

EDITORIAL

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Responsible Fatherhood

Ensuring African American Fathers Count

By CONGRESSWOMEN JULIA CARSON

Nearly 25 million children, more than one out of three, live absent their biological father, and 17 million kids live without a father of any kind. About 40 percent of the children living in fatherless households have not seen their fathers in at least a year, and 50 percent of children who do not live with their father have never stepped foot in their father's home. The situation is even worse for African American

children. 70 percent of black children are born to single mothers, and at least 80 percent of all black children can now expect to spend a significant part of their childhood years living apart from their fathers. "For too long, legislators, and policymakers have ignored the father/child relationship. The future of African American children depends on society's ability to reconnect fathers with their children. According to recent research, children with absent fathers

are more likely to fail or drop out of school, engage in early sexual activity, develop drug and alcohol problems, and experience perpetrate violence. We have known for a long time that a child's success is greatly influenced by his upbringing relationship. Our children need everyone of us to commit to rebuilding the institution of fatherhood. Black children deserve a good and constructive relationship with their fathers. We must use

every available resource to inspire men to be committed, loving, and responsible fathers.

The responsible Fatherhood Act of 1999 does the following:

Raising awareness about the importance of responsible fatherhood by authorizing a public awareness campaign, designed by states and communities, to help change attitudes, particularly among young men, about responsibilities that go with fathering a child;

Creating a block grant program expanding responsible fatherhood promotion programs at the state and local government, civic, charitable, non-profit, and faith-based organizations; and

Changing existing federal law to encourage a stronger connection between fathers and their children through increased child support to families and more available training through the Welfare-to-Work program for low-income fathers.

Random Acts of Violence Explained?

The horror of unexplained acts of public violence is back. Isn't it about time we started looking for the cause instead of treating the symptoms?

I am an international authority on energy conservation. I've published a couple of textbooks on the subject with McGraw-Hill, dozens of articles, and several computer programs. A key part of the equation of conserving energy, in building AC/heating systems, is being able to do so while main-

taining proper air quality. If you don't do it right, you save lots of energy, but ruin the air we breathe.

I also served on a psychologists licensing board in Texas, appointed by Governor Bush. I presented a technical paper to the Board members (also published in Engineered Systems magazine, of which I am on the Board of Advisors) discussing the psychological side affects of bad indoor air quality. The causes are simple enough: oxygen deprivation and carbon

dioxide poisoning. Their symptoms can be drastic, however: confusion, poor concentration, all the way to psychosis.

No one thought much of my paper at the time, which was a few years ago. After a spate of random violence in schools in the past year, and now the Texas church massacre, perhaps it's time to look into the matter more closely. A few facts and figures on the issue may bring my point home.

A typical school classroom re-

quires the complete volume of air to be changed out with 100% fresh air every fifteen minutes. Many building operators close off the outside air vents to save energy, thus constantly recirculating the existing air and never introducing any fresh air to the space. It's a thirty second task, to close the outside air vent; and it can reduce the utility bills by 250% or more, depending on the season or location. That's a LOT of money, especially for schools struggling to educate more students, and to pro-

vide higher teacher salaries - all on limited, sometimes even on reducing, budgets.

Businesses are no different. They have increasing profit pressures, and save just as much money by reducing or eliminating fresh air intake to air conditioning systems. Either way, the result is the same: poor air quality translates into psychological symptoms; the worse the quality and the more prolonged the exposure, the worse the human consequences.

Family Reunions

By RICHARD M. COOPER

"It's so nice to see, all the folks you love together. Simply talkin' 'bout, all the things that's been going down. It's been a long, long time, since we've had the chance to get together. Nobody knows, the next time we see each other, may be years and years from now." (The O'Jays, 1975, Family Reunion).

It seems like the older I get, the more funerals that I attend. I am often introduced to new extended family members at wakes or I bump into relatives from my childhood at sparsely occurring occasions ending with sentiments like, "Our family really needs to plan a family reunion." The statement are certainly sincere when they conclude with, "Yeah, I'll give you a call... stay in touch, let's make it happen." These family get-togethers just never seem to happen. We've all become too busy.

Much to my surprise, Sunday, Aug. 21 marked my in-laws' first planned family reunion. The idea was spawned by two cousins at a wedding reception and several weeks later came to fruition. What a blessing indeed! But believe me, there were many issues to be addressed, some of which reminded me of my own family and likely yours too. What follows are some brief thoughts on the planning of this important event.

First, and foremost one needs a historical perspective regarding the realities for many families in America and in the Diaspora. Our family structure was often ravaged by systemic oppression which altered many of

our kinship patterns. The mere fact that Black families exist and thrive today is a testament to their strength, tenacity, and survival skills. Daniel P. Moynihan erroneously disavows this idea in his so-called report on dysfunctional Negro families during the 1960's.

Families coming together for a spiritual Karamu (fast) makes practical sense. Nations are built on strong families.

For a successful first event, learn to plan on a small inexpensive scale. Remember the goal is to have an enjoyable gathering. Over time, your event can develop. Secondly, old arguments, power struggles, and some dislike among kinfolk will likely occur during the planning phase. These difficulties often run deep, wide and long. Prayer, time and deaths may improve things.

Draft your overall plan with the "doers" of the family and assign mutually agreed upon tasks with time lines. Pay homage when possible to the wishes of the elders of the family. Select a location/site that increases the likelihood of attendance. Cook-outs held in free public parks may be favored over rented banquet halls.

Families can simply B.T.O.F. (Bring Their Own Food) or work out other inexpensive arrangements.

Certain colors schemes worn for that day by all family members add warm touches and makes for great photographs. Hold off on the printing of costly family T-shirts with logos unless you can get a great price. Not all family members will buy them, even if they previously had said that

they would. My in-laws wore black and white casual. Outdoor attire.

Space will not permit addressing all of the details, but there are many good books and websites on the subject that can help. One point must be made...my strong recommendation is not to serve alcohol on that day. We all have that "loved/hated" relative that can't handle the brew. Trust me, you know the rest of that story.

When possible, have "out-of-town" family members stay with local relatives. However, inexpensive hotels should also be booked well in advance.

The culminating event for my in-laws' family reunion was an impromptu hand holding ceremony of about 75 people in a circle. The eldest family member spoke, blessed all of the attendees and then everyone embraced. It was truly powerful.

At the end of the day when I heard statements like, "let's get together" they sounded remarkably different from the past. This time, family members had hugged, cried, laughed, danced, and communed with one another all day long. There was just so much love present. This event was so joyful! Stay strong, families.

Just think: Your son is bright, healthy and headed for college one day. You love the direction your career has taken. You're doing a lot of the things you planned and even a few you didn't. Living life to the fullest is easy when you have family behind you. American Family Mutual Insurance. Call and talk to one of our helpful, friendly agents. You'll find out why we're consistently rated A+ (Superior) by A.M. Best, the insurance rating authority. Then, go on. Dream. Plan. What you do next is up to you and we'll be here to help you.

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