



Institute for Family & Child Well-Being  
**PERSPECTIVES ON OUR WORK**

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## **A Celebration of African American Mothers!**

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Greetings, and thank you for reading this issue of our ongoing analysis and commentary publication.

In this issue I would like to celebrate the significance of African American mothers and their immeasurable contribution to the history and continued development of African American families. I would like to do so in a very personal way, by reflecting on my relationship with my mother. I debated whether to share this personal message in this way, but ultimately decided to do so.

This tribute is written as a letter to my mother, expressing my great appreciation and admiration for who she is and what she has meant to me over the years. I am also hoping, however, to celebrate the critical contribution and role of African American mothers that keep hanging in there. Fathers are equally important, but this is my moment to say thank you to the mothers.

*Dear Mom,* there are many things I can say to describe how

much (and why) I respect you, appreciate you and love you. You have been so many different things for Khari and I over the years.

When we were younger, you were our healer during those late nights and weekends when we were sick. You were the judge and the jury when we got into trouble. You disciplined us in the moment when we misbehaved, making sure we knew exactly why we were in trouble *and* what conduct would have been more appropriate. When we were really bad, you made sure Dad heard about it and had his say.

You were a teacher and tutor to us, making sure we excelled in all of our classes. You made sure that we knew college was easily within our potential and certain to be within our reach. You knew our potential

and expected/accepted nothing short of excellence.

On this occasion, mom, I really just want to say thank you! Not because you struggled as a single mother through endless years of poverty doing it all alone. Not because you put all of your hopes and dreams into an entertainment career in search of that big break. And not because you fought your way through the mean streets, "pulling yourself up by your bootstraps," to become that great national symbol of perseverance and self-reliance. Perhaps there is a place for all of these stories, but these tend to be the only "feel good" stories we see on the rags-to-riches television specials celebrating triumph over adversity. There are many other stories of integrity and honor to be told and examples to be shared.

Mom, I thank you on this occasion because you are

"You are a part of a very strong and proud tradition of African American mothers that have always been on the front lines of our community's struggles in this country."

like so many other African American mothers out there that do your thing with no real national and community celebration... having grown

up among a generation of African American families in a home that emphasized the values of hard work, continuous education and a steadfast faith and belief in God. You are like so many African American mothers that have always found a way to make things work, despite the many challenges that life tends to present.

I thank you because you have lived a life of service... committing your professional life to educating children, and supporting other professionals in their efforts to do the same. I thank you because you have always been committed to living a life *on* purpose and *of* integrity. I thank you because you have always been consistent. I thank you for your example of how to care for and "be there" for family members and

friends in times of need.

I thank you for showing us how to rely on others for support and assistance, both during life's day-to-day routines and the challenging circumstances that we all face from time to time. I also appreciate your insistence that we be there for others when needed. By example you have demonstrated that we must be humble, caring, giving and compassionate in our conduct and in our relationships with others.

You have done all of this and so much more. You have given up so much of yourself over the years without even the slightest hint of regret. You have made it clear on many occasions that you have done it all out of love and your commitment to ensuring that we had access to the best this world has to offer.

Mom, I also thank you for doing what too many mothers have for some reason been reluctant to do... you instilled within Khari and I a great appreciation of what it means to be of African ancestry in America. I thank you for exposing us to and raising us in a household that celebrates African and African American beauty, art and music, that celebrates the accomplishments of great African and African American leaders and achievers, that consciously celebrates and actively contributes to our rich legacy of civic, social and political engagement and activism.

While your life story may not be the rags-to-riches story people celebrate on television, I am also very clear that yours has not been an easy journey by any means. You have worked very hard, and have endured many challenging circumstances.

Langston Hughes was correct when describing that *life for you ain't been no crystal stair. I know that it's had tacks in it, and splinters, and boards torn up! But you always continued climbin' on, reachin' landins, and turnin' corners, sometimes goin' in the dark where there ain't been no light.* The one thing I can tell you for sure, mom, is that *you never have to worry about me turning back or setting*

*down on steps, whenever life gets kind of hard. Indeed I will always keep going, and just as you showed us, you will always find me, still climbin'!*

I have to acknowledge that one very basic reason I am committed to the preservation of the Black family is that I know its value, yet see this great tradition disrespected and violated daily. I know very well that thirty five years ago on this very day, the lives of two little Black babies hung in the balance. The scales could have easily tipped one way or the other, and for a brief moment were leaning a different way. My life could easily have been completely different, but for a Black family's choice. You and dad, and both of your extended families, chose us, so that we might have a better life. And I am eternally thankful for it. I wake up every morning and give thanks for all that you and dad have made possible for us. I certainly appreciate the significance of adoption. Adoption can be great for some children and families, but not every adoptee can claim the blessings Khari and I have been showered with. I wish to emphasize here that my true appreciation is for the substance of *who* you are, and *how* you are.

I know, because of your example, that our purpose in life is not to make endless amounts of money in order to consume more *things*. We are here to provide for and care for our children, families and communities; we are here to prepare our children for a life *of and on* purpose and to contribute to making our communities stronger. You have demonstrated that we can do all of this while still living an enjoyable and rewarding life.

You are a part of a very strong and proud tradition of African American mothers that have always been on the front lines of our community's struggles in this country. On this day I thank you, mom, for your example and all that you are. *I Love You! - OAM*

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