INTRODUCTION: FATHERS' LIVES IN CONTEXT

1. Walter Mosley is a contemporary African-American male, award-winning fiction writer. The character for which his work is best known is Easy Rawlins, a black male detective who becomes a father at various points in the author’s series. See Devil in a Blue Dress, A Red Death, White Butterfly, Black Betty, Gone Fishin’, and A Little Yellow Dog. Also meet one of his latest male characters, Socrates Fortlow, in Always Outnumbered, Always Outgunned, which was also developed into an HBO movie.

2. The proportion of black children living below the poverty level was approximately the same in 1995 as it was in 1970. The percentage is almost two and a half times that experienced by white children in the United States in 1995. For Hispanics, the percentage was 39.3 percent in the same year. For a summary of these statistics and more on families, see Chadwick and Heaton, eds., 1998 (table H3–3, p. 252).

3. See Angel and Angel 1993, for a discussion of the health and well-being of African-American children and custodial mothers. Their experiences are compared to those of Latinos and European Americans; also see the U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992.


5. E. Franklin Frazier 1931, 1939; Daniel P. Moynihan 1965. For a brief and concise critique of Frazier’s analysis, see Herbert G. Gutman 1975. And see Walter Allen 1995 for a concise critique of Frazier’s work on black low-income families. Allen argues (and I agree) that some of the major problems of Frazier’s analysis are that he (1) failed to specify the societal-level processes argued to determine black familial experiences, (2) denies the legitimacy of aspects of black familial problems that differ from normative white patterns, and (3), which is referred to in this paragraph, implicitly attributes the economic deprivation of black families to cultural characteristics. Also see Walter Allen (1978), “The Search for Applicable Theories of Black Family Life”; Nathan Hare 1976, for a critique of Moynihan’s “Temple of Pathology” thesis and its failure to adequately account for racial oppression. Allen also offers support for this critique. And see Oscar Lewis 1972.

7. John L. McAdoo (1993), “The Roles of African American Fathers: An Ecological Perspective,” argues the logic of using this more holistic approach. For a full discussion of grounded theory, see B. Glazer and A. Strauss 1967; B. Glazer 1978; A. Strauss and J. Corbin 1998. When using grounded theory, one does not begin with a theory and then seek to prove it. Rather, the researcher begins with a topic of study, systematically and intensively collects and analyzes data on the subject, and then inductively derives categories and theories from the data that emerges and from which the theory is grounded.

8. Mothers of children were recruited in one of two ways: (1) twenty-one mothers provided the initial contacts arranging for me to meet the fathers of their children. They were recruited in a manner similar to that used for fathers. However, 10 of these women were contacted through child care centers and social service agencies that provided services to welfare recipients. And, (2) arrangements to meet the remaining twelve participating mothers were made through the fathers of their children.

Attempts were made to make contact with the mothers of each of these fathers’ children’s mothers. However, most initial contacts were made with the fathers themselves. Thus, they were the primary means by which I could make contact with the mothers of their children. Some fathers were reluctant to let mothers (or anyone) know that they were participating in the study. They expressed concern about the confidentiality of their identity and their responses. Another problem was a difficulty in making meeting arrangements that fit the potential female respondent’s schedule and my own schedule and deadlines. A third problem was a difficulty developing trust with mothers with whom I did not have initial personal contact. Mothers were reluctant to be interviewed over the phone if they had not initially met me “in person.” Those who agreed to meet or interview over the phone were not always extremely forthcoming with regard to responding to questions. Several seemed preoccupied with concerns about the nature of the study, the purpose of certain questions, how I came to meet their children’s father, and the nature of that relationship.

Adult children of noncustodial fathers were recruited through word-of-mouth, snowball techniques, and other means similar to those used for fathers and mothers. These adult children were not the children of men in this study. Rather, they ranged in age from 76 to 93, and 17 of the 21 adult children were women. Interviews with elderly men seemed complicated by the following: those contacted tended to have very poor health and had difficulty participating in interviews, tended to live with relatives (often making it difficult to arrange interviews that satisfied the
schedules of others in the household), and I had more success making contact with women than with men in this age group.

9. The term “distal” was initially used in my dissertation work on noncustodial African American fathers. However, some of my dissertation committee members had reservations about its use, suggesting that it sounded too negative, technical, and emotionally unappealing. I agreed with their perception of the term and found that “live-away” is better suited to describe the fathers of this study. However, I continue to search for a more appropriate and descriptive term.

1. “THERE’S NO SUCH THING AS A GOOD BLACK FATHER”

1. White and Cones 1999. The other conclusion that White and Cones draw from the March is that “race is an inescapable complication in American life that must be resolved” (p. 7). They argue that historical and contemporary racism have created economic and social obstacles that inhibit black men from an “optimal level of male functioning.”

2. Harris, Torres, and Allender 1994; Kimmel and Messner 1989 also provide elaboration in paragraph by quoting findings directly. Also see Kimmel and Messner, eds., 1989.


4. Black women, too, have been subject to equally harsh stereotypes. They are generally represented as asexual mammys and/or whorish Jezebels. These images have historically inundated media and persist to the present and served to justify oppression and rape of black women during and since slavery. Similar to men, the images of African American women generally contrast sharply with those of European Americans. There exist ample research and analyses of this pattern of representation, see bell hooks (1992) for a contemporary analysis and Deborah White (1985) for a thorough historical analysis as two examples.

5. There are many works that offer excellent discussions of African American stereotypes. As a starting point, see Sterling Brown (1933) for a thorough description of black stereotypes and an analysis of how each served a particular function during slavery, reconstruction, and the several decades following. Also see Earl Ofari Hutchinson (1997). Though the work offers little new insight and lacks some objectivity, it does provide a description of past and present stereotypes that many students will find useful. Also, for classrooms, see the film Ethnic Notions (California Newsreel; San Francisco).

6. See Cheryl Johnson (1993). In this study Johnson analyzed eighteen hours of television programming from one of three national networks. The station and the day of the week were randomly selected. In general, articles appearing in popular
African American magazines seem to blame black men for many of the woes in the black community and simultaneously directing them to stand up and accept their responsibility. These responsibilities included obligations to family, to communities, and to themselves to pursue success in education and employment.

Messages suggest that good black men (those who are not breaking the law, who are legally employed, responsible, and financially independent) are difficult to find. In the feature article “Why Some Good Girls Prefer Bad Guys,” Ebony, April 2000), the author argues that you can spot a “bad” black man as he walks across the room and his general manner. The author goes on to inform the reader that relationship experts have developed five general categories of common “bad boys.” These are as follows: 1) The Player—suffers from low self-esteem and needs the companionship of many women to feel good about himself; he disappears after conquering a woman sexually. 2) The Scrub—is harmless but may need to be pampered and mothered; similar to a child, he throws tantrums when he does not get his way. 3) The Womanizer—“unlike the Player, who uses many women to boost his poor self-esteem; the womanizer gets his thrills from hurting women intentionally”; he has a biological need to attract women and be attracted to them; he also has a total lack of respect for the opposite sex. 4) the Hustler—the only job these men have is hustling hardworking women for their money; “when the money runs out, he’s gone.” Finally, 5) the Abuser—demonstrates his power or frustration by emotionally and/or physically abusing women.

Good men are also consistently portrayed as those who achieve great economic success, drive expensive cars, and have at least one beautiful woman at their side. For example, in his January 1998 monthly editorial, Bernard Bronner, founder of Upscale (subtitled “The Magazine for the Success-Oriented African American”) advised blacks to choose their vehicles with care. After all he counseled, “the car not only serves as a means of transportation, but a symbol of success . . . style and profile in luxury with a Rolls Royce, Ferrari, Lamborghini. . . . or Lincoln Navigator.” Overall, it appears that black popular literature provides primarily one of two images, the black male as a victim of racial oppression in need of spiritual, community, and familial motivation, and as a lazy brute who will not perform his responsibilities without such encouragement.

7. In 1998 President Clinton commissioned an advisory panel to study race relations in America. The panel was titled “Advisory Board to Race Initiative” and was chaired by John Hope Franklin, famed African American historian. After 15 months of research the panel provided a final report titled “One American in the 21st Century.” The panel submitted the report to the president in September 1998. Kerner Commission 1968; Majors and Billson 1992.

8. The Franklin study also found that 63 percent of Latinos felt their demographic group was misrepresented on entertainment television. Consequently, in July of
1999, the NAACP announced the launching of the Television and Film Diversity Initiative to monitor the major television networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox). Their public strategy consisted of purchasing stocks in the major networks, publicly castigating the television industry, and threatening a boycott. La Raza, a Latino activist organization launched a similar initiative soon after.

Though empirical studies have found that children from single parenting households are economically disadvantaged compared to their counterparts in two-parent homes (see the work of Sara McLanahan in particular), there exist evidence that African American families’ have historically provided meaningful social and emotional support and care for their children: Carol Stack 1974; Dorothy Roberts 1998; Cynthia R. Daniel 1998; Jacqueline Jones 1985; Andrew Billingsley 1969, 1992. For research suggesting that fathers have traditionally had a presence of some sort in black families, see Borchert 1980 and Stack 1974. Black single parenting mothers are less likely to receive child support payments than most other demographic groups—this is documented in various sources; however, see Edin and Lein 1997, for a discussion. For fathers’ residence and involvement, see S. McLanahan 1999; Rivara, Sweeney, and Henderson 1986, for a longitudinal analysis of African American adolescent fathers, the majority of whom provided care and/or financial support for their children despite problems of unemployment.

2. SLAVERY, CIVIL WAR, AND RECONSTRUCTION

3. Also Genovese 1989; Fogel and Engerman 1974.
6. American Slave, Georgia Narratives, 12:60.
7. Slave Narratives, Egypt, 1945, 156–57.
20. Donna Franklin (1997), like Eric Foner, argues that the movement for black men to establish their patriarchy was strengthened by their participation in the Union Army because they, more than women, were more directly involved in the struggle for freedom. She and Eric Foner argue that black men during this period were attempting to “reassert” their leadership position in the family and ownership over wives, children, and labor. I argue that men could not possibly reassert rights that they never historically held as privilege. Also see John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss Jr. 1998; Gutman 1976.
22. Borchert 1980; Reed 1929. See the scholarly article by Virginia Young 1970. Also see Billingsley (1993) for a summary of trends in marriage among African Americans.
23. This is a study of the experiences of African American unwed mothers in New York City. It should be noted that in 59 percent of the unwed mother cases she studied, mothers resided with the fathers of their children.

3. “TIMES ARE JUST GOING TO GET WORSE . . .”

1. Robert Bullard 1989:28. Bullard summarizes the boom-and-bust period of the 1970s and 1980s and its effect on black Houstonians. In the years immediately following emancipation, blacks were able to acquire land, build businesses, and communities in several of the city’s wards. While these wards remain predominantly black, property and businesses are no longer in the hands of those who reside there.
3. For an analysis and description of emotional labor, see Arlie Hochschild’s work *The Managed Heart*. Although it is a qualitative study of the experiences of contemporary airline attendants, the concept readily applies to many service occupations held by African American men throughout the century.
5. In 1996, Congress passed and President Bill Clinton signed the *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996* (PRWORA). Prior to its passage, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) was the essence of states’
monetary assistance to poor African American families with children. AFDC was an entitlement that the state was obligated to provide to all those who qualified. Most importantly, it provided an economic safety net to the nation’s poorest citizens. Among other things, PRWORA replaced this safety net with Temporary Assistance to Needy Children (TANF). With TANF, the government is no longer obligated to provide for poor families or their children. The program places a five-year time limit on cash assistance and does not guarantee living wages or any type of job afterward. (Individual states have the power to enforce a shorter time limit if they choose.)

6. Pinkney 1984. For annual statistics about the conditions of black America, see also National Urban League (1998). Pinkney explains the difference between equality of principle and equality of practice. Legislative and judicial acts occurring between 1954 and 1968 elevated the citizenship status of black Americans. This provided them with “equality in principle.” However, he argues, deep-rooted racial discrimination in employment, education, housing, etc. has maintained racial inequality. Thus, “equality in practice” has never been realized.


10. See also U.S. Bureau of the Census, census.gov/population/www/socdemo/educ-attn.html (table 8).

11. In *Savage Inequalities*, Jonathan Kozol (1992) describes the bleak academic environment of East St. Louis and other schools in low-income communities. Children in these poor schools are provided with an education that maintains their social and economic status. In contrast to their wealthier counterparts, they receive their education in schools that lack current books, labs, and other academic materials. Additionally, children often walk to school through neighborhoods teeming with pollution, empty burned-out, lead-filled buildings. Lack of air conditioning, inadequate plumbing, and poorly paid teachers create an inconducive learning environment.

12. The Sentencing Project maintains up-to-date data on incarceration by race and by gender. They may be contacted at: www.sentencingproject.org.
13. Some information on fathers in prison may be obtained from P.A.C.T., 2836 HempHill, Fort Worth, Texas, 76110, one of many organizations developed to address the needs and issues of incarcerated parents and their families. Missions, goals, and programs of such national and state organizations can be viewed on the Internet. Generally, contact phone numbers and addresses are provided on respective websites. Also see the Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Dept. of Justice (ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs).

14. Staples (1990) attempts to theoretically link disproportionate substance abuse among blacks to racism and economic exploitation and marginality. By summarizing past research and statistics, he argues that a lack of employment and powerlessness among lower income black men have created the “opportunity for self-destruction through the use of alcohol and drugs, fratricidal violence and suicide.” Their use and abuse of drugs is more public, which makes them more likely to experience an arrest and subsequent incarceration; also see Jewell 1988.

PART 2: EXPECTATIONS OF OTHERS

1. Kurdek’s (1983) findings suggest that the relationship between custodial mothers and noncustodial fathers significantly impacts father’s involvement. For more discussion on the mother’s role as gatekeeper see Wallerstein and Kelly (1980), and Arendell (1986) for an examination of mothers’ perception of fathers’ involvement; also see Furstenberg (1995).

4. “JUST BE THERE FOR THE BABY”


2. Some fathers voiced uncertainty about how to characterize their relationships with the mothers of their children and/or reported no interest in mothers at all. Twelve fathers provided responses that fit this description. However, they tended to be fathers who were almost completely absent from the lives of their children and their children’s mothers.


4. Parke and Brott 1999:191–93. Their list also includes the following suggestions: participate more in child care duties, take pride in the special way fathers father their children, be emotionally available, be a partner to your child’s mother and not just a helper, show her respect and work to improve communication between yourself and the mother, know you legal rights with regard to your children and stay involved after separation and divorce. The author’s also produced a list of “Seven Things Women Can Do to Get Fathers More Involved.”
5. “BLACK MEN CAN DO BETTER”

1. National Urban League 1998; Shinagawa and Jang 1998. About 32 percent of black women were poor in 1994, compared to 11 percent of white women, 29 percent of Latinas, 15 percent of Asian women, and 23 percent of Native Americans. A similar pattern occurred for children: 46 percent of black children were poor, compared to 13.5 percent of whites, 41 percent of Latinos, 18 percent of Asian Americans, and 32 percent of Native Americans (see U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey, 1994) and again see R. Albeda and C. Tilly (1997). Albeda and Tilly also discuss women’s poverty and its relationship to geographical location. Those residing in the central cities make up 21 percent of all poor women, followed by rural areas (17.7) and the suburbs or small cities (9.9). Again, regardless of region, women and women of color are more likely to be poor.

2. Research findings by Hogan and Lichter (1995) suggest that relative to children of other demographic groups, childhood poverty among African Americans is highest regardless of their living arrangements. While parental marital relationships may reduce the rate of poverty for African American children, it will not eliminate it. Also note that women are more likely to be poor than are men, regardless of race, ethnicity, or region of the United States; see U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey (1994); see also R. Albeda and C. Tilly (1997) for a thorough discussion of poverty statistics, how they are measured, and their limitations in providing an accurate description of poor America. See Wilson 1997; Anderson 1990, 1999; Edin and Lein 1997; J. Jones 1985; D. White 1985.


5. Allen and Doherty 1996; Furstenberg and Nord 1985. Fathers’ emphasis on social and emotional tasks were also reported in an article published from parts of this sample data (Hamer 1997).

6. See all of the following for detailed analyses and/or descriptions of women’s use of various resources to sustain their economic well-being during slavery and beyond: J. Jones 1985; D. White (1985); Rainwater (1970); Sterling 1997; Schwalm 1997. See Edin and Lein (1997) for a contemporary analysis of poor women’s means of utilizing surrounding resources.


6. WHAT FATHERS SAY THEY DO AS DADDIES


3. Although Umberson and Williams attempted to recruit a racially diverse sample they were unsuccessful. Their sample consisted of mostly white, divorced men; also see 1999 article.

4. In chapter 5, mothers provide an analysis of fathers’ disciplinarian practices. It should be noted that many felt that fathers did not know how to discipline their children appropriately. Many thought fathers were too strict, particularly with younger boys.


6. Horn made this comment during his appearance on the Jim Lehrer News Hour, June 17, 1996 (Horn 1997).

7. LIVE-AWAY, BUT ABSENT?

1. David Blankenhorn (1995), in Fatherless America, provides definitions for various live-away father formats. For example, the “deadbeat dad” is one who does not pay child support; the “visiting father” is one who, generally by way of divorce, is no longer the man of the house but someone who stops by for visits; and the “sperm father” is one who provide only the sperm to produce the child and no form of paternal care subsequent to the child’s birth; also see USA Today, Thursday, June 17, 1999, p. 10D, “Crossing racial lines, coalition reaches to fathers.” In this Health & Behavior section of the newspaper, three different articles appear about absent fatherhood. Most of the discussion emphasizes the absence of fathers in black America and discusses a recent coalition between Morehouse Research Institute and the Institute for American Values (founded by David Blankenhorn) to combat the problem of fatherlessness. In another part of the newspaper a brief summary of the findings reported by Sara McLanahan mentioned in this paragraph are also provided. Also see Valerie King (1994).

2. Fathers were asked to report how often they had contact with their children in the twelve months prior to the time of their interview.

3. See Kornfein-Rose (1992). While Kornfein’s study suggests that some women who intentionally become mothers have not clearly defined the father role, her findings, for our purposes, must be read with caution. Her sample consisted of 17 well-educated, white women aged 20–30. Moreover, she provides little explanation for these
findings. Also see Elaine Bell Kaplan (1997) for an excellent ethnographic study of adolescent pregnancy among black mothers; Sara McLanahan (1999); Pamela Jordan (1995), for an exploratory analysis of mothers and fathers perceptions of one another’s roles; and Allen and Doherty (1996).


5. Trina’s living arrangements were “secret” because both she and her cousin were receiving government assistance. This required that they each be heads-of-household. However, both found that sharing an apartment made living expenses more affordable. Also, it was easier to manage the children and child care arrangements with two adults in the home.

6. Interviews with both Dwayne and Patricia were arranged by her Aunt Darlene.


8. “AIN’T NOTHING LIKE TRYING TO BE A FATHER AND TRYING TO BE A MAN”

1. Mosley 1999. Mosley examines how changes in the economy have had consequences for the number of hours men and women with families work, the type of employment available, and the decline of real wages. He demonstrates that since the 1970s the average wage of a worker has declined by approximately 15 percent and that family incomes have remained steady due to more family members in the workforce and adults working more hours outside the home.

   Parents also, because of a lack of time, experience conflict between work and family life, according to a nationwide survey conducted by the Families and Work Institute (Levine and Pittinsky 1993).


3. Those with mental disorders are also overrepresented among the homeless. About 20 to 25 percent of the single adult homeless population suffers from a mental disorder (Koegel 1996). Also see National Coalition for the Homeless (1997) for information of the prevalence and history of homelessness among African American and other populations.
CONCLUSION: “GOT TO MAKE FATHERHOOD WORK FOR US”

1. The quote from Jones is used with caution here. Jones, or Amiri Baraka, is well known for his male chauvinism and this study’s findings and conclusions offer little support for the patriarchal ideals about male and female relationships that he espouses. However, the issue of patriarchy as it relates to this is discussed in a later part of this chapter.

2. See Williams et al. 1995; Also see Jewell 1988; Majors and Billson 1992; Patton 1981; Taylor 1994.

3. See Rivera et al. 1986; Stack 1986; McClanahan 1999. Michael E. Lamb (1995) provides an excellent summary of the literature on what fathers do for their children. He also examines the influence of paternal involvement on child development. It appears that married fathers tend to provide about one-third of what mothers do regardless of whether both parents work 30 hours or more a week. One should note that the studies reviewed consist of primarily white samples. However, there are some indications that black fathers tend to do more in the household than their white counterparts. Yet, there is research that contradicts this as well. It is important to note that at least one study suggests that relative to middle-class and professional resident fathers, working-class fathers have increased their parental interaction with children more in recent decades. See Feree (1988), whose work suggests that part of the reason for this is that women in working class families are more likely to perceive themselves and be perceived by others as sharing the breadwinning role. Thus, she is in a better position than middle-class and professional women to demand an initiate greater participation in household activities and childcare. In middle-class families the need for women’s wages is less apparent and more apt to be perceived as a privilege.

4. The term “noncustodial” is used to describe a live-away father status in slavery only for lack of a better term. There are definite qualitative differences between live-away status during slavery and present day circumstances. During the former, black men (and women) were bonded labor and had no control over where they lived and sometimes no say in the decision to partner with a particular woman. In contemporary times, blacks have a different relationship to the market. They are no longer bonded. However, their noncustodial status is influenced by (among other factors) their relationship to the free market, their inability to find meaningful employment, and their relationship to the mother of their children.

5. Several attempts were made to locate, contact, and telephone interview directors of father-centered programs with predominantly African American clientele. I developed a list which consisted of 38 organizations from various regions and cities in the United States. Of these programs, 9 were no longer in existence or at least had
only no-longer-in-service phone numbers. Eleven did not respond to repeated phone calls and letter surveys. Consequently, in the end, data was collected from 18 programs. This poor response may be a reflection of the small staff available to many centers. It appears that, in general, centers have part-time staff and are open for business less than forty hours a week.


7. Ballard 1995; D. Blankenhorn 1994; Griswold 1993. Quite recently, Wade C. Horn (1999) has argued that a “Fatherhood Movement,” distinct from the men’s movement, is emerging. It is distinct, he argues, because its focus is on the needs and well-being of children, rather than emphasizing the needs and feelings of fathers and men as is associated with the Men’s and Father’s Rights Movements.

8. Billingsley 1999. In the past decade, faith-based initiatives have increased across the nation. Federal grant availability and a general decline in the well-being of poor black communities have spurred the sharp increase in the development of non-profit programs housed within churches. Grant monies also encourage faith-based organizations to collaborate to provide services to their communities and minimize duplication.