1966. Where we
sometimes err in our spiritual doctrine is in judging our churches. Community parents could make a pact to visit different churches and to begin thinking of churches as different - but not better or worse. Young people would learn from that acceptance of religious diversity.

**Racial Identity**

Young people could benefit from being reminded of who they are and whose they are. Community parents can assist by encouraging continued study about African American heroes and sheroes. Discussions about race, feelings about discrimination, observations of inequity in schools or on TV or in the neighborhood should occur. Those who have a firm grasp of their identity tend to be more successful because they are less likely to get derailed or to accept images of themselves that are not true. If these discussions happen with community parents, when uncomfortable situations arise in school, at work or in the community, youth will be better prepared to address the issue and to understand what is going on and to address the issue.

**Coping Mechanisms**

Often the stressors that youth and adults face each day are discussed. Seldom, however are strategies revealed for how to deal with the stress - in an appropriate way. Community parents should explore options with young people and might benefit from considering some strategies that they might employ. Many techniques are very simple to execute and might be as easy as counting from one to ten before responding or reacting. Another might be to take a time out when things get heated. Taking time for self is critical for community parents and for youth. It is helpful to find a balance which encompasses work, learning, play, time with friends and family, time for spiritual or religious focus, and exercise. Those who find balance in their lives have greater resilience.

**Racial Resilience**

Community parents could assist with discussions about racism. Defining terms like racism, assimilation, acculturation bigotry and stereotypes would be helpful information for young people to understand. Comfort levels in different environments should be discussed. In my second book, Racial Resilience (2009), an inventory is provided for youth to evaluate their comfort level in different academic environments, comfort in dealing with racial situations, level of assertiveness in the classroom, ability to manage finances and their racial identity. Community parents could explore these issues with young people prior to the selection of a high school or college. There are many situations that African Americans encounter each day that are perhaps dismissed to avoid the pain, rather than to walk through it. Community parents are in the position to walk with the youth regarding racial matters, so that they know that they are neither crazy nor alone.

In closing this is a call for African Americans to unite, to do so for the children and the ancestors. We need to regain the strength and the conviction to become the mighty people and the community that we once were. An African proverb states: “When spiders unite, they can tie up a lion.” We’ve got a lion facing us. Let the spiders come together!

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THE ROLE OF GRANDFATHERS

paul hill, jr

Who are we in this season of life? And what is our generational purpose as grandfathers? To answer these questions, we must build on the teachings of Frantz Fanon; especially when he states, “Each generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it”. This quote of Frantz Fanon is usually thought of relative to young people; however, all generations must discover their mission as they progress through the seasons of life.

In the eight stages (early childhood, middle childhood, early adolescence, late adolescence, early adulthood, late adulthood, early elderhood, late elderhood) of life, grandfathers are in the seventh and eighth. If all the stages of life are thought of as a circle wheel they reflect four quadrants or the four directions. The east half of the wheel reflects the stages of "being"; people in these stages (childhood and elderhood) experience an appreciation of the world—as—is—more than a desire to change it. In the west half are the stages of "doing". These stages (adolescent and adulthood) are about accomplishing, changing, and producing.

Although a momentous shift from "doing" to "being" takes place for grandfathers, they still have primary responsibilities and tasks to perform: defending and nurturing the innocence and wonder of children; and guiding and initiating adolescents. Grandfathers can be equated to existing as trees in a grove. Within the grove grandfathers exist as mature-growth redwoods or cedar forest. Picture a grove of ancient trees in the midst of that grove. Those colossal trees are the crown jewels of the forest. Not only do they, in their lofty presence, constitute evidence of a healthy forest community, but they also are a principle factor in generating and maintaining the health of their community. Those elder trees provide shelter and a stable environment of air, soil, and water for the growth of other trees, bushes, flowers, and grasses, and consequently, food and home for a variety of animal species.

Mature trees sustain their world—sustain our world. Maintaining the integrity, they are unsurpassed preservers and nurturers. Human elders like some of our grandfathers of the community have fulfilled and are fulfilling the same roles. Their very presence, past and present—-like old—trees, so rare now—-grants us hope for a healthy human community sometime in the future, a climax culture. Grandfathers play an essential role in engendering a healthy cultural environment for children, adolescents, and adults, and in enabling those adults to one day become elders.

Having returned to the source of their own innocence and wonder, elders celebrate these same qualities in children even more effectively than most parents can. Knowing the source of their true life in the mysteries, they recognize when an adolescent is ready to begin their own exploration of hidden dimensions, and they help guide that essential journey. Having spent an abundant adulthood experiencing life, they guide those adults whose work lies in similar vein. And most important, they possess the experience and hopefully wisdom and perspective that animate the big questions and that allow the long view by which they guide their lives in relationship to the larger community and greater world.

In his poem "To smile on Autumn", photojournalist Gordon Parks recalls his grandfather’s advice on life. If a man can reach the latter days of life with his soul intact, he has mastered life. For Black men who survive into their sixties and beyond, reaching the spiritual heights Parks speaks of is a sweet finale. We as men, hopefully, can approach this finale having left our children and grandchildren, a legacy. "I want them to say, I provided them, not only with material things, but with care and love. I want them to say 'my father, grandfather and community gave me a vision of myself, and a foundation to build on.'"

The intent of this book is to examine human competencies, coping mechanisms, and limitations within a proverbs context. The value and utility of this book is it focuses on addressing the needs of those in the "Spring and Winter of life"; during both seasons of life, the sharing of proverbs by the elderly can be beneficial to themselves and young people. It is based upon the use of proverbs as transmitters of values and as assessment tools. The book also offers information and insights from contributing authors who have personal, practical, and professional experiences with the use of proverbs. The major objective is to present practitioners, educators, researchers, and students with intervention models that acknowledge, develop and build upon the proverbs orientation of the elderly and youth. The book is organized into four parts with headings labeled according to topical categories to facilitate the reader's identification of areas of interest:

Part I (The Proverbs Framework) is an effort by the editor to provide the reader with a framework for understanding proverbs and their relationship to values.

Part II (Culture and Family) introduces the reader to the intergenerational transmission of proverbs.

Part III (Treatment Models for the Elderly) illustrates proverbs' influence upon health and restorative services considered by older persons.

Part IV (Life Events and Spirituality) offers an insight into proverbs as a buffer for stress, change, loss, and many other challenges confronting the aged. The contributions in this section serve as an opportunity to enhance the sensitivity and awareness of interventionists to the link between proverbs and spirituality.

The book is divided into eight chapters. All chapters have relevant content as related to the purpose of the book; however, chapters two, three and eight are standouts:

Chapter two-A Cultural Exchange of Values-focusses on the aged in various cultures assuming the responsibility to teach values to each generation within the family. The author shares from early childhood experiences in the West Indies how family stories and proverbs were handed down from one generation to another and became the cornerstone of the life lessons of the family.

Chapter three-The Roles of Grandparents: The Use of Proverbs in Value Transmission—examines the roles of grandparents; specifically, as it relates to the nature of relationships between grandparents and grandchildren, and the implications of the attachments inherent in such responsibilities. It further examines the methods of using proverbs by grandparents to transmit values to their grandchildren. Family oriented values and cultural values are passed down from generation to generation via oral tradition. The chapter concludes with a strong confirmation of developmental processes for grandchildren related to role functions performed between them and their grandparents.

Chapter eight-Faith of our Fathers (Mothers) Living Still: Spiritually as a Force for the Transmission of Family Values Within the Black Community-examines spirituality as a focus for the Black elderly's transmission of family values within the Black community.

The process of aging is presented as a spiritual journey which offers the elderly opportunity for continued growth. The grandparents' role in transmitting values through the oral tradition of storytelling and proverbs remain significant within the Black community,
though urbanization and social media has diminished their influence in recent decades. Strengths of the Black elderly in coping with life vicissitudes are demonstrated through their proverbs with messages of faith and hope.

This is an important resource that complements and supplements the Spring, 2016, edition of the Black Child Journal. Grandparents as guardians of the generations have important roles to play beyond grand parenting alone. Their roles can be observed in the transmission of families values, beliefs, and cultural norms through the use of their wisdom that extends beyond their life span. One of the most important roles that grandparents play is to bridge the family history of the past, through their lifetime, into the memories of their grandchildren and into the future. The transmission of family values, to those within their family, is crucial to the maintenance of culture within the lives of families. The values that are espoused by family members may change over time, but the core of beliefs that under bridge families become the cultural foundation that make families unique, yet they tie them into a system of ethnic, religious, and national mores that bring out the cultural dimensions of families. "Let the circle continue unbroken."

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