

“Comprehending the ‘Art’ and ‘Science’ of Family”

Families are the building blocks of society. It goes without saying, then, that if Black (African) Americans are to experience long-term success, then they must ensure that they are skilled in forming, nurturing, and growing solid, productive, and functional families.

Consider the following key statistics about Black American Families today?

Number of Black American households during 2006: 8.828 Million

Percentage of two-parent Black American households during 2006: 46.7

Percentage of single-parent Black American households during 2006: 53.3

These statistics reveal that, if we accept two-natural-parent plus children households as the norm, then less than one-half of Black American families meet that criterion.

There are several scholarly efforts of late that convey the importance of family to Black Americans: Bill Cosby and Alvin Poussaint (2007), *Come On People: On the Path from Victims to Victors*; Vonnie McCoy, Nancy Hill, and Kenneth Dodge (2007), *African American Family Life: Ecological and Cultural Diversity*; Colleen Bryant (2006) *Family Ties: Restoring Unity in the African American Family*; Nancy Franklin (2006), *Black Families in Therapy: Understanding the African American Experience*; Harriet McAdoo (2006), *Black Families*; Leonor Johnson and Robert Staples (2004), *Black Families at the Crossroads: Challenges and Prospects*; and Beverly Tatum (2000), *Assimilation Blues: Black Families in White Communities, Who Succeeds and Why*. We can interpret these efforts to mean that efforts are required to save/help Black American families.

In order to save/help Black American families, the long-term strategic plan (LTSP) for Black Americans could entertain implementing the following methodology of study:

- Define in present and future contexts characteristics of “good families.”
- Summarize high-quality analyses that outline why Black American families have failed or had difficulties historically emulating the just-mentioned characteristics.
- Use the just-mentioned summary along with historians’ expertise to shape a list of causal factors for Black American families’ failures, difficulties, and instability.
- Enlist the support of family psychologists, social workers, sociologists, and cultural experts to:
 - Determine the tools and practices that could be applied to the just-mentioned causal factors to reverse, or at a minimum, significantly improve their effects on Black American families.
 - Going forward, under current and expected future circumstances, determine the ideal (and variations on the ideal) structures, sizes, relationships, and economics of Black American families.

- Determine the best methods for applying the aforementioned tools and practices to the ideal structures, sizes, relationships, and economics to produce solid, productive, and functional Black American families.
- Determine effective methods for promulgating/operationalizing the just-mentioned methods that will produce “excellent” Black American families on a more widespread basis.

As these strategies are being developed, it is highly recommended that developers consider historical traditions that are appropriate for current and future periods; including evolving demographics, extended family relationships, religious practices, interracial families, and incentive structures. In addition, it appears reasonable to establish ratio floors as intermediate and final goals; i.e., within “t” years, “??” percent of Black American families should possess “X, Y, Z” characteristics—and so on.

At the root, parents represent leadership in households/families. Consequently, households/families will ultimately reflect the nature of parents. Therefore, in developing a LTSP for Black American families, it is important to stress the need for high-quality training for parents-to-be. It may be necessary to add to the curricula of secondary schools that are attended by Black American youth courses that teach high-quality parenting skills: From the psychology of interpersonal human relationships, to child care, to finances.

Obviously, the bottom-line requirement is “commitment” for marriages that go on to produce solid, productive, and functional families. That is, while “love” and “affection” are integral elements of good interpersonal human relationships, they are “icing on the cake” for good marriages and families. In addition, it may be important to teach would-be parents the perspective that marriage and family constitute a type of business that is expected to produce certain products and services. In fact, would-be parents should be taught that marriage and family can function as wealth producing vehicles that can serve the participants well in the short- and long-run. As a strong incentive to develop commitment, would-be parents should be informed concerning the disparity in wealth and lifestyles that are produced and experienced by couples and families that remain together for the duration or for extended periods versus for couples and families that do not remain intact.

Moreover, it is important to teach Black American would-be parents concerning the psychological, physical, and sexual cycles of females and males so that they are enlightened about these topics and learn the benefits of remaining committed for the long run in order to enjoy the best features and benefits of long-term psychological, physical, and sexual relationships.

Given the central role of family in community development, it is critical that a superb strategy be developed for producing more and better Black (African) American families if the overall LTSP for Black (African) Americans is to succeed.

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