

A Series: THE BLACK FAMILY AND THE CHALLENGES OF THE 80's

Part VI - OUR CHILDREN (CONTINUED)

By Maudra Jones

"The socialization of children remains perhaps the most exclusive domain of the family. It is within the intimate family circle that children develop personality, intelligence, aspirations and, indeed, moral character."

Andrew Billingsley

At this time of the year, when most of our children will be spending their time at home (or visiting with relatives), the family role becomes even more challenging. This is surely the time when parents must assume the full responsibilities of teacher, counselor, coach and principal. If our children are to be provided every opportunity for a healthy, wholesome and productive summer experience, then we parents must accelerate our efforts in the socialization process. The summer months afford us a unique opportunity to mobilize all of the resources available, through our families, churches and community organizations, for enriching our children's lives, for continuing to build the foundation for learning and nurturing cultural traditions, and to assist them in recognizing the realities of today's world, from a Black perspective. This additional time with our children can be devoted to strengthening bonds between parents and children and reaffirming the love, unity and togetherness that sustains the Black family.

Some of our children will be among the fortunate few who will participate in special programs, i.e. reading, crafts, recreation and summer employment programs. Others, among the majority of our children, will have a lot of "time on their hands" and will depend upon us to help them fill the void. In either case, it becomes critically important for us

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as parents, clergy, church community and organizations to "take the moment" and make a special commitment to the youth of our community to develop their awareness of the real world and the issues which affect and influence their lives.—never forgetting that our children need us now more than ever — never forgetting that they are constantly exposed to a world with challenges far greater than the limitations of their experience and understanding — never forgetting that our children are in constant need of our demonstrated love and support, upon which they can build their strengths, courage, confidence and endurance during these uncertain times. We are all "teachers" of our children. The responsibility for our children is everyone's responsibility, everyone who touches the lives of children. Our children are our mirrors. Our children are reflections of the people, the images and the experiences they encounter in their "world". What will your children's world consist of this summer? As parents, we know that the answer to this important question is: "Our children's "world" in the next three months will be what we make it or what we allow it to be". This opportunity to accelerate our "teaching" role can be greatly enhanced by an understanding of the socialization process. We must begin to analyze the structures of society and how they function to influence our lives and thus, the lives of our children (i.e. school, movies, TV, radio, peer groups, etc.). Andrew Billingsley says "socialization is doubly challenging for the Black family, for we must teach our young not only how to be human but how to be Black in a White society...The requirements are not the same". Billingsley further states that we must teach our children, very early in life, the meaning of being Black and, he writes, "we must also teach them to



Tell me what are the prevailing sentiments that occupy the minds of your young men, and I will tell you what is to be the character of the next generation.

EDMUND BURKE

separate being Black from being bad (contrary to the "myth-makers"). We must, at all cost, direct more attention to the intellectual capabilities of our children and pursue, along with them, a continual quest for knowledge (in spite of those forces which might deny the opportunities for excellence and self-fulfillment). We must teach our children the reality of the American experience for Black people, no matter what their status or station in life.

Some weeks ago, I shared portions of a speech which Lerone Bennett delivered at the Sixtieth Anniversary meeting of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History. His statements about the realities of the 1970's might be viewed as an escalation of those realities in the 80's Here is what he said about what is happening to our children:

"A whole generation is growing up (sic) in sections of our cities with nothing to turn to except drugs and crime and self-destruction...A whole generation is growing up with no faith in American or Afro-American traditions...we are losing a whole generation of Black people. And this fact, which is cultural, political and economic at the same time, constitutes in my judgment, the gravest social crisis in the Black community since the end of slavery".

We must look squarely at this same reality in the 1980's, as we hear the resounding voices of the Lerone Bennetts, of the past and present, calling us to "put our hand to the plow" and do for ourselves what no one else will do for us — coordinate our thinking and our work, "internalize the Black imperative and live in the spirit of the united Black community to come", acknowledge the social crisis we all face and utilize the resources within our families, churches, organizations and community agencies to alleviate the problems that make up the existing social crisis. The evidences of the crisis can still be found in current high unemployment rates, teenagers roaming the streets "without compasses or maps", the lack of aspirations of our youth and the "massive loss of confidence in the agency and power of Black people". On a deeper level, Bennett refers to the "sickening wave of so-called Black movies" which swept the country during the 70's as having had disastrous consequences in the field of Black culture. He cited the debasement of Black music and Black popular culture, as one of the more dangerous manifestations of the social crisis. We are hearing more and more of what he referred to as "the new tone and new values of so-called soul music". About this, Bennett told his audience: "All day long and all night long, messages of freakiness, hustling

and social disorder — messages teaching freakiness, hustling and social disorder are beamed not to the old...but to the young who are vulnerable and malleable". He reminds us that many of us have not paid attention to the fact that "a whole generation is emerging with little or no understanding and little or no relationship with the roots of Black culture...a whole generation is emerging with little or no understanding of jazz, the blues and the spirituals — a whole generation which knows little or nothing of Duke Ellington or Count Basie, not to mention Carter G. Woodson or W.E.B. DuBois". Bennett continues with heartening admonition: "For if we ever forget what the blues were and are; if we ever forget the spirituals and the old Black preachers and maids and cotton pickers and what they suffered and dreamed; if we ever forget where we came from and what we are and must be; if we ever, in a word, forget our souls, all the technology in the world will not save our bodies". Thank God for the Lerone Bennetts who help us to focus on the real issues and keeps us working toward that higher calling and a new vision of work and struggle that is adequate to the "dimensions of the hour" — the now reality.

(To be continued next week.)

PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE WEEK:

Plan a Black History study program for your children as a summer activity. Begin a regular schedule for monitoring your children's activities (Radio, TV, activities outside the home or neighborhood, movies, parties, etc.) Talk about TV with your children; look at TV with your children and choose TV programs with your children. Explore special programs for youth, which are being held at your community library or other facilities in your neighborhood or the city.

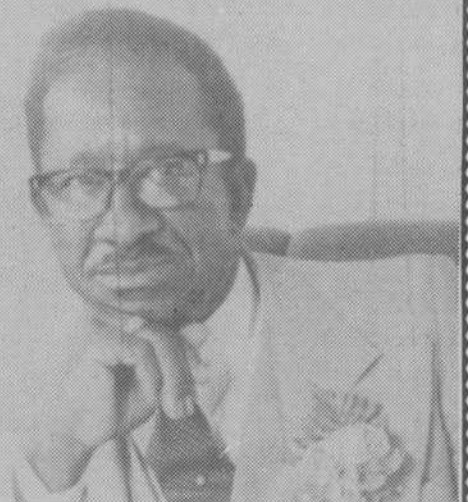
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