



The African-American Family in Crisis

Curriculum Unit 90.04.06
by Henry A. Rhodes

There are three basic reasons why I decided to develop a unit on the black American family. First of all, there is almost no formal training done in the schools concerning raising a family. The familylife curriculum that already exists directs its efforts towards value clarification, decisionmaking, and human sexuality. The teenmother classes that are found in the high schools only deal with the female students after they have become pregnant. It is just recently that this program has begun to deal with teenfathers. My unit can be used to supplement the familylife curriculum especially when a majority of the students are African-Americans because my unit directly relates to them.

Some may argue that students learn how to raise a family from their parents or guardians. In many cases this is true. Unfortunately, it is a sad reality that some black students live in poor home and neighborhood environments. It is not my intention to develop a unit that will be a cureall for the social, economic, and political ills that confront the African-American family. This is not possible due to the diversity in family structure that exists in the black community. However, I hope my unit will provoke discussion concerning the black family so as to allow students to understand the crisis that is threatening the AfricanAmerican family.

Another reason I decided to develop this unit was to help some black students come to terms with their home environment. AfricanAmerican students need to understand that if their family structure does not model the ideal American nuclear family that this does not mean that their family is unstable or something of which to be ashamed. One point which is often overlooked is the fact that a majority of black families are headed by two parents. Sometimes some black students feel uncomfortable because they do not live in a twoparent household, but this should not be the case. Hopefully, my unit will help students look at the positive aspects of their family instead of dwelling on what is lacking.

As a middle school teacher in a predominately black neighborhood I have encountered a number of African-American students whose family life is anything but ideal. It would be wrong to point the finger of blame at their parents because that would be another case of blaming the victim, which is not my intention. Many of the problems confronted by these families are the result of factors which these parents have very little or no control of at all. In addition, research has shown that children of problem families have a greater tendency to emulate their parents. For example, the children of teenage parents are more likely to become teenage parents themselves. Thus, one of my purposes in writing this unit is to try to help students break these cycles of degradation(i.e. drug/alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, welfare dependence, etc.) and realize that alternatives exist that can help them avoid the traps to which their parents fell prey.

No one can dispute the importance of the family. John H. Scanzoni in *The Black Family in Modern Society* states that it is in the family where personality is developed, where identity is formed, where status is assigned, and where basic values and norms are learned. Before embarking on a discussion of the African American family, a basic definition of family needs to be established which is applicable to the African American. The HBJ School Dictionary offers several definitions for the entry family which I believe can help define the black family. They are: 1. a unit consisting of parents and their children 2. a group of persons forming a household 3. one's entire group relatives 4. a group of people descended from the same ancestor.

It is at this time that I would suggest that the class be broken down into several small groups. Students should be made aware that while this unit is being taught about the African-American family that periodically they will be asked to function in group type situations. Each group should choose a group leader whose major responsibility will be to keep the group on task and insure full group participation. Also, a group recorder needs to be selected. In order to avoid in-group squabbling over who is going to be group leader or recorder I suggest that these responsibilities should be shared by everyone on a rotating basis as they progress through the unit.

At this time each group should be asked to examine and discuss which definition of family offered by the HBJ School Dictionary is applicable to the African American family based on their experience. Students should begin to realize that due to the diversity in family structures that exist in the black community that all of these definitions can be related to the black family. Students should not have any problem relating the first definition of family to the African American family. Nor should students have a great deal of difficulty relating the second definition of family to the black family because some of them live in either an extended family type situation or a single parent household. Also, with the revival of family reunions over the recent years in the black community some students should see a connection between definitions three and four in the HBJ School Dictionary and the black family.

Before continuing my examination of the African-American family I would like to outline some suggested teaching strategies that could be used in the teaching of my unit. By no means should a teacher feel obligated to adhere strictly to these suggestions. My unit is intended to be taught in grades 7-12. Once again, I strongly suggest that my unit be used to supplement the family life curriculum that already exists. Recent research in education suggests that cooperative learning is beneficial to the learning process for students of all levels. I tend to agree with this research based on my experience and use of cooperative learning. As a result, many of the teaching strategies that I will suggest will revolve around small group activities.

According to Jualynne Dodson in her essay "Conceptualizations of Black Families" in the Harriet Pipes McAdoo's book, *Black Families*, there are two basic schools of research concerning the study of the African-American family. The first school of thought which Dodson discusses was to have a tremendous effect on how the African-American family was viewed. In addition, this school of thought became the basis for government policy for aiding the black American family.

This first approach was known as the cultural ethnocentric approach. It was associated with the work of E. Franklin Frazier and Daniel P. Moynihan. The work of these researchers led to the adaptation of social policies which assumed the black family was unstable, disorganized, and that it was unable to provide its members with the social and psychological support and development they needed.

During the twentieth century E. Franklin Frazier was the leading exponent of the cultural ethnocentric school. One of Frazier's major concerns was to understand the process by which the black family became culturally assimilated into American life. According to S.M. Lyman in *The Black American in Sociological Thought*,

Frazier's work was influenced by his determination to refute the arguments advanced by Melville Herskovits and W.E.B. DuBois that much of black life is a continuation of African cultural forms and to empirically demonstrate Robert E. Parks race relations cycle.

Frazier asserts in *The Negro Family in the United States* that "as a result of the manner in which the Negro was enslaved, the Negro's African cultural heritage has had practically no effect on the evolution of his family in the United States." Frazier did concede that cultural traits, such as names and folklores did survive initially, but either became lost or distorted with time.

Nathan Glazer makes the claim in the "Forward" of Frazier's 1966 edition of *The Negro Family in the United States* that the most salient conclusion that could be drawn from Frazier's work was his belief that with further economic progress the weakness of the African-American family would be overcome. It should be noted that at least one source asserts that in Frazier's 1932 work, *The Negro Family in Chicago*, "cultural" rather than economic factors were alleged to be at the heart of Negro family difficulties. This point made by Frazier concerning economic or cultural progress as being the cure for the ills that confront the African-American family would make an excellent resolution for a student debate, with the remainder of the class acting as judge.

The cultural ethnocentric approach is characterized by a common belief that the black family is unstable and dysfunctional. Other scholars of the African-American family who adhered to this school of thought used Frazier's work to substantiate their position. One of the most notable works that did this was the Moynihan Report of 1965 (officially known as *The Negro Family-The Case for National Action*) which was prepared under the auspices of Daniel P. Moynihan, assistant secretary of the Office of Policy Planning and Research of the United States Department of Labor. This report cited Frazier's research as support for its conclusion that the black community was characterized by broken families, illegitimacy, matriarchy, and economic dependency. It should be noted that Frazier's work and the Moynihan Report have come under sharp criticism from many scholars of the black family. At a latter point in this unit a lesson should occur in which students will be given an opportunity to determine if the assertions made by Frazier and Moynihan hold true for today's African-American family.

The second school of thought discussed by Jualynne Dodson in her essay is known as the cultural relativity school. The scholars of this particular school advocate that the black family is a functional entity. In addition, many of these researchers contend, unlike the scholars of the cultural ethnocentric school, that African cultures did have an effect on the African-American family and its way of life. Some of the leading scholars of this school of thought are Andrew Billingsly, Virginia Young, Robert Hill, and Wade Nobles. It should be noted that all of these proponents of this school do not agree on the degree to which African culture influenced the culture of black Americans, but they do agree that African culture helped influence family patterns that helped combat the racist conditions which exist in American society.

Like the scholars of the cultural ethnocentric school, the researchers of this school of thought had a researcher's work which they used to substantiate their findings. In this case it was the work of Melville Herskovits, who was one of the first scholars to recognize similarities in African cultural patterns and those of African descendants living in the United States. Herskovits found in the black community what he believed to be authentic African cultural patterns in their language, music, art, house structure, dance, traditional religion, and healing practices. Herskovits also established through his work the fact that family life in traditional African societies was characterized by unity, stability, and security.

Once Herskovits had established the fact that in most African societies the family structure was stable and

strong, other proponents of cultural relativism began to demonstrate how the American black family possessed some of the same strengths that were inherent in their African ancestor's families. Wade Nobles in his essay "Africanity: Its Role in Black Families" asserts that slavery did not totally destroy the traditional African base of the black family functioning. Nobles like other scholars of this school believed that the AfricanAmerican family represented a continuing fountain of strength and endurance built on its African cultural heritage.

One researcher who also supports this position was Robert H. Hill in his book *The Strengths of Black Families*. In it, Hill outlines five strengths inherent in the African-American family, and they are: 1. strong kinship bonds 2. strong work orientation 3. adaptability of family roles 4. strong achievement orientation 5. strong religious orientation. Dr. Hill was the National Urban League's Research Director at the time he did his study.

Hill asserted that strong kinship bonds were demonstrated by AfricanAmerican families by their absorption of individuals, especially minors. Hill used data from the 1970 U.S. Census to substantiate his position. Dr. Hill found that black families were much more likely than white families to take in other young related members. I believe a major contributing factor to why white families were less likely to take in other young related members was because they were not faced with as many unwanted pregnancies because they had the financial means to avoid this type of situation. Dr. Hill estimated that more than 160,000 outofwedlock black babies were absorbed in 1969 by already existing AfricanAmerican families. This absorption contends Hill was done in spite of the precarious economic position that existed within these families. I agree with Dr. Hill that this is a demonstration of strong kinship bonds. Students should be asked if they are aware of any situation in which a black family absorbed someone outside of their immediate family into their household. If so, why do they believe this was done?

Another strength Hill attributes to the African-American family is their strong emphasis placed on work. According to Dr. Hill, through work comes selfhelp, and I agree. There are several myths and misconceptions which seem to cloud and cast a shadow over the black work ethic. One, because black families headed by women comprise the majority of the families receiving public assistance, it is often believed that dependency is a characteristic of most of these families. But Hill states that this is not the case with black femaleheaded households. The 1970 census data indicates that threefifths of the women heading black families work(most of them full time), although 60 percent of them are poor.

Another myth that Hill discounts is that blacks are not positively oriented towards work and that they shy away from it in favor of public assistance. Dr. Hill quotes statistics from a survey done by Curt Tausky and William J. Wilson in 1971 in which 90 percent of the black workers surveyed stated that if they were out of work they would rather take a job as a car washer than go on welfare even if the pay for the two sources of income were the same. In addition, Dr. Hill asserts that the fact that about twothirds of the wives in black husband-wife families work compared to only half of the wives in white families demonstrates the strong work orientation of AfricanAmericans.

Another strength of black families according to Dr. Hill is their ability to perform different family roles. Hill believes this exists in many black families and is a source of strength and stability. This flexibility probably developed because of the high proportion of working wives in black families. Instances probably arose in which the wife had to work and the father had to act as the mother and vice versa. I can personally attest to this fact because my father had no problem with cooking, washing clothes, or cleaning the house while my mother was working. Such role flexibility helps to stabilize the family in the event of an unanticipated separation caused by illness, death, or divorce according to Hill.

Dr. Hill concludes his discussion of the strengths of African American families by talking about how the black family's high achievement and religious orientations have been used as mechanisms for survival and advancement throughout the history of the United States. Hill states that even though a higher proportion of middle income than low income students have college aspirations, the majority of low income students (and their parents) have college aspirations. Also, since blacks from low status families tend to outnumber those in middle status families, the number of black students attending college from low income families often equals or surpasses the number attending college from middle class families. Dr. Hill concludes by asserting that religion has been used as a major source of strength and inspiration by African-American families from slavery through the Civil Rights Movement.

Examining the effect that African cultures had on the American black family deserves further attention. Niara Sudarkasa does an excellent job in this respect in her essay "Interpreting the African Heritage in Afro-American Family Organization" in Harriet Pipes McAdoo's book, *Black Families*. Sudarkasa contends that an understanding of African family structure sheds light on the form and functioning of the African American family structure as it developed in the context of slavery and later periods. In the same respect, if one wanted to understand Anglo- or Italian American families one would have to study their institutional heritages stemming from Western Europe asserts Sudarkasa. For knowledge of structure and functioning of kinship and the family in these areas helps to explain the structure and functioning of families formed among their descendants in America. It is for this reason Sudarkasa found the work of E. Franklin Frazier lacking because of his refusal to acknowledge the influence of African culture on the black American family.

Professor Sudarkasa makes the point that in order to understand the African family structure one must understand the dynamics of consanguinity and affinity and their role in African society. (It should be made clear that Africa is made up of a myriad of different cultures and that the assertions that are being made about African culture are concepts that cultures have in common.) Consanguinity refers to the kinship that is commonly assumed to be biologically based and rooted in blood ties. Whereas with affinity, kinship is created by law and rooted "in law." One aspect of affinal kinship is conjugality which refers specifically to the bond created through marriage.

Ms. Sudarkasa contends that with the family in Western Europe the principle of conjugality dominated family organization dating back to the Middle Ages, whether nuclear or extended in nature. This conjugal relationship was emphasized in matters of household formation, decision making, property transmission, and socialization of the young. Whereas African families, on the other hand, have traditionally been organized around consanguinal cores. This is demonstrated by the African extended family. Upon marriage, Africans did not form new households, but joined the compound of the extended family of the bride or groom.

Niara Sudarkasa states that the African extended families could be subdivided in two ways. There was the division between the nucleus formed by the consanguinal core group and their children and the outer group formed by the inmarrying spouses. In many African cultures, inmarrying spouses are collectively referred to as "wives" or "husbands" of the house by members of the core group. This collective designation infers that their membership in the compound is rooted in law and thus can be terminated by law, whereas membership in the core group is rooted in descent and exists in perpetuity according to Professor Sudarkasa.

Sudarkasa also claims that African families can also be divided into their constituent conjugally based family units comprised of parents and children. However, in the traditional African family, these conjugal units did not have the characteristics of the typical nuclear family of Western Europe asserts Niara. In the first place, African conjugal families normally involved polygamous marriage at some stage. Some scholars have

characterized this African polygamous conjugal family as several distinct nuclear families with one father in common. Professor Sudarkasa rejects this assumption. She argues that whether the African man had one wife and children or many wives and children, his was one family. As a result, all the children of the same generation regarded themselves as brothers and sisters and not cousins. Thus, according to Sudarkasa the African conjugal families did not have the rigid boundaries which characterized Western European families.

When Professor Sudarkasa compared the African and European extended families she found the most far-reaching difference in the emphasis placed on consanguinity and conjugality. The most common type of European extended family consisted of two or more nuclear families joined through the parentchild or siblings tie. However, the African extended family was built around a consanguinial core and the conjugal units of these larger families differed significantly from the European nuclear families. Niara asserts that in Africa, unlike Europe, in many critical areas of family life the consanguinial core rather than the conjugal pair was paramount. As I have already stated with respect to household formation, married couples joined existing compounds. It was also the lineage core which owned the land and the compound where the families lived, farmed and practiced their crafts. Also, the most important properties in African society (land, titles, and entitlements) were transmitted through lineages, and spouses did not inherit from each other. With respect to decisionmaking, it was centered in the consanguinial core group and not the conjugal pair in African society. The oldest male in the compound was usually its head with men in his generation serving as elders. It was this group that settled disputes and made decisions in the compound.

Another area in which consanguinity dominated over conjugality was in child rearing. The socialization of the young involved the entire extended family not just the separate conjugal families even though each conjugal family had special responsibilities for the children living with them. The concept of "living with" takes on a different meaning in the context of the African compound. In the first place, husbands, wives, and children did not live together in an area separate from other families. Wives had their own rooms or dwellings and husbands had theirs. The children usually slept with their mothers to a certain age, after which they slept in rooms reserved for boys or girls. Children of the same compound played together and shared many learning experiences. The children were socialized by all the adults of the extended family and were referred to collectively as sons and daughters. This reinforced the importance of consanguinity.

Professor Sudarkasa contends that the stability of the African extended family did not depend on the stability of marriages of the core group members. Divorce did not have the ramifications it has in nuclear family systems. When marital dissolutions did occur, they were usually followed by remarriage. Normally, all adults lived in a marital union throughout their lives. It should be noted that the children of a divorced couple were usually brought up in the compound in which they were born.

Once Professor Sudarkasa had thoroughly discussed the African family, she began to explore the African connection to the AfricanAmerican family structure. Sudarkasa begins by stating, rather than start with the question of what was African about the American black family, it would be more appropriate to ask what was not African about them. Most of the Africans captured and brought to America carried with them the societal codes they had learned regarding family life. This runs counter to the popular Frazier position denying the influence of Africa on the American black family.

The extended family networks that were developed during slavery by Africans and their descendants were based on the institutional heritage which the Africans had brought with them to the United States. The specific forms the extended family took reflected the influence of European derived institutions as well as the political and economic circumstances in which the enslaved population found itself according Niara.

Some scholars suggest that the female-headed households characterized the early black American family during slavery. However, Herbert G. Gutman in *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* states that probably only in a few localities did female-headed households constitute as much as one-quarter of all households. Professor Sudarkasa believes that the rarity of this household type was in keeping with the African tradition whereby women normally bore children within the context of marriage. Sudarkasa agrees with Frazier in attributing the development of female-headed households to slavery and urbanization. Gutman's research suggests that female-headed households developed mainly in two situations, and they are: 1. a woman whose husband died or was sold off the plantation might head a household comprised of her children and perhaps her grandchildren born to and unmarried daughter 2. a woman who did not marry after having one or two children out-of-wedlock but continued to have children (probably her master's children).

When one focuses on extended families among the enslaved Blacks, it is evident that these kin networks had many features of the African extended families. The African-American families were built around consanguinal kin whose spouses were incorporated into the extended family networks in different degrees, claims Sudarkasa. Sudarkasa goes on to state that the significance of the consanguinal principle in the black American extended family is indicated by Gutman's contention that the pull between ties to an immediate family and to an enlarged kin network sometimes strained husbands and wives.

Also, the literature on black families during slavery provides a wealth of data on the way in which consanguinal kin assisted each other with child rearing, in life crisis events such as birth and death, in work groups, in efforts to obtain freedom, and so on. Relationships within these groups were governed by principles and values stemming from their African background. Respect for elders and mutual cooperation among kinsmen are noted in all discussions of black families during slavery. Also, the willingness to assume responsibility for relatives and children beyond the conjugal family and selflessness demonstrated in accepting these responsibilities were also characteristics attributed to the enslaved population and were reflective of their ancestor's culture.

As a result of my extensive research of the African-American family I have come to the conclusion that some of the problems of the black American family can be attributed in part to its departure from the traditions of consanguinity of their African ancestors and their movement toward the European-influenced conjugal type household. The work of Joanne M. Martin and Elmer P. Martin, *The Helping Tradition in the Black Family and Community*, does an excellent job of demonstrating how the decline of the helping tradition (which has its origin in African culture) has had an adverse effect on the American black family. Hopefully by studying the Martin's research it will shed some light on the problems confronting the African-American family and at the same time suggest some helpful strategies for coping with these problems. Prior to beginning their discussion of the helping tradition, the Martins offer explanations of key concepts that recur throughout their discussion, and they are:

Tradition (according to Leonard T. Hobhouse, the late noted British sociologist) is the link
¥ between past and future; it is that in which the effects of the past are consolidated, and on the basis of which subsequent modifications are built.

¥ *Black helping tradition* refers to the largely independent struggle of Blacks for their survival and advancement from generation to generation.

¥ *Black extended family* consists of a multigenerational interdependent kinship system held together basically by a sense of obligation to the welfare of members of the kin network.

- ¥ *Mutual aid* , a dominant element in extended family life, involves a reciprocal effort of family members to pool the resources necessary for survival and growth.
- ¥ *Social class(statusgroup) cooperation* is the endeavor of family members of different income, educational, and social class levels to downplay class distinctions in giving and receiving aid.
- ¥ *Malefemale equality* is the adherence of black men and women to certain conventions that promote the welfare of the family through an emphasis on sexual equality and a deemphasis on matriarchy and patriarchy.
- ¥ *Prosocial behavior* involves the attitudes and practices of cooperation, sharing, and caring that black adults consciously strive to instill in black children so the traditional black selfhelp will be passed on to future generations.
- ¥ *Fictive kinship* is the caregiving and mutual-aid relationship among nonrelated Blacks that exists because of their common ancestry, history, and social plight.
- ¥ *Racial consciousness* is the keen awareness by many black people of their history and condition as a people and their overwhelming desire to uplift their race to a state of dignity and pride.
- ¥ *Religious consciousness* refers to deliberate attempts by Blacks to live according to those religious beliefs that call for acts of charity and brotherliness and neighborliness toward one another as a means of coming closer to God and carrying out God’s will.
- ¥ *Racism* occurs when one people deliberately and systematically subjugates another people that it holds to be inferior.
- ¥ The *bourgeoise ideology* is largely a middle-class suburbanbased stance that places heavy emphasis on individualism, social status seeking, and the acquisition of material goods through legitimate means as hard work, education, and civic responsibility.
- ¥ The *street ideology* is largely a lowerclass urban based stance that places heavy emphasis on individualism and the acquisition of material goods through such deviant or illegitimate means as manipulation, conning, or criminal activity.
- ¥ *Patriarchy* is the notion of a malecentered or male-dominated family and society.

The Martins begin their discussion of the American black helping tradition by studying its place of origin, which was Africa. The major forces which they attribute the birth and growth of the helping tradition are the African extended family, mutual aid, socialclass cooperation, malefemale equality, prosocial behavior, fictive kinship, racial consciousness, and religious consciousness.

Joanne and Elmer Martin assert that the helping tradition was deep rooted in traditional African life and culture. Edward Wilmont Blyden, a nineteenthcentury British scholar of Africa stated that we, and not I is the law of African life. John S. Mbiti, author of *African Life and Customs* , held that the cardinal point of African philosophy could be summarized in the saying: “I am, because we are; since we are, therefore I am.” At the cornerstone of this philosophy according to the Martins was the African extended family.

Despite the diversity of traditional African societies, one feature shared by nearly all of them was that life was organized around the family. Julius Nyerere, a scholar and former leader, states that the traditional African family lived together and worked together and the result of their joint labor was the property of the family as a whole. It was the extended family ties that were the basis for caregiving. According to wellunderstood and accepted customs, the results of joint efforts were divided so every member of the family had enough to eat and a place to sleep before any of the family, even the head of the family, had anything extra.

Patriarchy was at the core of traditional African family life. Men generally were the unquestioned heads of their family, as well as leaders, authority figures, and decision makers in the African community. Although

patriarchy was an essential feature of African life, the traditional African family and community did not permit it to thwart or frustrate their mutual aid thrust. A man could not form a social class with other men of his rank to exploit the rest of the community. The men were obligated to raise their children to concern themselves with the wellbeing of the community. This demonstrates that regardless of one's status in the extended family that the helping tradition was paramount and not to be overlooked by anyone.

In the traditional African family women generally played subordinate roles. They were expected to obey the authority of their husbands and show them a high degree of respect. They were also expected to do their share of menial agricultural labor (the amount varied according to the tribe) and almost all of the household duties. The woman's most important role was in the bearing of children. Failure to bear children brought a women shame and disgrace regardless of how sympathetic their husbands or others might be to their plight. For traditional Africans emphasized both the living and dead, and having children ensured not only the continuity of the family lineage but the immortality of its family members.

The importance of children in African societies can not be overstated. The extended family took great care in the prosocialization of their children in the ways of their elders. Children were showed the importance of the helping tradition in African society by the example set by the adults of the extended family. House building, cultivation, harvesting, digging trappits, putting up fences around cultivated land, building bridges, and engaging in religious and recreational activities were done by the group. The mutual aid tradition of the African extended family guaranteed that children could not be raise to put their egos or interests above those of the group. This kind of socialization assured that the helping customs of traditional Africa would be passed down through the generations.

It is easy to understand the fact that one did not have to be a relative by blood or marriage to receive help in traditional African society. Everybody in the community was treated as kin. Even those that did not demonstrate the helping tradition could expect to receive help, especially in times of emergency. Selfish people and individualists were frowned on in African societies. In fact, early Africans, known for their judicial systems and respect for authority, generally made the helping tradition a part of the laws of their societies. Thus, it was not uncommon for a person to be brought before the court for being selfish and unneighborly or for treating their assets as his or her property and using them in ways not consonant with the general welfare of the people.

After completing their discussion of the helping tradition in traditional African society, Joanne and Elmer turn their focus on the extent to which this African helping tradition was carried over into black life in the United States. The Martins contend that there were several powerful forces working against the retention of the African helping tradition.

First, the American slaves' ancestors did not come from one single region in Africa. As a consequence there was a language problem. Thus, these Africans were thrust together in slavery coming from different regions with different languages and customs. This made it difficult for these Africans to retain their culture. Second, the allpowerful master was adamantly opposed to the slave holding on to their African heritage. Third, many American slaves gave up trying to maintain their traditions and culture in an effort to find new ways to survive the hideous institution of slavery. As a result, many of the Blacks born in this country would know little about their African heritage and placed little importance on knowing about it.

As there were forces working against the American slave retaining his ancestor's heritage, there were forces that were countering these efforts. The fact that the helping tradition was so much a part of the heart and habits of African men and women that even when severed from its African heritage, it could not help but

remain strong in the new land according to the Martins.

Although the slave master forbid Africans to display outward forms of their culture, the institution of slavery demanded cooperation between the slaves in the carrying out of their duties. Furthermore, if slaves had not cooperated with one another, it is doubtful if they could have survived the rigors of slavery. Thus, slavery inadvertently reinforced the African helping tradition. Slaves had to build their own home. Both the skills of house building and the practice of Africans working together, which were a part of traditional Africa, were carried over into slavery. In addition, the hunting, trapping, and gardening the slaves had to do were done with skills learned from Africa. Seeing as the slave was usually responsible for caring for its sick, the slave relied on the African traditional use of herbs, spices, ointments and linaments to cure a host of ailments. The most important lesson the slaves learned from their African ancestors asserts the Martins was to take the resources that their environment and nature had to offer and make a way for themselves. It's quite evident that the helping tradition developed by black people in the United States was a carryover from traditional African society.

The Martins claim that slavery may have uprooted the American slaves from their aboriginal heritage, but it did not destroy the strong feeling for family that the slaves had deep within them. Joanne and Elmer assert that this strong sense of family explains why some slaves who had escaped worked for years to buy relatives or risked their lives to go back into the jaws of slavery to rescue their kin. The heroic tales of Harriet Tubman returning to the South to lead other slaves to freedom clearly illustrates this point.

Martin and Martin believe that during slavery it was the extended family that was the basis of the black helping tradition. There were four crucial elements of family life, according to the Martins, of the slave family which keyed the development of care giving in the slave community. They were: 1. the breakdown of patriarchy and the concomitant rise of black male-female equality and cooperation 2. the mutual aid network 3. the prosocialization of children 4. status group cooperation.

Slavery had stripped the African man of the patriarchal authority he had in Africa. The master was now the chief authority figure and decision maker. Everywhere and every day on the plantation, the male slave faced serious assault on his manhood. The most serious being his inability to protect his wife from sexual advances of white men and his master. In traditional Africa a man who could not protect his women from being raped or abused by another man, was not a man. As a result, many male slaves preferred to marry women from other plantations. They would rather suffer the pain of separation than experience such an extreme sense of helplessness.

Out of the demasculinization the American male slave, came a crude type of equality between the black man and the black women. Slavery equalized the black man and women in the most important world on the plantation, the world of work. Sojourner Truth made this point clearly in speech when she stated, "I have plowed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me and ain't I a women? I could work as much and eat as much as a man (when I could get it), and bear de lash as well and ain't I a women." The Martins contend that the equalization of the sexes came about partly from the conscious effort to defeminize black women. This probably was done so as to ease their consciences of the atrocities they perpetrated against the black woman.

According to the Martins, the equalization of black men and women made it necessary for the black slaves to cooperate for survival, and this cooperation played a crucial role in establishing the black helping tradition. The slave family like the traditional African family consisted of more than just a husband, a wife, and their dependent children. Hence, mutual aid among relatives was also essential for survival. The slave family also

took in parentless children and made sure that new slaves were absorbed into slave families and initiated into slave life. As a consequence, the slave family included both kin and nonkin.

The prosocialization of children also played a vital role in the development of the helping tradition. It was instilled in slave children at early age that their actions could have a detrimental effect on the group. Prosocialization was not an easy task due to the fact that white and black children were allowed to play with one another on the plantation up until a certain age. From this some slave children assumed they were equals to their white counterparts. If this assumption was not corrected, the entire group could suffer dire consequences. Not all socialization of the children was geared toward making the children good slaves. A part of rearing children was to teach them the prosocial values necessary for the survival of the slave family and community asserts the Martins. Usually while the parents were in the fields, older slaves took primary responsible for rearing the children. The older slaves taught the older children to care for the younger ones, both kin and nonkin. They passed down a black heritage of caring, helping, and sharing. The elder slaves instilled in the younger slaves prosocial values of mutual cooperation and support, teaching them to feel a sense of obligation for the entire slave community.

The helping tradition was also fostered by the cooperation between the three status group which existed during slavery. The slaves were usually classified as either house slaves, field slaves, or skilled slaves. Some people erroneously assume that the field slave and the house slave were at odds with one another. They assert that the field slaves viewed the house slaves as Uncle Toms and pawns of the slaveholders. This was not true. The Martins state that it was not unusual for house slaves to marry field slaves. Also, house slaves were very helpful in aiding field slaves with their escapes. House slaves provided the field slaves with information they had obtained from working in the master's house. The skilled slaves also cooperated in a similar manner. Due to the fact that their skills afforded them an opportunity to travel throughout the community at times, they were able to obtain valuable information which could aid in escapes.

Religious and racial consciousness also played an important role in the black helping tradition. Worshipping God served a source of therapy for slaves even though the slave's master distorted Christianity to advance the interests of slavery. The "institutional" black church was to become a dominant caregiving institution second in importance only to the black extended family. The Christian religious ideology of caring, giving, and loving reinforced in the slaves the helping tradition.

The Martins felt that racial consciousness was evident in slave protest and rebellion. When slaves could no longer tolerate seeing their relatives, whether extended or fictive kin, brutally abused, quests for freedom arose from the extended families. In order to effectuate a successful escape it took the cooperation of many slaves. Slaves had become aware of their common oppression and were willing to help one another escape the bondages of slavery.

Joanne and Elmer contend that the black helping tradition, which was developed in traditional Africa and retained in slavery began to decline rapidly during the 1930s and has sunk into insignificance today. The Martins attribute the decline of the black helping tradition to the Great Depression of the 1930s and desegregation. They felt that the Great Depression forced even strong extended families to retreat into themselves and concern themselves primarily with the survival of their members. Although thousands of black families could not have survived without aid from their kin, many black families had trouble feeding themselves, let alone their relatives. As the Great Depression took its toll, the practice of taking responsibility for other Blacks began to diminish.

The other factor which attributed to the decline the black helping tradition was desegregation. Along with

desegregation came a strong movement for assimilation for the black American. Which meant a deemphasis on the prosocialization values that had originated from the African heritage. The government viewed the problems of Blacks as problems of class, not necessarily of race. As a result government leaders pressed for assimilation and participation of the black American in the dominant society with little regard for the preservation of the helping tradition values. With assimilation, Blacks could receive social services, thus curtailing the need for the black helping tradition.

In order to trace the decline of the black helping tradition the Martins believe you must go back to the rural and small town Blacks and study their migration to urban centers. Blacks have been steadily migrating to the big cities since the turn of the century in search of a better life. World War I and World War II sparked a need for cheap, unskilled laborers in the war industry. Blacks saw these jobs as a means to escape sharecropping and other semislavery types of work.

The pattern of rural to urban migration generally was the same. First, Blacks felt stifled by the lack of opportunity in rural areas and sought a better life in the city. Second, they usually followed relatives who had paved the way. Rural Blacks realized from the stories of their urban relatives that urban life could be treacherous for newcomers. So they opted to stay with relatives or in an area with people from their hometown until they became accustomed to city life. They forced "homegirl" or "homeboy" ties with people from their small hometowns. What is ironic, I have had black students in my class who have picked up on this "homegirl"/"homeboy" concept but they use it in reference to their neighborhood.

Martin and Martin contend that even when small town Black migrants attempted to avoid the dominant influence of the big city, they are generally unsuccessful. First, they learn that many of their small town ways do not fit well in the big city. They are told by relatives and friends who have been in the city a while that city people are not to be trusted because city people are cold, "slick" and ever ready to pull a con game on their unsuspecting country cousins. Second, small town migrants are constantly being told their ways are "country." It is not long before these recent arrivals try to rid themselves of being "country" by changing their dress, talk, and the manner in which they act. The need to gain acceptance in the big city helps to explain the decline of the helping tradition. As the black urban population grew, the helping tradition came face to face with a world in which not helping people was considered more conducive to survival.

The decline of the black helping tradition has been partly the result of the changing values of Blacks. As Blacks have struggled to survive bigcity life, black people have taken on values that call for "me first" instead of the "we first" law of traditional Africa. For it is not uncommon to hear the phrase, "you have to look out for number 1" throughout the black community nowadays.

It is my contention that the crisis confronting the AfricanAmerican family can be attributed in part to the replacement of the helping tradition in the urban black community with the bourgeoisie and street ideologies. Pursuit of the bourgeoisie ideology would not have such an adverse effect on the black community if the black people who adhered to this philosophy did not become so self-consumed that they would obtain their material wealth at the expense of the rest of the black community. In addition, these people should not forget the helping tradition of their African ancestors. The street ideology on the other hand, if allowed to go unchecked, will continue to have a detrimental effect on the African-American family. This ideology requires its adherents to display a dispassionate attitude that stresses exploiting, using, or conning others for economic, sexual, or egotistical gains. This street ideology helps to account for the high teenage pregnancy rate, crime rate, and drug trafficking that occurs in the black community.

These ideologies are similar in four ways according to the Martins. First, both place a great deal of emphasis

on individualism. Second, both focus on obtaining money, material goods, and social status. Third, both are motivated by a desire to escape the hardship and the stigma of being poor. And fourth, by being consistent with the values of the status quo, both are supportive of the status quo. The two ideologies differ in that the street ideology stresses the use of illegitimate means while the bourgeoisie ideology advocates legitimate means.

With the teaching of this section of my unit I would suggest using one of the most popular show on television today, the Cosby Show. This show, in my opinion illustrates the bourgeoisie ideology. Here you have a black family in which the father, Cliff Huxtable, is a doctor and the mother, Clare Huxtable, is a lawyer. Both are successful in their respective fields. They never have a fight and by the end of the program whatever the family problem was, has been successfully resolved. This season the Huxtables are living in an extended type family situation. Whether this family is reflective of the AfricanAmerican family would make the basis for a good class discussion. It is true that there are black families that exist in real life in which the parents are successful professionals, but the lack of family conflict and the ease in which the Huxtables' conflicts are resolved are not reflective of a true American black family.

One may ask if the Huxtable family is an example of stable family, in my opinion it is. What makes a family stable is not the fact that both parents are present and successful but that the expressive and instrumental needs of its family members are being met. Alice F. Coner-Edwards in her essay "Mate Selection and Psychological Need" defines expressive needs as the psychological or inner most strivings for fulfillment of interpersonal requirements for love, companionship, emotional support, sharing, or affiliation. Instrumental needs are defined as those security strivings for survival or assumption of responsibility, economic sufficiency, food, clothing, shelter, protection, and social interaction. It is my belief that in order for a family to be considered stable, it must meet *both* the expressive and instrumental needs of its family members. Students should be made aware that it is not necessary to have a twoparent household or to have parents who are doctors and lawyers to meet these needs. However, our students should be encouraged to delay starting a family at an early age because of the difficulty inherent in raising a family. I would encourage you to conclude this unit by having a teen parent group from one of the high schools visit your class so students can get an idea of some of the problems of being a teenage parent.

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LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan #1 is found within the unit and deals with establishing a definition for family which is applicable to the AfricanAmerican.

Lesson Plan #2-“My Family”

Objective Students will make a collage made up of family pictures.

Procedure

1. Students should bring in pictures of their family. Students are not limited to their immediate family. (Students should ask their parents approval before bringing in their family pictures to school. Also, parents should be made aware of the collage activity, because the pictures should be expendable.)
2. Students should make a collage with these pictures.
3. After students have finished their collage, they will present it to the class giving a brief explanation of the family members present in the collage.

Materials Family pictures, glue or tape, cardboard.

Lesson Plan #3-‘The Interview’

Objective Students will interview a relative or family friend who has migrated from a Southern rural town.

Procedure

1. Once students have selected a subject to interview, they should pose the following questions:
 - a. What role did their family play in getting them settled in the city?
 - b. How was life different in the city in comparison to their hometown?
 - c. Did you settle in an area with relatives or people from your hometown? Why?
 - d. Why did you leave the South?
 - e. Do you like living in the city?
 - f. Did you change your ways to fit in? If so, why?
2. The answers to these question will form the basis for a class discussion.

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