



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
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Minority Teenage Fathers: Rights and Responsibilities

Curriculum Unit 94.01.03
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PURPOSE During a recent discussion with a colleague, she mentioned a statistic she had come across which stated, the most devastating loss to any child, (but especially a male child) was the loss of a father, when the child is between the ages of seven to twelve. This unit is an attempt to intercept the trend of minority, teen-age fathers who are not responsible for their children financially or emotionally.

In today's society the gap between the "haves" and the "have nots" is growing exponentially. It appears that the majority of those on the losing side of this "contest" are minority children, especially African American males. There is increasing awareness that if any group is in desperate need of sound advice and direction, it is young African-American men, many of whom live on the cutting edge of poverty and despair. Their problems run the gamut from a hostile racist environment, unemployment, gang pressure, substandard housing and substandard schools to drug trafficking, substance abuse and incarceration (to name only a few).

Some statistics give a sense of the magnitude of the problem. According to research, nearly one out of four African-American men aged 20 - 29 were in jail, or prisons on probation or parole as of 1989. African-Americans represent only 12% of the population, however 44% of the inmates in state prisons and local jails are African-American males. (Ingrassia 15) Life expectancy for African-American males decreased from 65.2 years to 64.9 years (while white males' rose from 75.3 to 75.6) (Dickey 139)

STRATEGIES This unit will:

- 1) provide general information concerning the court system in the United States.
- 2) provide information and practical advice, examine current laws and use problem solving activities designed to develop in students the knowledge and skills necessary to evaluate situations they may/will be confronted with as potential teen-aged fathers.
- 3) finally they will be exposed to the concept of abstinence (and/or responsible sexual activity) a small but growing trend in the country today.

This knowledge will help them take a pro-active (informed choices) role regarding their future, and type of

family situation they will choose as opposed to their future being a result of reacting to outside forces and for events in their POPULATION This curriculum unit is designed for use in an American History class. but can easily be modified to be used in any Language Arts area. The students I am currently working with are in classes which are in an alternate setting within the New Haven Public Schools. Their difficulties include specific learning disabilities and emotional problems. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

I.: Increase student awareness of the United States Judicial system. Students will be able to discuss, define, identify the various aspects of the court

II.: Increase student awareness of issues concerning minority teen aged parents in the United States specifically awareness of statistics concerning teen pregnancy in the United States.

A.: students will become aware of their own family structure. now it fits into society.

B.: students will begin to formulate opinions concerning their future role in society including the type of family they wish to have.

III.: Increase student self concep

A.: students will become aware of their own family structure, how it fits into society.

B.: students will begin to formulate opinions concerning their future role in society, including the type of family they wish to have.

IV.: Increase student awareness of issues concerning changing, evolving, differing family structures. including:

1) extended

2) nuclear

3) single-parent

4) step families

V.: Increase student. awareness of the growing movement towards abstention.

A. students will be able to define, and discuss abstentions and its possible effects on their future.

B.: students will be able to discuss responsible sexual activity.

INTRODUCTION Any discussion of minority teenage fathers should begin with several statistics and some

background information to define the problem. According to Susan Killheffer of Planned Parenthood in New Haven, most recent statistics show that teenage pregnancy represents 18% of total pregnancies within the city. In 1990 there were 457 teenage pregnancies among which 288 were from African-American females.

Figures such as these confirm a trend toward increasing sexual activity involving teens that we as teachers of middle and high school students have observed for sometime. Dr. James P. Comer of the Yale University Child Study Center says "the exploding population of African-American Children from single Parent homes represents the education crisis that is going to kill us." (Ingrassia 15)

The children of teenage parents usually live their lives as part of a single-parent family. Unfortunately many of these parents are poor women.

Washington D.C. - 50% of the household consist of single-parents, 89% of which are headed by poor women.

Detroit. Mich. - 55%. of household consist of single-parents, 84% of which are women. (Brown 12)

Hamden. Conn.- 57% of the children are from a single-parent household. (Thomas 5)

Black families nationally - 50% (up from 23% in 1967) are now headed by single women.

If the single-parent-trend continues, half of all children born in the U.S. last- year (1993) will live with a single parent by the time they are 15 years old.(Hodgkinson 16)

Black children today are more likely to be born into poverty, lack early pre-natal care, have a single mothers and/or unemployed parents.

Single parent families are a product of economic factors with a long history. The historical background of the economic status of African-American has been a mixture of highly visible improvements and persistent problems. Substantial gains in academic achievements during the 1970's greatly increased the size of the black middle class. By the mid 1980's a majority of African American families earned more than \$15,000 a year and over 20% had annual incomes higher than \$35,000. Despite these advances the median family income of all blacks remained at less than three-fifths the median family income of whites. (Dickey 138}

ECONOMIC FACTORS In ironic contrast to the economic forces that first brought Africans to North America, some of the most dynamic U.S. industries began to use foreign workers - usually not unionized, and unprotected by minimum wage laws - instead of unskilled urban African-American workers. Unable to obtain the industrial and domestic service jobs that had attracted earlier generations of blacks to urban centers, inner city residents were increasingly mired in economically depressed urban areas that offered few opportunities for upward or outward mobility. The long term movement. of African-Americans from agricultural and domestic services jobs to urban industrial occupations had now become fruitless. By the 1980's the trend among some inner-city African-American was toward family deterioration and declining occupational security.

CONTRAST OF TRADITIONAL FAMILIES VS SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES The traditional family pattern of father as the major wage earner, mother staying at home with several children, often grandparents of other relatives living in the homes contributing economically spiritually emotionally and therefore providing positive role models for children contributed to the basic stability of the family unit.

Due to this family structures most families thrived, male children had a father figure readily available to serve as a counselor and often as a friend. Without a father as a role models many boys learn about relationships

from peers. They learn that girls are to be used and/or abused. Having a father is no guarantee, but without a proper role model boys will tend to treat girls incorrectly. Elijah Anderson's 1920 study of street life concluded "boys view courting as a game in which the object is to perfect a rap that seduces girls. The goal: to add up one's conquests since that's the measure of respect. (Ingrassia 17) The mother was able to provide children with everyday living skills, supervision, and general emotional care. It should also be noted that grandparents contributed greatly to the stability of the children.

Although some families continue to function on this level, the American family has changed dramatically in the past 40 years. The variant that we will concentrate on will be the single-parent teenage father, the conflicts this causes and problems that often involve the law.

FAMILY LAW BACKGROUND The law requires parents to care for, support, and control their children. When parents are unable and/or unwilling to fulfill their responsibilities the law becomes involved. Teenage fathers are often not financially or emotionally capable of providing support for their children.

"Parents who are secure, valued and in control of their lives are more effective than those who feel unsure and who are not in control. Parents still have primary responsibility for raising children, but they must have the power to do so in ways consistent with their children's needs and their own values. If parents are to function in this role with confidence, we must address ourselves less to the criticism and reform of parents themselves than to the criticism and reform of institutions that sap their self-esteem and power." (Keniston 11)

ECONOMIC RESPONSIBILITIES Parents must provide for their children such necessities of life as food, clothing, shelter, education and medical care. If they cannot or will not state laws authorize intervention by designated authorities to ensure that children's needs are met. Laws require a father to support his minor children if he is able to do so. The "Adolescent Health, Services, and Pregnancy Prevention Act of 1978" tried to address concern of teen pregnancy - with some thought given to teen father's responsibilities. In 1981 the "Adolescent Family Life Program of 1981" was debated in the Senate. As usual the main centered of female issues but the male was included (even if only in a financial capacity). (Vinovskis 27) Therefore failure to provide support may result in civil or criminal proceeding against him, if paternity has been admitted or established.

In many communities there is an informal acknowledgment of the child by the teen-age father. This can range from simple public acknowledgment, to financial support and a sharing of child care responsibilities with the mother. Limited employment opportunities also play a key factor in a teen-age father's ability/willingness to conform to society's image of a responsible parent. "Teen fathers run an especially high risk of unemployment and disproportionately lack the educational credentials/basic academic skills, and employment experience needed to secure steady well paying jobs." (O' Brian 227}

Unfortunately many of the children of teenage parents wind up being supported by AFDC. Originally set up in 1935 to assist widows, today many feel it is out of control. Many states are attempting to put restrictions such as: time limits, limit the amount of children being supported/work fare etc.

"The Arkansas Legislature has even given money for Norplant. They wanted to reduce the number of young women and babies on welfare and Medicaid. I was thinking about the bright young people who were being lost because they are the products of unplanned pregnancies." according to Joycelyn Elders, U.S. Surgeon General. (Todd 15)

THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY REACTS Obviously the solutions to these problems are not simple. Public

policy demands that these fathers take responsibility for their children, however this cannot happen unless there is also greater effort to develop job programs as well as programs such as parenting classes that include fathers.

As a result of these many issues contributing to the general breakdown of the family resulting in a preponderance of single-parent families, the African-American community has decided to organize, to raise the consciousness of men, especially young men, of the dilemma in America and their deteriorating relations with the family and the community at large.

The African American community has begun to recognize that African American males are in serious trouble. They have begun to rally as never before - organizations such as *100 Black Men*, which is involved in various ways in the community, including an extensive centering program.

Another organization, *Concerned Black Men* tries to help vulnerable young African-American males and to serve as role models and mentors. Civil rights organizations have developed various "Black Male Responsibility" projects and some school districts are considering the merits of organizing all-black male schools to address their needs.

The Milwaukee school district has opened two schools (one elementary, the other middle school) that will cater specifically to African-American males' academic and social needs. While the schools will accept children from all backgrounds, "they will emphasize African-American studies and seek to foster self-esteem and responsibility by offering school time counseling and discussions on such topics as male sexuality and entrepreneurship." (Williams 15) The schools will also strive to have a higher ratio of African-American male teachers than the district norm.

A similar idea is taking place in Baltimore Maryland. This class however doesn't do anything differently as far as curriculum is concerned, the idea is to have an African-American male teacher as a role model for young boys. The principal of the school noticed that because of the changes taking place in the neighborhoods the boys no longer were exposed to men on the corners going to work. They were now seeing aimless young men on street corners. At about the same time a teacher, (African-American male) noticed the young boys in his class begin to take on some of his mannerisms. "All these kids are saying," Boynton says, "Teach me, discipline me, and love me." Along the way, he adds, he hopes to instill in the youngsters some sense of direction for their lives. "In here" he says, "we're always talking about respect, responsibility, and self-control." (Williams 19)

Another program called the *Houston Endowment INC* has contributed 1 million dollars to Texas Southern University to fund the school's innovative Black Male Initiative, a program that aims to improve the quality of life for African-American males. BMI is a component of Texas Southern University's Center on Family. "The program concentrates on the educational, social and economic needs of Black males include recruiting, mentoring, counseling, employment, tutoring, seminars, traveling and research." (Moore 8)

There is also a *Male Youth Project* in Washington D.C.. Three men from the community have taken on the task of acting 25 surrogate fathers for up to 60 African-American boys in an after school program.

Some have stressed the need for school-based health clinics. "In a tiny school in Arkansas, the teenage pregnancy rate was 57% before we set up a comprehensive health clinic at the school. We created after-school programs and summer programs. They have had no pregnancies, no abortions, and no dropouts for three years." according to Joycelyn Elders the nation's top health official.

The final program we will discuss is the *Young Fathers* program of the Vocational Foundation. This program “drums at responsibility and pride in young fathers who typically are jobless dropouts with crimped prospects as individuals never mind as parents”. (Clines 21) The young men are counseled, sometimes helped to gain entry level positions and if necessary, helped through the maze of the court system to secure visitation rights to their children.

There are obviously many factors impacting on students in today’s society. In my discussion I have attempted to outline many of these factors so that you as a teacher will be able to lead discussions of these topics with your students. Only by exposing these ideas to our students will they be able to form opinions on the way they want to shape their future.

STRATEGY # 1 Since this unit will be taught under the “umbrella” of American History a brief introduction using factual information concerning the U.S. court system is warranted.

LESSON 1

A brief description of the three branches of the Federal Government. This description could include: the federal government is divided into three parts or branches. These branches are the: 1) legislative; 2) Executive; 3) Judicial.

The legislative branch is Congress (composed of the House and the Senate). The executive branch includes the president and vice-president.. The judicial branch is made up of the courts. None of the three branches of the federal government can work alone. For example, only Congress can make laws. But the president must approve the laws by signing them, or not approving them or not approve by power of veto. The Supreme Court can decide whether the law goes against the Constitution. This system has checks and balances. This means that each branch checks or limits, the power of the others. The power is then balanced among all three branches.

Vocabulary

1. branch
2. legislative
3. executive
4. judicial
5. congress
6. checks
7. veto
8. federal
9. constitution
10. balances

LESSON 2

Students can be divided into 3 groups. Using cooperative learning techniques, each group can be given the responsibility for 1/3 of a chart displaying the 3 branches of the federal government. When the groups are finished the charts can be combined and displayed in the classroom for future reference.

LESSON 3

To explore in more depth and as background information for various court cases and issues to be used in strategy # 2, we will define law “the set of rules and regulations made and unforced by the government that regulates the conduct of people within a society. Laws generally reflect and promote a society’s values.(McMahon 3)

LESSON 4

As a final introductory lesson it will be helpful to present the following chart of the federal and state court system.

U.S. SUPREME COURT

APPEALS

U.S.CIRCUIT COURT OF APPEALS

APPEALS

U.S. DISTRICT COURT

(FEDERAL TRIALS)

FEDERAL CASES

APPEALS

STATE SUPREME COURT

(HIGHEST STATE COURT)

APPEALS

MUNICIPAL OF COUNTY COURT

(LOCAL TRIALS))

LOCAL CASES

FAMILY COURT

JUVENILE COURT

Further it can be explained that “Family of Domestic Relations Courts” may hear all actions involving divorces separation and child custody.

Additions time can be spent. Supplying students with various cases (varied) and having the students determine which type of court would try the case.

STRATEGY # 2

LESSON 1

An hour long broadcast of the show NATURE, titled "The Nature of Sex." This show looks at how different animals raise "Young Ones", examining the varying responsibilities of male and female parents raising their offspring to maturity. Included: jacanas, a bird species whose males each raise a clutch (a nest. of eggs). This should provide a starting point for a discussion of parents, and especially fathers' responsibilities.

LESSON 2

A court case -involving a custody battle in Tennessee will be one of the cases we will use. The Tennessee Supreme Court ruled unwed fathers should have priority over adoptive parents in the custody of a child, clearing the way for a young Black man to get the 3-year-old son he has sought to raise since birth. (Moore. April 4, 1994 , 27)

Using the basic facts of this case (as well as some fictitious information) the students will debate the opposing sides. As a result they will be able to understand the verdict.

LESSON 3

Stanlev vs. Illinois (1972) a case in which the state attempts to take illegitimate children away from their natural father after their mother died. The mother and father had lived together irregularly for about 50 years. When the mother died Illinois law stated that the children became wards of the state. The father contested the state's premise that unwed fathers are basically unfit, and not subject to the same procedures given to married fathers or unwed mothers (a hearing would have been held to determine the parent's fitness before children would have been taken).

Caban vs. Mohammed , (1970) a case in which a father had established a continuous supportive relationship with his children. The courts agreed and ruled in favor of the father.

These two cases illustrate for the students the necessity and obligation of fathers to actively maintain a relationship with their children regardless of the marital status of the parents.

Using the facts in these two cases the students will Conduct "mock trials" with the teacher as the judge.

LESSON 4

Quilloin vs. Walcott, (1978) is a case in which the courts terminated the parental rights of a father who had not established a relationship with his children, yet sought to block a step-father from adopting them. The state sought to preserve an ongoing family unit therefore ruled against the natural father.

Lehr vs. Robertson , (1989) a case in which the courts terminated the parental rights of a father who had rarely seen his daughter since her birth, were terminated without notice. The courts made it clear that an unwed father does not have an absolute right to notice.

These two cases illustrate to the students their obligation to any children they might have as far as their legal responsibilities. and therefore the rights that go along with them.

These cases also will be used as basis for “mock trials”, and discussions of the similarities and differences of the four cases.

LESSON 5

As the final lesson for this section I plan to use several quotations from EBONY magazine from an article entitled “FATHER TO SON”. (June 1993) The article appeared close to Father’s Day and it was an attempt. to get some fatherly advice from several prominent men from the African-American community. (The quotes as presented here are abbreviated. It is recommended that the teacher obtain the complete quote as the messages are very powerful.) Each quote should be presented to the students with some discussion to follow. At. this point the students can individually (or in groups) assess each statement and rate them. They can then write a brief explanation for their choice.

The students can then write their own paragraph containing advice they would give to their sons.

Roland Burris - Attorney General State of Illinois. “You must set goals; you must think about how the future will turn out for those who dare to dream.”

Bill Cosby - Entertainer. “I want you to remember that when you were born you were as intelligent and anxious to learn as any one your age.”

Dr. W.W. Herenton - Mayor Memphis, Tennessee. “As the seed of a past and present generation, son, you will be faced with obstacles. However, I hope that. my words will help guide you in the challenges you face and the choices you will make in life.”

Rev. Jesse L. Jackson - President, Rainbow Coalition Shadow Senator, D.C. “Now that I have blazed some trails, you must take advantage of the new pathways that have been established. My son knocking down those walls were my burdens. Remember, my son, scaling those mountains were the burdens of my generation. Seizing the valleys beyond those mountains is your challenge and opportunity. Reflect on those things.”

Percy Sutton - Chairman Emeritus Inner City Broadcasting. “No matter your circumstances you must live the consequences of your choices.”

Douglas Wilder - Governor Commonwealth of Virginia. “Taking a wife and beginning a family are the greatest responsibilities a man can accept. Making sure that you can provide for this family must be your highest priority.”

STRATEGY # 3 In order to provide an issue that the students could debate I have decided to conclude the unit discussing the issue of abstinence, obviously the only way to completely ensure that a pregnancy will not occur, and to possibly expose these young men to a concept they may not have previously considered seriously.

LESSON 1

Students will read article from Naples, Fla. concerning teens, especially those with church affiliations. Some girls have begun to wear wedding bands to symbolize a promise they’ve made to themselves and their parents to abstain from sex. Others attended a rally sponsored by WAYJ-FM. Don Tomei the youth minister at New Hope Ministries in Florida says, “They can control it. The kids are more than just a gland. They have consciences. I think a lot of them realize that abstinence is the way to go.” (Scripps Howard News Service A13) Students will discuss article and as a homework assignment try to find more articles in the newspaper and/or

magazines.

Lesson 2

Students will read pamphlet from Dept. of Children and Family Services concerning pregnancy prevention. During subsequent class discussions, students will generate ideas pertaining to their continuing abstinence.

Lesson 3

Students will “role play” scenes from “I Ain’t Down for Being Called DADDY!” A pamphlet which contains sound advice regarding fatherhood and concludes with: “Having Sex too soon can change your life in a way that you may not be ready for.” The conclusion continues by stressing the responsibilities of parenthood.

Additional Lesson Ideas

- 1) Students research financial aspects of child rearing. Each student brings to class a complete list (including prices) of a full layette.
- 2) Guest speakers including a former teen fathers a doctor (or health care professional) to discuss the health of children born to teenage parents
- 3) A lesson in which an alarm clock would be set at various intervals during the day. When the alarm goes off, student must perform a chore regardless of what they were engaged in (to illustrate an infant’s complete dependency and lack of set schedule).

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