

FATHER'S DAY CULTURAL RESOURCES

Sunday 2013

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I. Historical Background and Documents

Father's Day has taken on new and exciting meanings as our culture forges new definitions of marriage and family over the past three generations. Any attempt to ignore this cultural evolution will leave a void in your understanding of the challenge facing religious leaders serving contemporary families. Any attempt to comprehend the complexity facing the African American family unit must begin with its African roots that brought to America unique family structures that could be traced from the country, region, or tribal unit of origin. Many family structures were represented including the modern day nuclear family, polygamy, and tribal.

The term 'father' cannot be restricted to terms of biological origin. Its concept must be expanded to become a 'metaphor' for a paternal relationship inclusive of kin and non-kin relationships. It is defined by a conscious emptying of ones self into their own children and or into a community of children. It was this 'fatherhood concept' that saved the black family during slavery when Frederick Douglass recalls his extended male protectors on the plantation 'uncles', according to plantation etiquette, as a matter of respect, due from the younger to the older slaves. There was not to be found, among slaves, a more rigid enforcement of the law of respect to elders than they maintain.

In my book *Frederick Douglass*, Douglass recalls that slavery does away with fathers, as it does with families. Slavery has no use for either fathers or families, and its laws do not recognize their existence in the social arrangements of the plantation. Probably the most severe blow to the African American family during slavery was the *Valuation and Division*, a process where slaves were sold. The valuation and division of slaves, among contending heirs, took place where slaves were divided from all their family.

The concept and role of 'Fatherhood' has been in constant change from African culture via the Middle Passage, Slavery, Reconstruction, Sharecropping, Legalized Segregation, and Discrimination to the current State of Affairs with fathers.

Seventy-two percent of African American children are born to unwed mothers. Many fathers are incarcerated. Forces have been at work for years to destroy the black family. I shall never forget building 150 apartment units in Huntington, West Virginia for low-income families. Qualified applicants had to be either dirt poor or on welfare. Men and women refused to marry because it would increase their income just high enough to be ineligible. With both incomes they were very poor. Economics and racial discrimination still play a role. These factors do not excuse the cultural period of self-inflicted moral permissiveness reflected in the negative baggage load of hip-hop culture. This

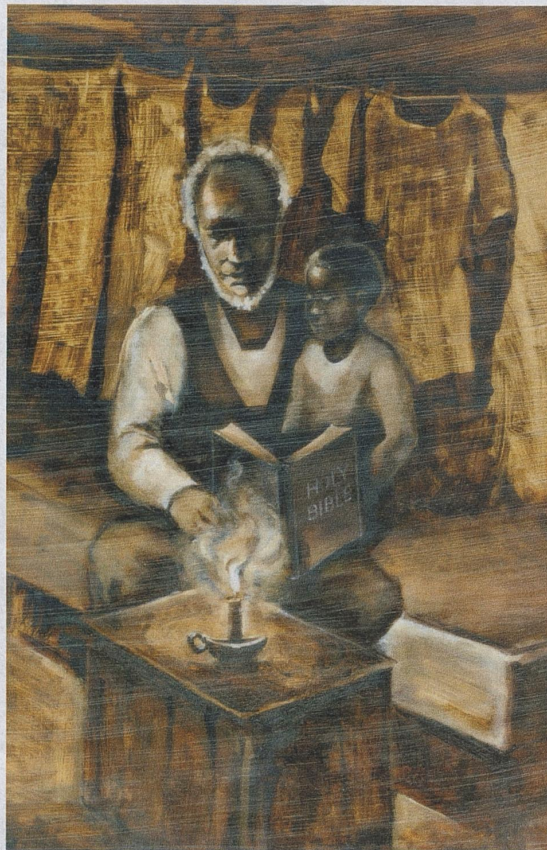
social phenomenon has a negative impact on boys, who are future fathers. The threat and fear among these families often leave them in a state of 'defeatism'. However, the text suggest we move from feat and moral inertia and take responsibility now for our children as God carried us.

Instead of using Father's Day to reticule and put down the absent father, I am suggesting that we spend time lifting up fathers who have faced similar situations (the unwed mother and the absent father), and still under the guidance of God produced the strongest families in African American history.

Our text from Deuteronomy suggests that the role played by God the Father is to be carried out in our family lives regardless of life's threats. God carried us and we are to carry our children. I will use my own family to demonstrate the power of this text.

'Fatherhood' and 'Grandfather hood' inter-generational began in slavery. The following true story is packed with symbols: Education; The Role of Sacred Text; Moral Sources: Continuity; and Fearlessness.

SCIPIO



III. Fathers Threatened By Circumstances



Rev. Thomas Horace Smith's Story

Circumstance - Unwed Mother - Absent Father

"Contradictions of life are not in themselves either final or ultimate. Your existing circumstance should not define who you are or what you should become."

My oldest brother John tells the story of my father's plight being born by an unwed mother and reared by an absent father. It should give encouragement to children of unwed mothers and a challenge to fathers who need direction and support from the church and community.

My brother John recalls the story of our father Thomas, who we will call Tom. He lived in two worlds, both of which were characterized by object poverty. From Sunday night to Friday afternoon, he lived with his maternal grandparents, Benjamin and Matilda Strider on Thomas Street in the east end of Lexington.

On Friday afternoon he would walk ten miles to Jonestown out in the country where he would stay with Lucinda Strider, his mother, until Sunday afternoon. Cindy gave birth to Tom before she was married. Her father, a Methodist Episcopal minister, had a full family.

Tom had only one coat and one pair of trousers, which were given to him. That outfit he would wear to Constitution School each day and on Friday evening he would walk back ten miles to Jonestown



Dr. Clay Simpson Sr. MD's Story

CIRCUMSTANCE - POVERTY

“Will not define me nor control my destiny.”

My oldest sister Mary was married to Dr. Clay Simpson. Her daughter, Sarah, tells the vivid story of her daddy's struggle to become a doctor. His name was Clay.

Clay was born on a small farm near Notuslga, Alabama. He was a small, thin, man around 5' 7" with an oblong deep, rich, chocolate face. His long eyelashes framed his slightly droopy eyes, and his high cheek bones were highlighted by streaks of immature gray in his sideburns.

My daddy's father new him well and realized that we were not fit to work on the family farm. He called him lazy, but made arrangements for the to work in the home of Dr. John Kenney, who planted the seed of medicine in his mind and spirit.

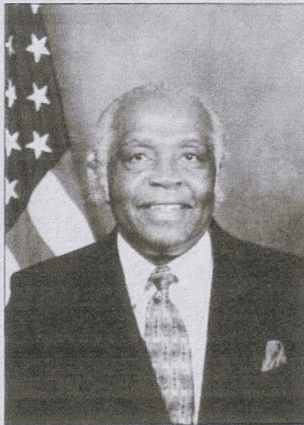
Although his daddy's farm produced cotton, corn, peanuts, and pecan trees of plenty, by the time he had to deal with white merchants to sell his goods, there was little or no money left for Clay's education.

Clay's main tuition was paid by the state of Alabama with the encouragement and support of Dr. John Kenney. He finished Tuskegee Institute and was under the tutelage of none other than Booker T. Washington, the Virginian who journeyed to Alabama and established a school to educate black folks.

Clay graduated with a degree in Agriculture from Tuskegee.

Being encouraged by his mentor and under the direction of God, he bought a one-way bus ticket to Nashville to attend Meharry Medical School with no money for tuition or housing. He sat outside the president's office demanding to see him to reject that he stay and go to medical school. After several days the president finally found him a private room and provided a loan for tuition with the understanding that he would pay it back as soon as he could.

Clay worked every summer and as many weekends as possible as a Pullman Porter to pay his way through medical school. He finally graduated and moved to Ornesboro, Kentucky, where he served white and black patients with less that one third ever paying him for his service. His house visits were \$3 per person. He married my older sister, Mary, and they had two children that continues his medical history and serviced to the poor and down trodden. Their children continued a service in the following disciplines: medical physician, educators, journalists, recreational specialists, and airline administration.



Clay Simpson Jr. Ph.D

Public Health Deputy Assistant Secretary for
minority health in the Dept. of Health and Human
Services



Sarah Helen Thompson Medical Technologist

IV. Stories and Illustrations

After 10 years of pastorate, I retired in August 2012 and moved to Marietta, GA. In my congregation, there were only two families with a father attending. As pastor, I embraced a host of young men and mentored them as a father. These young men are now in college, mannered, working, and have kept in touch with me and expressed their appreciation for my tough love relationship. We all must do this if we are to create a new village.

V. Learning Moment

Father's Day is an event. So what? The church needs to embrace a new concept of the 'village' to save new generations of potential fathers. Demographics have virtually changed the practicality of the old 'village' community arrangement. Mini plans of mentoring, cooperative arrangements with community-based institutions can make this happen. Use this day to plant the seed in a newsletter. Be prepared to build an infrastructure for delivery. Books for these teachings are available.

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Faith of our fathers, we will love
Both friend and foe in all our strife;
And preach thee, too, as love knows how
By kindly words and virtuous life.

I Want Jesus To Walk With Me

Deuteronomy 1. 29-31

It seems that life constantly gives us reason to be terrified. When we feel that we have mastered our season of life, the season changes. Yet when we realize that it is God who carries us, if we walk with Him, we can go past the fear into faith toward God. He is a faithful father who will carry us all the way until we reach our final destination. This can give fathers the courage to face their internal adversaries and go forward.

I want Jesus to walk with me
I want Jesus to walk with me
All along my pilgrim journey
I want Jesus to walk with me

In my trial, Lord, walk with me
In my trials, Lord, walk with me
When the shades of life are falling
Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me

In my sorrow, Lord walk with me
In my sorrows, Lord walk with me
When my heart is aching
Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me

In my troubles, Lord walk with me
In my troubles, Lord walk with me
When my life becomes a burden,
Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me

Lift Every Voice And Sing

Parallel histories of Hebrews and Africans and the concept of slavery, struggle, journey, and promise merge into this reflective hymn *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, particularly the third voice. It recognizes that God was there and how He brought us through the Red Sea of middle passage, slavery, sharecropping and segregation. It will be God who will lead us into the future light.

I published a book entitled the *African American Jubilee Legacy: A Spiritual Odyssey*.

It acknowledges Father as the deliverer of African America's weary past, This hymn warns us of being 'drunk with the wine of world of irresponsibility' and admonishes to continue beyond biblical antiquity and carry our children into the future under the shadow of God's Hand.
Jude 3... contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the Saints.

Lift every voice and sing, till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise, high as the list'ning skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.

Sing a song full of the faith
that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope
that the present has brought us;
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod, bitter the chast'ning rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat, have not our weary feet,
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way
that with tears has been watered.
We have come, treading our path
thro' the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from a gloomy past, till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam
of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who hast by thy might, led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places
Our God where we met Thee,
Lest our hearts drunk with the wine of the world
we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand
May we forever stand,
True to our God,
True to our native land.