

"COMING TOGETHER

NCNW ESTABLISHES



Photos courtesy of Roland Freeman

Dr. Dorothy I. Height
President, National Council of Negro Women

Family reunions, sometimes called "homecoming," are a valued part of Black family tradition. This year, however, a new, inspirational and unique nationwide celebration took place on the National Mall near the Washington Monument in Washington, D.C. This grand and glorious event known as the first annual Black Family Reunion—a celebration of history, cultural values and tradition—was created and initiated by the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW). The reunion was produced in cooperation with the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior, the Smithsonian Institution and the government of the District of Columbia.

This historic reunion brought together community members and leaders of all arenas. As envisioned by Dr. Dorothy I. Height (NCNW president for 28 years), the leadership committee and the affiliated organizations, the Black Family Reunion focused on achievements and showcased programmatic efforts aimed at addressing the issues confronting Black family members.

The Black Family Is a Precious Institution

The Black family—even though broken apart deliberately in the past for both economic and psychological exploitation—has played a most unique and invaluable role in American history. Because of past attempts over a long period of centuries to dehumanize Black people and destroy Black families, preservation and strengthening of the Black family must be placed on the list of America's highest priorities.

The family, along with its social network of relationships and ties, provides the attitudes, values and mores which allow its members to develop healthy personalities and give to society its particular quality of life. The laws and regulations of a society

are most effective in influencing the behavior of its citizens when they are introduced and reinforced within the context of constructive family life. For this reason, society must encourage and facilitate successful family functioning universally.

But, the case for help long overdue with the Black family has never been addressed in a just or an equitable way by America as a whole.

According to Faye Bryant—National co-chairperson of the Assault on Illiteracy Program (AOIP) and member of NCNW,

America's policies in welfare, in the lack of proper ego-strengthening remediation in education and outright discrimination in the job and housing markets simply continue the contemptuous past at a tragic cost to all in America. Black American families, at best, always have been fragile. Now, at least, we are awakening to the realities.

What was allowed to exist loosely as the Black family has always served as a buffer and shield against the negative implications of rejection from the major institutions of American society. This semblance of family began this role during the period of enslavement. John W. Blassingame, a well-known Black historian, deals with many aspects of the slave "family" in his book, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Ante-Bellum South*. In Chapter 3, Blassingame states:

The family, while it had no legal existence in slavery, was in actuality one of the most important survival mechanisms for the slave. In his family he found companionship, love, sexual gratification, sympathetic understanding of his sufferings; he learned how to avoid punishment, to cooperate with other blacks, and to maintain his self-esteem. However

"Pulling Ourselves Up By Our