

# The Obamas and the Culture of Black Parenting in America

by

Cassandra Chaney, Ph.D.

cchaney@lsu.edu

Associate Professor, College of Human Sciences and Education,  
School of Social Work, Child and Family Studies  
Louisiana State University

&

Colita Nichols Fairfax, Ph.D.

cnfairfax@nsu.edu

Associate Professor, The Ethelyn R. Strong School of Social Work,  
Norfolk State University

## Abstract

Given the historical nature of the Obama presidency, the purpose of this paper is to examine Black men and women's attitudes regarding the ability of the Obamas to change the culture of Black parenting in America through African-centered theories offered by Kambon and Nobles. Specifically, participants were asked to read the *New York Times* article, "The Good Obama Can Do" by Mona Charen, share their level of agreement or disagreement with the article, and provide a rationale for their response. This pilot study examined the written responses of 17 Blacks (11 women, 6 men) between the ages of 23-61 years of age and was based on the following questions: (a) "Do Blacks believe that President Barack Obama and Michelle Obama have the ability to change Black parenting in the United States?" (b) "In what ways, if any, can President Barack Obama and Michelle Obama change Black parenting in the United States?" Qualitative analyses of the data resulted in three delineated themes: (1) The Inability of The Obamas to Change the Culture of Black Parenting; (2) The Ability of the Obamas to Change the Culture of Black Parenting through Positive Interactions with Their Children; and (3) The Ability of the Obamas to Change the Culture of Parenting as Models of Positive Parenting.

**Note:** Throughout this text, the authors use the term Black to refer to people of African Diaspora, and to such populations that reside within the United States. To some, African Americans are a subgroup within a larger Black community. Since this discussion purposely includes those who may be first-generation immigrants or who, for whatever reason, do not identify as African American, we employ the term “Black.” Furthermore, we capitalize the term Black to distinguish this racial category and related identity from the color. Similarly, we capitalize the word White when referring to race.

**Key words:** African American, African-centered theory, Baraka Obama, Michele Obama, Parenting

## **Introduction**

In addition to being the leader of the free world, President Barack Obama is also known as the proud father of two daughters, Malia and Natasha (Sasha). As further evidence of his commitment to promoting greater father involvement, on Friday, June 19, 2009, the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse (NRFC) announced that President Obama would participate in a series of Public Service Announcements that would support responsible fatherhood in time for Father's Day ([www.fatherhood.gov](http://www.fatherhood.gov)). For many, the ushering of the country's first Black<sup>1</sup> president and first lady harkened the possibility of positive change in the Black community. As Barack Obama walked hand-in-hand with his wife, Michelle, and their two children during the presidential election, this inquiry as whether the nation's first Black president and First Lady could positively change the culture of parenting in America is an initial inquiry to advance the discourse of African American parenting models. Parenting is absolutely a crucial cultural element in African culture. Particularly in America, where the political economy has historically and contemporarily been anti-African, models that appear to have some impact and influence on Black parenting should be paid scholarly attention.

Images and popular models employed in the parenting process for girls and boys are vital to the success of that process. For example, “it is essential, therefore, for this population [black males specifically] to connect with success, intelligence and authenticity” (Aymer, 2010: 833). In addition to positive images and modeling, President Obama and Mrs. Obama have indicated in many interviews ways in which they discipline and supervise their daughters. It is also important that “parenting monitoring and supervision are important to the well-being of girls” (Belgrave, 2009: 46). Whereas there are exceptional training programs, such as Effective Black Parenting Program, the parental needs of the African American community in particular are diverse and multi-faceted. Examining the influence of public models provide other insights of how Black parents are patterning rearing their children to succeed in 21<sup>st</sup> century America.

The first purpose of this paper is to examine whether a pilot sample of Black men and women believe that the Obamas can encourage responsible parenting in the United States. The second purpose of this paper is to examine the ways that Black men and women in our sample believe the Obamas can encourage responsible parenting in the United States. The second purpose is to show a progressive image of parenting that isn't only representative of low-income, but an image that shows the trajectory of generational African American parenting that evolved from the traditional working-class ethic (Michelle Robinson Obama's parents and grandparents), and the value of extended family in the parenting process. Finally, this paper showcases that the Obama style of parenting dispels some previous published notions that Black parents aren't affectionate, warm and controlling (Tamis-LeMonda, Briggs, McClowry and Snow, 2008).

The African-American Healthy Marriage Initiative (AAHMI), a component of the Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) National Healthy Marriage Initiative (NHMI) "specifically promotes a culturally competent strategy for fostering healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood, improving child well-being and strengthening families within the African American Community" (<http://www.aahmi.net>). Despite these initiatives, very little is known about the likelihood that *this couple* will change the culture of Black parenting in America.

From the onset, we define "the culture of Black parenting" as the high-visibility of the Obamas resulting in greater esteem for the Obamas as models for responsible parenting, greater self-efficacy with regard to the single or dual-parenting role, as well as a heightened need for parents to become the primary facilitators of increased interaction between themselves and their children. While high-profile and highly-respected television mediums have generated a great deal of public interest in this couple ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/11/17/barack-michelle-obama-giv\\_n\\_144390.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/11/17/barack-michelle-obama-giv_n_144390.html)), no scholarship, to date, has specifically examined the perspectives of Black men and women.

Since President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama are one of the most widely-recognized parents in the world, the perspectives of a pilot sampling of Black men and women regarding this couple's ability to change the culture of parenting in America is an important area of study. Although many previous studies regarding African American parenting typify deficit models (Tamis-LeMonda, Briggs, McClowry, and Stowe, 2008), this study provides utterances into how parents use popular images of success to influence their parenting skills. The authors hope that this initial pilot sample will lead to more inquiries correlating positive media and public imaging of Black family life as impacting the lives of everyday African American families.

## **Review of Literature**

In the following literature review, we provide an overview of how “parenting” has been defined in the scholarly literature, the negative effects of single parenting on Black parents, the negative effects of single parenting on Black children, as well as how effective parenting is demonstrated. Next, we provide the methodology that was used in this study. Following this, we present the narratives that were provided by the Black men and women in this study. Finally, we discuss the implications of how a key Black political figure can influence attitudinal change among a subset of the Black population.

### **Definitions of Parenting**

A large body of scholarship has examined the positive and negative financial, emotional, and social effects of parenting on Black children. In order to contextualize the ideas that will be presented in this paper, it is important to define the term “parenting,” and the context of African American parenting. Over twenty years ago, Franklin, Boyd-Franklin, and Draper (1985: 120) defined “parenting” as “the person(s) responsible for the nurture and guidance of children through developmental periods into adulthood” Some years later, other scholars (Kambon, 1998; Nobles, Goddard, Cavil, & George, 1987) extended the definition of “parenting” as “the basic mechanism that humans use to prepare their young to meet the traditional expectations and contemporary challenges of their society as well as to be able to live in accordance with the social and cultural dictates of their time” (Nobles, et al, 1987: 45). Kambon explains that the parenting of our children through African values is African-centered parenting (Kambon, 1998). Essentially, these definitions of “parenting” recognize the individuals responsible for the nurturance and guidance of children to adulthood and the ways in which children learn to adhere to the traditional, contemporary, social, and cultural values of society.

### **The Effects of Single Parenting on Black Parents**

Over the past few decades, there has been a general decline in marriage, but Blacks are not marrying at the same rate as members of other racial and ethnic groups when compared with Whites (62%) and Hispanics (60%), Blacks are least likely to marry (41%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003) and are more likely to divorce and end their relationship upon initial cohabitation to become a single-parent (Edin & Reed, 2005; Furstenberg, 2001; Gibson-Davis, Edin, & McLanahan, 2005; Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997; Smock & Gupta, 2002; Smock & Manning, 2004).

Consequently, the single-parent family is victim to a host of social ills that threatens the stability of these families. For example, a single-parent family has a higher likelihood of being poor (Battle & Coates, 2004), and poverty diminishes the capacity for supportive, consistent, and involved parenting and further exposes parents to greater forms of psychological distress (Cooper, McLanahan, Meadows, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009). In addition, never-married mothers have higher rates of unemployment and are less likely than divorced or separated mothers to have completed high school (Ceballos, McLoyd, & Toyokawa, 2004). In addition, never-married fathers have a slightly higher poverty rate (23.4% in 1995) than Whites (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010).

Moreover, having a low income is one of the greatest disadvantages associated with single-parenthood, along with low levels of parental involvement and high levels of residential mobility (Battle & Coates, 2004; Kim & Brody, 2005). In addition to the many ways that this type of family forms effect the single parent, lower rates of Black marriage have been found to be financially, academically, and socially problematic for Black children, especially when they have weak ties to their mothers and nonresidential fathers (King & Sobolewski, 2006).

According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2010), only 33.1% of Black children live with both parents compared to 75.9% of White children and 66.3% of Hispanic children. In addition, although 22% of the nation's children are poor, Black children (38.2%) are more likely to be reared in poor households than Hispanic (35.0%), Asian (13.6%), and White, Non-Hispanic (12.4%) children (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010). Low levels of education among Black children (who grow up to be uneducated adults), the segregation of Black people into poor neighborhoods with few resources, the mass incarceration of Black men, and racism has been identified as some of the primary sources of Black poverty (Alexander, 2010; Glaser & Vigdor, 2012). Thus, as a result of their greater propensity to be reared in single-parent households, Black children have a higher likelihood of living below the poverty level, residing in a dilapidated home, and living doubled up with other family members (McAdoo, 1997). In addition, evidence suggests that Black children who live with one parent are less likely to be in school at the age of 17, less likely to graduate from high school, and are at a higher risk of establishing a single parent household by the age of 16 than daughters of two-parent Black households (Brubaker & Wright, 2006). Moreover, Black children of single parents have higher rates of teenage and single motherhood, lower levels of educational attainment, and lower rates of labor force participation (Simms, Fortuny & Henderson, 2009)., When compared with young women with no history of teenage births in their families, Black women whose mothers and sisters were teenaged parents were substantially more likely to become pregnant in their teens (East, Reyes, & Horn, 2007). Clearly, the type of single parent environment in which children are reared contributes greatly to their current and future life chances.

In addition, some scholars have attributed the overrepresentation of Blacks in crime to the high rate of female-headed households, specifically the lack of a father in these households. Due to the competing demands of balancing their work and home lives, single parents may not be able to devote as much time to supervision and discipline and may be less effective in supervising general youth activities such as “hanging out” which may inadvertently encourage juvenile delinquency (Harvey & Mukhopadhyay, 2007). Consequently, this may be problematic for Black children because one parent may be less effective than two parents in observing, questioning strangers, and watching the property of their neighbors (Zalot, Jones, Forehand, & Brody, 2007). Essentially, these studies suggest there are many disadvantages for Black adults and children when, due to weakened relationship ties, the parenting structure in the home is non-existent or ineffective.

### **Effective Black Parenting**

Over the past several years, a burgeoning body of scholarship has highlighted various aspects of effective Black parenting. Kobi Kambon has written that values reflective in African-centered parenting within a family system involving kinship, religious expression and practices that acknowledge God and spiritual behavior with regard to ethics and morality aspects of parenting. In addition, music and rhythm in song, prose and self-expression, shared participation in experiences of victory, defeat, situation, strife, social-affiliation emphasis to fellowship, and involvement in community associations are other key aspects of African-centered parenting. Furthermore, reverence for elders, and a survival thrust that compliments school, choices, career and stability are other essential components in successful parenting (Kambon, 1998). (This sentence is too long to grasp its significance. Restructure into shorter and powerful pieces) In her examination of perceived self-efficacy, social support, children’s behaviors, and maternal parenting among 188 single employed and non-employed Black mothers of a pre-school age child, Jackson (2000) found fewer child behavior problems and higher maternal educational attainment significantly increased the likelihood that these women would be more supportive and involved parents. In their examination of the factors that contribute to resilience among Black adolescent mothers, Reiner Hess, Papas and Black (2002) found maternal maturity, positive self-esteem, and positive adolescent mother-grandmother relationships (characterized by autonomy and mutuality) to be strongly associated with better parenting outcomes.

The most recent scholarship (Coles, 2009; Coles & Green, 2009; Hamer, 2009; Hamer & Marchioro, 2002) related to effective Black parenting has highlighted the varied experiences of a hidden demographic: the single Black custodial male parent. For this unique group of Black men, effective parenting not only involves making the decision to parent, but also entails instilling racial identity and pride in their children, parenting their children in ways that balance mother-father gender norms, and socializing children to adopt the values of society (Coles, 2009).

In sum, these studies provide a strong and positive counter-narrative to the decades of research that has primarily focused on demographic trends that reinforce notions regarding the social vulnerability of Black families instead of what can enhance the strength of the Black parent-child relationship.

Faye Belgrave (2009) has identified several evidence-based parenting programs. The Effective Black Parenting Program in California, is a culturally relevant parenting, skills-building program that attends to the unique history, values, and life circumstances of African Americans. It is a program that was implemented in small groups of parents, addressing strategies, skills, single parenting and substance abuse prevention (2009; [www.ciccparenting.org](http://www.ciccparenting.org)). Creating Lasting Family Connections in Kentucky is a comprehensive family strengthening, substance abuse, and violence prevention curriculum that assists families in high-risk environments. This curriculum consists of six training modules, and can be implemented within community agencies (2009; <http://www.copes.org/index.php>).

The Institute for the Advanced Study of Black Families in California, has a long history of research, education and training in areas of family reunification through culture and community (2009; [www.iasbflc.org](http://www.iasbflc.org)). All in all, these programs have found that parents who are aware of the unique stressors of African American families, take seriously their responsibility to socialize the next generation, rear their children in loving and nurturing homes, are part of a strong religious and/or spiritual community, and are surrounded by a strong supportive network of individuals that are invested in the welfare of their family are encouraged to become strong and effective models of parenting.

## **Significance**

There are two reasons why examining the responses of Blacks regarding the potential of the Obamas to change the culture of parenting is important. First, and foremost, the historical nature of the Obama presidency is noteworthy. His marriage to Michelle Obama and the presence of a traditional African multi-generational family in the White House has attracted international attention (Chaney & Fairfax, 2013). Second, no studies to date have *qualitatively* examined how Black men and women, from diverse backgrounds, feel about the ability of the Obamas to change the culture of parenting in America. Therefore, understanding the perceptions of Black men and women can reveal their expectations for the Obamas about successful Black parenthood in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Current Study**

This qualitative pilot study is unique in that it especially seeks to examine whether Blacks believe that the Obamas can change the culture of Black parenting in America. Although the sample size is small, it provides data from Black parents about the influence a political figure may have on parenting styles. Given the historical nature of the current administration, no studies to date, have connected the parental status of a political figure with the likelihood of increased parental involvement among Blacks. Past researches have revealed the quality of Black parenting to be largely dependent on the family's structure and financial stability (Cain & Combs-Orme, 2005). However, given the historical nature of the current administration, and its goal to strengthen marriage and families, it is critical to introduce the presence of a historical-political figure into discussions of Black parenting. To extend earlier work that has primarily focused on the content of presidential speeches (Atwater, 2007) or demographic trends (McLanahan & Casper, 1995; Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997) to explain attitudes and behaviors. This study will determine whether Black men and women from different social classes believe the Obamas can change the culture of Black parenting in America.

## **Theme of Study**

This study is based on the following thematic questions: (1) Do Blacks believe that President Barack Obama and Michelle Obama have the ability to change the culture of Black parenting in the United States? (2) In what ways can President Barack Obama and Michelle Obama change the culture of Black parenting in the United States? There are two major limitations with the aforementioned research. For one, given the current administration and goals of this study, no studies to date have *qualitatively* interjected the potential influence of a particular political figure into the parenting literature. Furthermore, in general, the aforementioned studies have generally relied on demographic trends (McAdoo, 1997; Street, 2009; Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997), which does not fully extrapolate the how's and why's of human attitudes that are essential to this particular method of discovery. Second, with few exceptions (Billingsley, 1992; Coles, 2009; Jackson, 2000; Jarrett, 1994; Hopkins-Williams, 2007; Marks, Hopkins, Chaney, Nesteruk, Monroe, & Sasser, 2008; Reiner Hess, Papas, & Black, 2002), much of the scholarship on Black parenthood has not been done from a strengths-perspective, and no studies to date have systematically examined how a historical political figure can influence Black parenthood. This study prospects to fill this gap in the research by *qualitatively* analyzing Black men and women's written narratives regarding the ability of the Obamas to change the culture of parenting in America.



## **Methodological Choice and Application**

There are delimitations to this inquiry that are important. This study measured the influence and impact of the Obamas upon parenting styles among a pilot sample of African Americans. This piloted test is to provide data for future research protocols and research funding. The researchers provided exclusionary and inclusionary decisions about this study. All participants were adult African American who were raising children (biological and through marriage), and were gainfully employed. Participants were sought who were willing to be exposed to data, and their reactions were included in this study. Participants' political party affiliation was not solicited. The researchers realize that such a small sample cannot generalize to millions of persons of African descent in America. Yet, it the data adds to the narrative about parenting and power of public leaders that represent them.

## **Sample Population**

Seventeen Blacks (11 women, and 6 men) participated in the study. A purposeful sample was implemented. In particular, individuals from different age groups, levels of education, relationship and parental statuses, and religious affiliations were selected. The participants were recruited through a mass electronic announcement, and were apprised of the inquiry of whether they believed President Obama and his wife Michelle could change the culture of Black parenting (Best, Krueger, Hubbard, & Smith, 2001; Hamilton & Bowers, 2006; Hiskey & Troop, 2002; Mathy, Schillace, Coleman, & Berquist, 2002). After completing the necessary consent form, participants were asked to read the *New York Times* article, "The Good Obama Can Do" by Mona Charen (2008), share their level of agreement or disagreement with the article, and provide a rationale for their response on an open-ended survey. This piece was selected because the *New York Times* is a highly-visible and nationally-respected news source, the author's optimism that the Obama administration could further marriage-strengthening policies initiated by the Bush administration, but most important, the journalist's confidence in the ability of the Obamas to change the culture of marriage and parenting in the United States. The identity of all participants is protected through pseudonyms. No monetary compensation was provided to the participants. This methodology was chosen because it was a time-efficient way for the researchers to solicit the perspectives representative of a large number of Black men and women, and allowed anyone who chose to participate to privately pen their opinions, values, and experiences regarding the questions of interest.

The age of participants ranged from 23-61 years. The mean age was 40.06 years (SD = 1.23). The average amount of education was 15.41 years (SD = 1.30). Two participants (12%) were doctoral students and one student (.06%) was a master's student. Nine participants (43%) were married; four participants (19%) were divorced; and four participants (19%) were single, never married.

Although five participants (29%) did not have children, twelve participants (71%), had at least one child between the ages of 5 months - 42 years of age. Five participants were Baptist (.29%); Three participants were Christian {Non-Denominational} (.18%); three participants were Jehovah's Witnesses (.18%); two participants were Non-Denominational (.12%); one participant was Catholic (.06%); one participant was Missionary Baptist (.06%); one participant was spiritual (.06%), and another participant did not claim a religious affiliation (.06%). The average number of children was 2, and the average length of marriage was 15 years.

The participants had an income in the \$25,000-\$100,000 range, and a median income of \$37,500. Specifically, two (10%) participants had an annual income that was between \$20,000-\$29,999; five participants (24%) had an annual income that was between \$40,000 - \$49,999, one participant (.05%) had an income that was between \$50,000-\$59,999, four participants (19%) had an annual income that was between \$70,000-\$79,999, one participant (.05%) had an income that was between \$80,000-\$89,999, and four (19%) participants had an annual income that was over \$100,000.

## **Research Design**

To identify the themes that emerged from the written interviews, all narrative responses were content analyzed using grounded theory and an open-coding process (Holsti, 1969; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). In keeping with open-coding techniques, no apriori categories were imposed on the narrative data. Instead, themes were identified from the narratives. In order to clearly abstract themes from the written responses, words and phrases were the units of analysis. Identifying the themes involved three steps.

- The first step involved *individually* reading each comment with the purpose of identifying the most salient themes, and examining how the themes presented answered the questions of interest. Approximately 3-4 phrases constituted a particular theme. So, if when describing "interactions between the Obamas and their children," the participants used the words "interact," "show," or "involve," these words were regarded as anchors indicating the ability of this couple, through their positive interactions with their children, to change the culture of Black parenting.
- The second step involved re-examining all responses, keeping track of emerging themes, assigning words and symbols to each coding category, providing definitions for emerging themes, and examining how the themes presented are specifically related to the ability or inability of the Obamas to change Black parenting. (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). [See Table 1 for the theme, definition, and supporting commentary regarding the Obamas' Ability or Inability to Promote Positive Models of Parenting].

- The last step involved establishing reliability of the themes. To assess the reliability of the coding system, a list of all codes and their definitions along with the written responses was given to two outsiders who then coded the transcripts based on this pre-determined list of codes. The outside coders were selected due to their extensive experience with coding and analyzing narrative data. After a 96% coding reliability rate was established between the researcher and the outside coders, it was determined that a working coding system had been established. Most important, this time intensive method was thorough, greatly minimized the likelihood of researcher bias influencing the findings presented, and ensured that only the most salient themes were identified and highlighted in this paper.

Table 1: Theme, Definition, and Supporting Commentary Regarding the Obamas' Ability or Inability to Promote Positive Models of Parenting

Theme	Definition	Supporting Commentary
<i>The Inability of the Obamas to Negate Pre-Existing Models of Good Parenting</i>	Words and/or phrases that indicate that other factors besides the Obamas (i.e., positive models of parenting that existed prior to the Obamas, or the level of media exposure given to the Obamas) promote good parenting.	"I agree but it appears that the author is unaware that models of good parenting have always existed."
<i>The Inability of the Obamas to Minimize External Stressors</i>	Words and/or phrases that indicate external stressors such as earning a living may hold greater importance for individuals than the Obamas positive model of parenting.	"They [The Obamas] are positive models, but many people are too busy and depressed, loaded with responsibilities to give what they do too much attention. Now that's not to say that they won't pay attention, it's just that the economy is so bad now, I think that people are more concerned about making a living than parenting their children in a different way."
<i>The Ability of the Obamas to Change the Culture of Parenting through Positive Parent-Child Interactions</i>	Words and/or phrases that indicate the Obama's demonstrative affection toward their children, and the types of activities in which they engage with their children are examples of positive parental modeling.	"Yes, absolutely. They do a great job with good parenting. They spend quality time with their kids...they clearly love them very much. They hug and kiss their kids. They play Uno with their kids (photos available); Uno is a learning, thinking, acting, interacting game, rather than sitting in a stupor with the tv or with a video game. If people just watch the Obamas, they are modeling without even trying to do so."
<i>The Ability of the Obamas to Change the Culture of Parenting as Models of Positive Parenting</i>	Words and/or phrases that indicate the positive model of parenting set by the Obamas directly and indirectly teaches other parents to have stronger relationships with their children.	"I agree. I believe that examples teach just as well as experience for some, i.e., the mere example of strong black parenting will have a positive effect. So, because what they say and do is so positive and uplifting, this can definitely have a positive effect on how people parent their own children."

## **Results**

Two participants (12%) did not share the author's optimism regarding the ability of the Obamas to change the culture of Black parenting, while fifteen (88%) participants believed the Obamas had such influence. The three primary themes that emerged from the written narratives were related to: (1) The Inability of The Obamas to Change the Culture of Black Parenting; (2) The Ability of the Obamas to Change the Culture of Black Parenting through Positive Interactions with Their Children; and (3) The Ability of the Obamas to Change the Culture of Parenting as Models of Positive Parenting. The subsequent paragraphs will highlight narratives that supported these three primary themes.

As previously mentioned, two participants did not share the author's optimism that the Obama's could change the culture of parenting in America. Specifically, these disagreement sub-themes were related to (a) The Inability of the Obamas to Negate Pre-Existing Models of Good Parenting; and (b) The Inability of The Obamas to Minimize External Stressors.

### **The Inability of the Obamas to Negate Pre-Existing Models of Good Parenting:**

One participant believed that the author failed to recognize the positive models of parenting that currently exist, and the media's role in keeping the Obama's views current. Thomas, a 38-year old, professor who has been married for two years, and is the father of two children (ages 14 years and 17 months), described his feelings in this way:

I agree, but it appears that the author is unaware that models of good parenting have always existed.

Interestingly, Thomas expressed skepticism regarding how the Obamas can be good models of Black parenting. He expressed himself in this way:

I don't think this is something the Obamas control. It depends on how much the media keeps their family in the spotlight.

### **The Inability of the Obamas to Minimize External Stressors:**

Another participant was concerned that the pressures of the current economy would minimize the importance of the parenting role, for some individuals. Nancy, a 61-year old divorced, retired postal worker, and mother of three children (ages 42, 40 and 38), shared this view when she penned the following:

They [The Obamas] are positive models, but many people are too busy and depressed, loaded with responsibilities to give what they do too much attention. Now that's not to say that they won't pay attention, it's just that the economy is so bad now, I think that people are more concerned about making a living than parenting their children in a different way.

Clearly, not all Black men and women believe that the Obamas can positively change the culture of Black parenting. Specifically, Thomas believed the presence of the Obamas cannot diminish the presence or impact of "models of good parenting" that existed pre-Obama. In addition, for Nancy, the external stressors experienced by many Blacks may be more important than giving exclusive attention to these "positive models." Conversely, Charen's (2008) optimism regarding the ability of the Obamas to positively influence the culture of Black parenting resonated with the majority of the men and women who participated in this study. Specifically, these themes were related to the ability of the Obamas to change the culture of Black parenting through positive parent-child interactions, positive words and behaviors, and as models of positive parenting.

#### **The Ability of the Obamas to Change the Culture of Parenting through Positive Parent-Child Interactions:**

The positive interactions between the Obamas and their children led 15 participants (88%) to feel confident in their ability to change the culture of parenting. For one female, the positive interactions demonstrated between the Obamas and their children provide a window into the quality of their relationship. When responding to whether she agreed or disagreed with the author's view, Deidre, a 27-year old, divorced, who has no children, wrote the following:

I agree. Their two daughters greatly show in public that they feel safe and content and have much confidence and respect for their parents. They stand close to them, holding their hands with positive verbal and facial expressions.

When sharing how she thought the Obamas could specifically influence the culture of parenting, Deidre continued:

They involve their children in most of their activities. The children were always with them on the campaign trail before Barack was sworn in, and AFTER he was sworn in. For example, during their vacation to Hawaii, Barack was shown with their daughters participating in recreational activities.

The positive parent-child interaction theme provided by Deidre and Roberto was further articulated by Faye, a 59-year old, analyst, mother of two children (ages 27 and 24) and a wife for 27 years. However, in an extension of the aforementioned views, Faye believed the positive interactions between the Obamas can have widespread positive effects on a wide array of Americans. She shared the following:

The Obamas have the bully pit and they are watched by the world — their dress, their gentle touches, looks of affection, interaction with their girls, extended family, friends, etc. They are watched by all races, ages, religions, etc. With such wide audience, they can use it to reach all socioeconomic statuses regarding including the low income which is often difficult to effect attitude and behavior changes.

When describing how the Obamas can change the culture of Black parenting, Faye continued:

They can accomplish this by staying true to who they are and continuing to allow the public to share in their life styles and thoughts. I too believe that they should share more family-oriented and child rearing experiences that can be emulated by the masses.

In addition, another participant highlighted the specific ways the Obamas interact with their children, which runs counter to how many children spend time. This view was shared by Belinda, a 48-year old, mother of two children (20-year old daughter, and 16-year old son), who has been married for 18 years. When sharing her perspectives regarding the quality of the parent-child interactions between the Obamas and their children, Belinda provided this extended narrative:

Yes, absolutely. They do a great job with good parenting. They spend quality time with their kids...they clearly love them very much. They hug and kiss their kids. They play Uno with their kids (photos available); Uno is a learning, thinking, acting, interacting game, rather than sitting in a stupor with the TV or with a video game. If people just watch the Obamas, they are modeling without even trying to do so.

For Carol, a 40-year old, journalist and mother of three children (ages 6, 4 and 2), who has been married for 8 years, positive interactions between the Obamas and their children encourages her to spend quality time with her own children. She penned the following:

Yes, I agree. Obama is the president of the United States. Every word that comes out of his mouth is important and everyone is listening. When Obama reminded us to turn off the TV sets and study with our kids, it motivates me and reminds me to do exactly that. Because that is the right thing to do—turn off the TV and read or help them [her children] with homework.

Michelle Obama and Barack are older parents in their 40's. They have lived, worked and experienced a lot about life. Barack had a challenging childhood but he believes in traditional strong family values. Michelle seems to also have a strong family backing. Together, and judging from the way they are interacting with their own children, they are going to give us a lot of positive parenting models to work from. I'm always observing how happy the children appear to be around their mom and dad. And the smiles don't look fake. They appear to be happy, well-adjusted children with parents who love them and guide them.

In light of the aforementioned, Black men and women are aware of how this couple interacts with their daughters. For Deidre, the Obamas have instilled “confidence and respect” in their children, “stand close to them, hold their hands,” and through their verbal and non-verbal expressions, demonstrate parental love for their children. In addition, the recreational activities that Obamas engaged in with their children (post-inauguration) demonstrated that family time was a priority. In addition, for Faye, because the Obamas “have the bully pit” and “are watched by the world,” this couple has the power to effect positive change among a wide array of families from different races, ages, religions, and socioeconomic statuses. Moreover, for Belinda, the public displays of affection (e.g., hugs and kisses) that are shown by the Obamas toward their children as well as their habit of participating in an “interacting game” demonstrate that Black parents should interact with their children in loving and mentally-challenging ways. Furthermore, Carol was impressed with Obama's ability to create a family that was distinct from his own family of origin, motivated to interact with her own children in more positive ways, and was impressed with the “smiles” of the Obama children “that don't look fake.” Clearly, from what Black men and women have observed regarding how this couple interacts with their children (as well as how their children interact with them), these actions can influence the Black culture of parenting.



## **The Ability of the Obamas to Change the Culture of Parenting as Models of Positive Parenting:**

In addition to the positive interactions between themselves and their children, other participants believed that through positive modeling, in the form of words and behaviors, the Obamas can change the culture of parenting. This view was advanced by Victor, a single, 24-year old Educational Administrator, with no children when he wrote:

I agree. [They can do this] through preaching a survey of actions and positive rhetoric.

In support of Victor's view, another participant believed that the words and actions of this couple are powerful motivators for more effective parenting. This opinion was expressed by Amelia, a 31-year old, single, doctoral student, with no children. When discussing the importance of positive examples of parenting, she shared:

I agree. I believe that examples teach just as well as experience for some, i.e., the mere example of strong black parenting will have a positive effect. So, because what they say and do is so positive and uplifting, this can definitely have a positive effect on how people parent their own children.

One participant believed this couple can provide positive answers to marriage and family concerns that are of interest to the world. This view was provided by Mona, a 51-year old, divorced, computer manager, and mother of two children (a 31-year old daughter & 26-year old son) when she shared:

Many nationalities are looking to this first family for positive answers in marriage, parenting, finances, education, and balancing home and work lives. These are concerns of many of today's families, and the Obamas can help many families by giving them effective solutions to deal with these issues.

Another participant believed that when the Obamas make the public aware of the "normalcy" of their lives, they make effective parenting an attainable goal. This view was confirmed by Ezra, a 25-year old, executive, who has been married for 2 years. This father of two (2 years and 5-months), when he provided the following comments:

I agree. The Obamas go out of their way to expose their normalcy. They articulate it when asked and demonstrate it in the interactions with the children. Such modeling makes successful parenting seem attainable and realistic. Specifically, they can do this by speaking in laymen's terms, using opportunities to speak truth to power (i.e., President Obama's Father's Day Speeches in 2007 and 2008).

Broadly, the Obama's candor about their own family experiences can help families from other ethnic groups to realize that families, in general, share many of the same experiences. Harriett, a 56-year old, divorced, Administrative Assistant, and mother of twins (son and daughter, 37 years of age) provided the following testimony:

I agree. Because they are seen on various forms of media such as television and magazines, and they talk so openly about their family experiences, people can see people of color can have the same family life and experiences of those we see in the media.

For another participant, the Obamas can be spokespersons for strong parental and family values, particularly among the young. This view was introduced by Stella, a 59-year old professor, who has been married for 38 years and has two children (ages 36 and 32). She penned the following:

I agree. Their ubiquitous presence in the media is powerful. If media that are targeted to the African American market keep their family life in the forefront, this is bound to get the attention of young people who will learn how to interact with and support their children. They can do interviews with Black oriented media outlets, appear at public events with their kids, publicize visits to their children's schools, and even talk about what they do at the children's school. Additionally, they can talk about how they interact with Sasha and Malia at home to get them to do their homework, spend quality time with the family, etc.

In support of Stella's comments, other participants believed the positive words and behaviors of the Obamas can encourage Black families to communicate with one another in more meaningful ways. This view was shared by Barry, a 38-year old, professional actor, and father of a 13-year old son, who has been married for 1 ½ years. For Barry, the Obama's can provide a positive image that runs counter to the negative images that are prevalent in the media. He expressed this when he penned the following:

I agree with the author's point of view. Having the person who is considered the most powerful man in the world supporting, initiating the reinforcing the ideals of family and time at dinner with out with the intrusive and distracting "idiot box" blaring all of the negative things inherent in the world is a very positive thing. At this point it is even revolutionary, that we, as a society, rely on the tv to tell us what our own family and neighbors are thinking instead of having the dialogue.

For other participant, there are three reasons why the Obamas are excellent role models for Black parents. Roberto, a 41-year old single graduate student with no children penned the following words to articulate his perspective:

Yes, I agree with the author. The Obamas will make excellent role models for African American parents. One reason is that they decided to have children after they were well established in their careers. Second is their commitment to stick together under rough times. Third are the high levels of education that they have both achieved to give an example to other children of achieving their educational goals.

In a slight departure from Roberto's assessment, another participant believed the Obamas have the power to influence positive parenting for both members of the Black community, and the American community, at large. This view was shared by Belinda, a 48-year old, professor, mother of two children (20-year old daughter, and 16-year old son), who has been married for 18 years. When sharing her perspectives regarding the aforementioned, Belinda provided this extended narrative:

The Obamas can also be models of good parenting for the American community. We have problems throughout this country. Teenage parenting is NOT a Black owned problem (okay, so we have the lion's share, but Hispanics also have a big problem with this, and so do others who are poorer or less educated — Sarah Palin's daughter fits the mode, even though her mother is a governor).

Other men and women believed that due to their high visibility, the Obamas provide a template for “family” and positive parenting. Patricia, a 24-year old, single, university extension associate, with no children believed the Obamas have the power to provide a positive example for many Black communities that lack strong parental models. She expressed herself in this way:

Yes. I agree. By committing themselves to parenting and remaining positive role models for the country, they set great examples of what “family” is and how “family life” should be carried out.

When discussing how the Obamas can influence Black parenting, Patricia continued:

Again, modeling is a very good avenue for teaching. It is one thing to try to convince someone of the “right” thing to do but if you walk it every day, and people see by your lifestyle, then they are more likely to do what those things that made you a success.

Interestingly, for some participants, the Black community needs more positive parental models. Michael, a 32-year old, doctoral student, who has been married for 2 years, believed that, in light of the many negative models of negative parenting, the Obamas can have a profound effect on the Black community. When discussing whether this couple has the potential to positively influence the culture of parenting, this father of a 2-month old son wrote:

All in all, there are so many negative examples and models of bad parenting that a positive example exhibited by the Obamas can only help the African-American community.

When providing recommendations regarding how the Obamas can do this, Michael extended his comments in this way:

They [The Obamas] can accomplish this by being true to who they are. Most people lead best by example, which is what they have been doing. Therefore, if the Obamas are going to have a profound effect, the media will have to shed more light on the Obamas as a family unit.

In a slight departure from the previous comments, another participant believed President Obama's promotion of increased literacy can encourage Black parents to regularly read to their own children. Yvonne, a 38-year old, professor who has been married for 3 years, and is mother to a 5-month old son, provided the following commentary:

Yes, I agree. People are already using them as examples by reading more to their children like the Obamas.

Their status in society and their commitment to certain family rituals serves as a great example. My husband was acting as if he did not feel like reading to our son. I reminded him that if Obama with all that he has on his plate has time to read with his kids, I'm sure my husband can "squeeze" in some time to read to our little one. He read to my son and didn't complain after I said this.

Interestingly, another participant recognized that although President Obama may not be the nation's most effective president, the positive example set by him and his wife will transcend any political accomplishments that he attains during his term. When responding to how the Obamas can positively change the culture of parenting in America, one respondent wrote the following:

I believe they can do this by continuing to do what they are doing....lead by example. He may turn out not to be our greatest commander-in-chief, but his example of what a man with integrity can and should be is transcendent. His wife is supportive, yet strong and opinionated. She stands on her own two feet and is a force to be reckoned with next to her husband or not, but the impact of them together is what will alter the fabric.

As evidenced by these comments, many Black men and women believe the Obamas can provide a positive model of parenting that can be emulated by Blacks and non-Blacks in America. For Mona, “many nationalities” are looking to this couple for answers related to marriage and parenting. In Ezra’s view, “exposing their normalcy” will make “successful parenting seem attainable and realistic,” and Stella believed that ‘appearing in public forums’ that promote strong marital and family values that encourage other parents. For Belinda, this couple is a strong role model for the Black community, and the American community, at large. In regards to the latter, Harriett was confident that due to their high visibility (on television and magazines) and their candor about their family experiences, the American community can understand that Blacks share many of the same family life and experiences as members of the general population. In addition, Patricia was excited about the likelihood that this couple can define “what family is and how family life should be carried out.” On the other hand, Michael believed the media must shed more light on the dynamics of the First Family in order to create a “profound effect,” while Roberto believed that because the Obamas established careers prior to parenthood, maintained marital commitment in the face of adversity, and achieved their educational goals, they are strong models of Black parenting. Conversely, one respondent recognized the quality of the Obama family (marriage and parenting) will have a greater impact than any political policies created as a result of his administration. Clearly, many Black men and women are optimistic regarding the ability of this couple to positively alter the culture of Black parenting in America.

## **Discussion**

This small pilot qualitative study examined Black men and women’s opinions regarding the ability of the Obamas to change the culture of Black parenting in America. From the onset, I defined “The Culture of Black Parenting” as the high-visibility of the Obamas resulting in greater esteem for the Obamas as models for responsible parenting, greater self-efficacy in regards to the single or dual-parenting role, as well as a heightened need for parents to become the primary facilitators of increased interaction between themselves and their children. The overwhelming majority of men and women in this study believed the current President and First Lady have this power. Results in the current study have made a substantial contribution to the current scholarship by addressing the effects of a key Black political figure on the attitudes and behaviors of Black Americans. More directly, this exploratory study accomplished this by identifying the attitudes of a diverse group of Black men and women.

### **The Inability of the Obamas to Negate Pre-Existing Models of Good Parenting and Minimize External Stressors:**

Although most participants were optimistic that this couple can effect short and long-term change, not everyone wholeheartedly embraced this view. Specifically, Thomas' comment that "models of good parenting have always existed" recognizes the continued commitment that many (less-renowned) Black parents make to their children, and does not make the Obamas THE standard for responsible parenting. Further, while this high-profile couple has a media platform at their disposal, many Black parents work behind the scenes to keep their families intact in the face of life's challenges (Billingsley, 1992; Coles, 2009; Jackson, 2000; Reiner Hess, Papas, & Black, 2002). Given the historical financial instability of many Black families (Tucker, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997), Nancy, like other Blacks, recognizes that economic pressures may be more important to Black parents than altering how they parent their children. For these parents, the psychological and economic pressures of making a living may be more important than modifying their parenting behavior.

### **The Ability of the Obamas to Change the Culture of Black Parenting through Positive Interactions with Their Children:**

Although the Obamas are expected to be professional and polished at all times, several participants were impressed with how this couple interacts with their daughters. In particular, Deidre was impressed by the cultural "confidence and respect" that this couple has instilled in their children (McAdoo, 1997), as well as how they "stand close to them, hold their hands," and through their verbal and non-verbal expressions, demonstrate parental love for their children. In addition, the Obamas demonstrated that family time was a priority when they vacationed with their children after the inauguration. This may encourage parents with competing demands to make it a priority to create more loving bonds between themselves and their children (McAdoo, 1985). And regardless of their financial standing, Black parents can create imaginative (and inexpensive) ways to deepen the parent-child bond. For Belinda, the public displays of affection (e.g., hugs and kisses) that are shown by the Obamas toward their children as well as their habit of participating in an "interacting game" (e.g., Uno) may also motivate single and dual-parents to publicly and openly display their love and pride in their children as well as nurture their children's cognitive and academic development. In order to nurture these bonds, Carol and other Blacks may consciously turn off the television, read to their children, or assist them with homework. Clearly, from what Black men and women have observed regarding how this couple interacts with their children (as well as how their children interact with them... "smiles that don't look fake") these actions can positively influence the Black culture of parenting by creating and sustaining healthier parent-child bonds.

## **The Ability of the Obamas to Change the Culture of Parenting as Models of Positive Parenting:**

As evidenced by these comments, many Black men and women believe, by their words and actions, the Obamas can provide positive models of parenting that can be emulated by Blacks and non-Blacks in America. Since “many nationalities” are looking to this couple for answers related to “marriage, parenting, finances, education, and balancing home and work lives,” the advice that this couple provides can result in individuals feeling more confident in their decision-making and greater pride in their parenting role. Another interesting perspective was by “exposing their normalcy” the Obamas make “successful parenting attainable and realistic” to many parents. This view is salient because although the Obamas are highly-educated and highly-visible political figures, through modeling, they demonstrate that “successful parenting” is an achievable goal. Stella believed that ‘appearing in public forums’ that promote strong marital and family values that encourage other parents. For Belinda, this couple is a strong role model for the Black community, and the American community, at large. In regards to the latter, Harriett was confident that due to their high visibility (on television and magazines) and their candor about their family experiences, the American community can understand that Blacks share many of the same family life and experiences as members of the general population. Essentially, in this respect, the Obama family experiences can facilitate shared family understanding between various races.

In light of the expanding ways in which people define and experience “family” (Ferguson, 2007), Patricia was excited about the possibility that this couple can define “what family is and how family life should be carried out.” On the other hand, Michael believed the media must shed more light on the dynamics of the First Family in order to create a “profound effect,” while Roberto believed that because the Obamas established careers prior to parenthood, maintained marital commitment in the face of adversity, and achieved their educational goals, they are strong models of Black parenting. Essentially, this may encourage Black adults and children to achieve their educational goals, solidify their financial standing, and successfully work through relationship challenges. Conversely, Barry recognized the quality of the Obama family (marriage and parenting) will have a greater impact than any political policies created as a result of his administration. Clearly, these comments not only speak to the mass appeal of the Obamas but their ability to transcend race, ethnicity, and color to address world concerns.

## **Generalizability of the Findings for the Current Sample**

With regards to generalizability, we are not referring to the sample population, but to the extent to which our theory of the impact of a political model on parenting, can be exported to provide explanations for how some African Americans may frame a reference for their parenting. Although the sample size was small, there are three ways that the findings are generalizable for the sampled population in America.



For one, African American men and women in the general population may have little faith in the ability of the Obamas to change the culture of Black parenting because they have few positive parental models on which to draw. In other words, Black men and women who are more likely to be reared in single-parent homes than whites (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010), may have less confidence in the ability of this couple to change the realities of many Blacks in America. Second, for Blacks who lacked positive parental models and for those who want to pass on a legacy of a strong parent-child relationship may be encouraged to become more emotionally open and physically demonstrate their love and affection for their children. Given the fact that both members of this couple show love for their children through laughter, hugs, and words of encouragement they provide positive templates of support on which Black parents, with and without strong parental models can draw. Lastly, for Black men and women who lack positive role models, the Obamas provide a how-to guide in terms of what “nurturing” parenting looks like. These models are particularly salient as they highlight the “normalcy” of the nation’s most politically visible family for Black men and women, and overtly and subtly encourage Black men and women, with and without children, to value and cultivate the parent-child bond now and for future generations.

### **Limitations of the Current Study**

There were several limitations of this study. For one, the small sample size and inequities in the number of men and women who participated makes it difficult to generalize the findings of this study to the general population. In addition, as the majority of the participants were college-educated and had incomes in the \$37,500 range, the current sample lacked socioeconomic diversity. So while the Obama model may be closely aligned with middle-class parenting, additional research inquiries about whether the sample of impoverished parents can be influenced is necessary. Furthermore, since most of the participants had children, one must also be cautious when extending the findings of this study to Black men and women who do not have children. However, in spite of these limitations, this study is the first to initiate scholarly dialogue regarding how the nation’s first Black president and First Lady can change the culture of Black parenting in America.

### **Directions for Future Research**

There are five ways that future studies can expound upon the findings that have been presented here. First, future research should seek the perspectives of a more diverse group of Black men and women. Through exploring the views of Blacks who represent different ages, marital and parental statuses, geographic regions, educations, religions, socioeconomic levels, and degree of political activism, future research may reveal more varied themes than the ones presented in this study. Second, future research should examine whether the high visibility of the Obama family will result in more positive images of Black marriage and parenting in television and film.

Given media interest in the intelligence, shared commitment, and mutual support of this couple, future work in this area may find that this couple have established a standard for presidential parenting that has been unprecedented to this day. Third, future studies should examine whether the positive and powerful images associated with the Obama's positive relationship with their children will motivate other Black parents to strengthen their relationship with their own children. In addition, increased community involvement may result in greater support for single-parents, more mentoring programs for children in single-parent homes, and heightened activism, particularly in disadvantaged communities. Fourth, future studies should explore the specific ways that Black men from single-parent homes keep their homes intact. Of particular interest is the increased likelihood of Black men to experience unemployment or seasonal employment (Young, 2004), yet still keep their families strong. Last, given the African American Healthy Marriage Initiative's (AAHMI) emphasis on promoting strong marriage and greater father involvement, future studies must measure the effects of a highly-visible political figure on attitudinal and behavioral change. More directly, these studies must examine whether the Obama's example will cause Black men and women to view the Obamas as models for responsible parenting, experience greater self-efficacy in their single and dual-parenting roles, as well as motivate them toward increased interaction between themselves and their children.

## **Conclusion**

Clearly, the eyes of the world are watching the words, the policies, and the parenting of President Obama and his wife. At the onset of this paper, President Obama's Father's Day 2009 commitment to 'build a foundation for his children's dreams, give them the love and support to fulfill those dreams, and stick with them in the face of internal doubts and external difficulties,' was highlighted. Based on the comments provided by the Black men and women in this study, the researcher is confident that a growing number of scholars will extend the scholastic dialogue regarding the long-term impact of the Obamas on the culture of parenting in America. Although one cannot conclusively determine whether the parent-child interactions and modeling of the Obamas will result in responsible parenting, greater self-efficacy in the single or dual-parenting role, and increased parent-child interaction, the findings of this study reveal the overwhelming majority of Black men and women are optimistic that this couple can change the culture of Black parenting in America. Given the unique needs of Black children in America, as well as the global world, the impact of Black public leaders may warrant more inquiry. Particularly in the age of technology and social media that is impacting and influencing relationships, the researchers believe that more examinations are required to learn how our children are raised in this new age. Parenting remains a crucial element in African culture. In light of the scant media images of positive Black parenting, the findings presented in this study are important because they acknowledge that President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama have the ability to effect positive parental change in America and abroad.

## References

- Administration for Children and Families – African American Healthy Marriage Initiative. Retrieved from website: <http://www.aahmi.net>  
[http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/pdf/child\\_trends-2004whatishm.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/pdf/child_trends-2004whatishm.pdf).
- Alexander, M. (2010). *The New Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness*. New York: The New Press.
- Atwater, D. (2007). Senator Barack Obama: The rhetoric of hope and the American dream. *Journal of Black Studies*, 38(2), 121-129.
- Aymer, S. (2010). Beyond Invisibility: Psychosocial Reflections on How President Obama's Image Can Affect Young African American Males, *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 20: 827-837.
- Battle, J., & Coates, D.L. (2004). Father-Only and Mother-Only, Single-Parent Family Status of Black Girls and Achievement in Grade Twelve and at Two-Years Post High School. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 73(4), 392-407.
- Belgrave, F. (2009). *African American Girls: Reframing Perceptions and Changing Experiences*. NY: Springer.
- Best, S. J., Krueger, B., Hubbard, C., & Smith, A. (2001). An assessment of the generalizability of Internet surveys. *Social Science Computer Review*, 19(2), 131-145.
- Billingsley, A. (1992). *Climbing Jacob's ladder: The enduring legacy of African American families*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Brubaker, S.J., & Wright, C. (2006). Identity transformation and family caregiving: Narratives of African American teen mothers. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68(5), 1214-1228.
- Cain, D., & Combs-Orme, (2005). Family structure effects on parenting stress and practices in the African American family. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 32(2),
- Ceballo, R., McLoyd, V.C., & Toyokawa, T. (2004). The influence of neighborhood quality on adolescents' educational values and school effort. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 19(6), 716-739.
- Chaney, C. & Fairfax, C. N. (2013). A change has come: The Obamas and the culture of Black marriage in America. *Ethnicities* 13(1), 20-48. doi: 10.1177/1468796812463546
- Charen, M. (2008). The good that Obama can do. Retrieved on Tuesday, March 3, 2009 from: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2008/dec/18/the-good-obama-can-do/print/>
- Coles, R., & Green, R. (2009). *The myth of the missing Black father*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Cooper, C.E., McLanahan, S.S., Meadows, S.O., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2009). Family structure transitions and maternal parenting stress. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71(3), 558-574. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2009.00619.x

- East, P.L., Reyes, B.T., & Horn, E.J. (2007). Association between adolescent pregnancy and family history of teenage births. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 39(2), 108-115. DOI: 10.1363/3910807.
- Edin, K. & Reed, J. M. (2005). Why don't they just get married? Barriers to marriage among the disadvantaged. *The Future of Children*, 15(2), 117-137.
- Ferguson, S.J. (2007). *Shifting the center: Understanding contemporary families* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.
- Furstenberg, F. F., Jr. (2001). The fading dream: Prospects for marriage in the inner city. In E. Anderson & D. Massey (Eds.), *Problem of the century: Racial stratification in the U.S.* (pp. 222-247). New York: Russell Sage.
- Gibson-Davis, C., M. Edin, K., & McLanahan, S. (2005). High hopes, but even higher expectations: The retreat from marriage among low-income couples, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 67(5), 1301-1312.
- Glaeser, E.L., & Vigdor, J.L. (2012). The end of the segregated century: Racial separation in America's neighborhoods, 1890-2010. Civic report, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research.
- Hamer, J. (2009). *What it means to be daddy: Fatherhood for Black men living away from their children*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hamer, J., & Marchioro, K. (2002). Becoming custodial dads: Exploring parenting among low-income and working-class African American fathers. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64(1), 116-129.
- Hamilton, R. J., & Bowers, B. J. (2006). Internet Recruitment and E-Mail Interviews in Qualitative Studies. *Qualitative Health Research*, 16(6), 821-835.
- Harvey, A.S, & Mukhopadhyay, A.K. (2007). When twenty-four hours is not enough: Time poverty of working parents. *Social Indicators Research*, 82(1), 57-77. DOI: 10.1007/s11205-006-9002-5
- Hill, S. A. (2005). *Black intimacies: A gender perspective on families and relationships*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.
- Hiskey, S., & Troop, N. A. (2002). Online longitudinal survey research: Viability and participation. *Social Science Computer Review*, 20(3), 250-259.
- Holsti, O.R. (1969). *Content analysis for the social sciences and humanities*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- Jackson, A.P. (2000). Maternal self-efficacy and children's influence on stress and parenting among single Black mothers in poverty. *Journal of Family Issues*, 21(1), 3-16.
- Jarrett, R. L. (1994). Living poor: Family life among single parent African American women. *Social Problems*, 41, 30-49.
- Kambon, K. K. (1998). *African Black Psychology in the American Context*. Tallahassee, FL: Nubian Nation Publications.
- Kim, S. & Brody, G. H. (2005). Longitudinal pathways to psychological adjustment among Black youth living in single-parent households. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 19(2), 305-313.

- King, V., & Sobolewski, J.M. (2006). Nonresident fathers' contributions to adolescent well-being. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68(3), 537-557. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2006.00274.x
- Marks, L. D., Hopkins, K., Chaney, C., Nesteruk, O., Monroe, P., & Sasser, D. (2008). "Together, we are strong": A qualitative study of happy, enduring African-American marriages. *Family Relations*, 57, 171-184.
- Mathy, R. M., Schillace, M., Coleman, S. M., & Berquist, B. E. (2002). Methodological rigor with Internet samples: New ways to reach underrepresented populations. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 5(3), 253-266.
- Mattis, J. S. (2000). African American women's definitions of spirituality and religiosity. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 26(1), 101-122.
- McAdoo, H.P. (1997). *Black families* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- McAdoo, H.P. (1985). Strategies used by Black single mothers against stress. *The Review of Black Political Economy*, 14(2-3), 153-166.
- National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse (NRFC). Father's Day PSA Transcripts. Retrieved from: [http://www.fatherhood.gov/media/tv/fdpsa\\_transcripts.cfm#30](http://www.fatherhood.gov/media/tv/fdpsa_transcripts.cfm#30)
- Nobles, W., Goddard, L., Cavil, W., & George, P. (1987). *African-American families: Issues, insights and directions* (p. 45). United States of America.
- Obama, B. (May 1, 2009). "We Need Fathers to Step Up" by President Barack Obama. Retrieved from: <http://www.parade.com/export/sites/default/news/2009/06/barack-obama-we-need-fathers-to-step-up.html>.
- Reiner Hess, C., Papas, M.A., Black, M.M. (2002). Resilience among African American adolescent mothers: Predictors of positive parenting in early infancy. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, 27(7), 619-629.
- Simms, M.C., Fortuny, K., & Henderson, E. (August 2009). Racial and ethnic disparities among low-income families. The Urban Institute (LIWF Fact Sheet). Retrieved from: [http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411936\\_racialandethnic.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411936_racialandethnic.pdf)
- Smock, P.J. & Gupta, S. (2002). Cohabitation in contemporary North America. *In Just living together: Implications of cohabitation on families, children, and social policy*, eds. A. Booth and A.C. Crouter, 53-84, Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Smock, P.J. & Manning, W.D. (2004). Living together unmarried in the United States: Demographic perspectives and implications for family policy. *Law and Policy* 26(1), 87-117.
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory, Procedures, and Techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Street, P.L. (2009). Barack Obama and the future of American politics. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.
- Tamis-LeMonda, C., Briggs, R.D., McClowry, S.G., & Snow, D.L. (2008). Challenges to the Study of African American Parenting: Conceptualization, Sampling, Research Approaches, Measurement, and Design. *Parenting, Science and Practice*. 8. 319-358.

- Taylor, R., Jackson, J. S., & Chatters, L. (1997). *Family life in Black America*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Taylor, S. J. & Bogdan, R. (1998). *Introduction to qualitative research methods: A guidebook and resource* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census (2010). Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2010, Report P60, n. 238, Table B-2, pp. 68-73.
- U.S. Census Bureau (2003) Households and families. U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, D.C. Retrieved from: <http://www.census.gov/prod/2003>
- Young, A.A. (2005). *The minds of marginalized Black men: Making sense of mobility, opportunity and future life chances*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Zalot, A.A., Jones, D.J., Forehand, R., & Brody, G. (2007). Self-Regulation and Conduct Problems among Low-Income African American Youth From Single-Mother Homes: The Roles of Perceived Neighborhood Context and Child Gender. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 33(3), 239-259.