



From 1965 to 2018: What Happened to Black Men?

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ABSTRACT

In 1965, there were a number of major events occurring in the United States, including U.S. soldiers fighting in the Vietnam War; the historic march that took place in Selma, Alabama, led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; the murder of Malcolm X in Harlem, New York; and the signing of The Voters Rights Act by President Lyndon B. Johnson. It was a time that Black families were moving in a positive direction in the areas of housing, employment, and education. Since 1965, Black men in the United States have not made the same progress as their White and Hispanic counterparts. This article explores both the absence of Black males in households as well as the nesting syndrome created by mothers rearing Black men and its impact on Black males since 1965.

In 1965, 190,000 U.S. soldiers were fighting in the Vietnam war; Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and more than 2,600 others were arrested in Selma, Alabama during demonstrations against voter-registration rules; Malcolm X was shot to death at a Harlem rally; Blacks rioted for 6 days in the Watts section of Los Angeles; and the Voters Rights Act was signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson. During the same year, Moynihan (1965) indicated in a report published by the U.S. Department of Labor, “The White family has achieved a high degree of stability and is maintaining that stability. By contrast, the family structure of lower class Negroes is highly unstable, and in many urban centers is approaching complete breakdown” (p. 5). When Moynihan made the prediction in 1965, Blacks probably did not expect that the impact would have a devastating and destroying effect on Black males. The forecasted breakdowns have expanded to Blacks disregarding other Black lives. According to the Federal Bureau of

Investigation's 2015 Uniformed Crime Report, in 2015, there were 2,380 Blacks murdered in the United States by a Black offender (FBI, 2015). Of the 2,380 Black murders in 2015, 2,299 of the offenders were Black men (FBI, 2015). Although the U.S. Department of Labor forecasted more than 50 years ago that Black families were "approaching complete breakdown", little to nothing has been done to diminish the negative effects the breakdown has had on Black men and the advancement of the Black family.

What has occurred since 1965 to create such negative connotations and statistics about Black males? Who is the blame for the shortcomings and downfalls of Black males in the 21st century? Some have blamed Black Mothers of extending their "nesting instinct" which has affected Black men into and beyond adulthood. Others have blamed Black Fathers' absence from households and not being an active participant in the rearing of their Black male offspring. In this article, both explanations will be explored.

ABSENCE OF BLACK FATHERS IN BLACK HOUSEHOLDS

According to the United States Census Bureau (2012), 57.6% of Black children live in households absent of their biological fathers. Former President Barrack Obama, then Illinois State Senator, stated in 2008, "[Black Fathers' have] abandoned their responsibilities, acting like boys instead of men." McAdoo and McAdoo (1997) asserted "...the stereotyped Black father is seen—by those who are not of color—as a visitor to his family, underemployed, marginal to his family, inattentive to his children, rather violent, and plainly not in the family picture" (p. 7). McAdoo and McAdoo (1997) further asserted the absence of Black fathers is linked to unemployment, imprisonment, high death rates, and the imbalance of the male–female ratio.

Although the absence of Black fathers in the lives of their Black male sons has been viewed as negative, a report authored by Jones and Mosher (2013) for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicated that Black fathers who do not live in the household with their children speak with their children more often than both Hispanic and White fathers. Furthermore, the report implies that Black fathers, whether or not they reside in the household with their children, are more involved with their children than both White and Hispanic Fathers.

WHAT HAPPENED TO BLACK MEN: A LEGAL REVIEW

According to a report published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, one in three Black men are expected to spend time in prison (Bonczar & Beck, 1997; Knafo, 2013). In 2014, 516,900 Black men were a part of the U.S. prison system, which was 37% of the total male incarceration population and 6% of all Black males in the US (BJS, 2015). In the same year, 67,810 Black men graduated from community colleges (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2016). And as the US experienced in one of the most controversial presidential elections in 2016, nearly 1.4 million (one in eight) voting-age Black men were unable to cast a vote due to state-enacted voting laws (“Study: Non-Voting,” 2016).

Legal scholars have conducted research in an attempt to determine the reasons for the large number of Black males incarcerated in the US. Findings of the studies have indicated that Black males are incarcerated at rates greater than any other race/ethnicity because they experience high rates of unemployment, lack education attainment, are victims of racial profiling and police discrimination, receive poor legal representation, are more likely to be referred to police as a kid than any other race/ethnicity, and are raised in single parent households often times ran by Black mothers (Quigley, 2015).

WHAT HAPPENED TO BLACK MEN: AN EDUCATION REVIEW

Education scholars have also conducted research attempting to determine reasons why Black males who enroll in U.S. postsecondary institutions do not persist to graduation. In the fall of 2016, 933,179 Black men enrolled in postsecondary educational institutions in the US, and by the end of that academic year, only 184,111 Black men completed post-secondary graduation requirements (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2018). Research findings for Black men’s lack of educational accomplishments have concluded that Black males have a difficult time balancing personal and school responsibilities, enter college unprepared for college level course work, experience financial hardships, and do not have stable housing and employment (Downs, 2016; Dulabaum, 2016; Moltz, 2009).

BLACK MOTHERS AND THE “NESTING SYNDROME”

According to American Pregnancy Association (n.d.), *nesting instinct* is described as pregnant women and animals who prepare for a newborn offspring that is soon to be born. When studying Black males who lack postsecondary educational accomplishments and make up high rates of mass incarceration, little to no research has been conducted on the roles and contributions of mothers who have created a “nest” for their Black sons.

Williams (n.d.), a Black woman, believed that Black women have generationally been taught to be independent, nurturers, and providers. She further argued that it began when Black men decided to have babies and not take care of them. While Williams thinks that every woman should be educated and able to take care of herself, she does not believe that women should excuse men from the same requirements.

Many women, who have raised today’s incarcerated and un- and undereducated Black men, have extended the nesting periods beyond preparing for their births. Some single Black mothers who are rearing Black boys, label them as the “man of the house.” Many of those Black boys labeled as *man of the house*, move into adulthood not being required to make contributions to or be a vital part of the family structure. Many Black boys are reared to rely on their mothers and are not trained to be responsible, independent, and head of their own households. Those same Black boys age into adulthood and become Black men who have not developed maturity, independence, or responsibility. Often when the sons of Black mothers lack accomplishments and become involved in troubled situations, it is those same mothers who are the first to make excuses for, defend, and open the nest for the return of their Black sons. According to Lei and South (2016), “In 2011, 31% of young Black men aged 25–34 lived in a parental home” (p.110). As seen in today’s music videos and reality television shows, Black men can degrade, disrespect, misuse, and abuse women in personal relationships, yet even after displaying this behavior, can return home to their mother’s nest. Furthermore, Black men are allowed to return to “Momma’s nest” after producing and not being present in the lives of their own children. Those *boys* age out of being juveniles and move into an adulthood un- and under-educated, un- and under-employed, becoming members of the criminal justice system (Desilver, 2013; Witters & Liu, 2015). Many Black boys who become under-achieving Black men, as well as their mothers, blame their lack of accomplishments on the absence of Black men in households.

FIXING THE “NEST”

Moynihan (1965) indicated, “The role of the family in shaping character and ability is so pervasive as to be easily overlooked. The family is the basic social unit of American life; it is the basic socializing unit. By and large, adult conduct in society is learned as a child.” In order for progress to be made with correcting downfalls of Black males in the United States, restructuring of the Black family must occur. As more than 72% of Black children are born to single Black mothers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016), the restructuring should include mothers creating a nest that develops Black boys into Black men. The nest should not be created as a place that allows Black men to continuously return home with the door wide open. Mothers in charge of the nest should include positive Black male mentors to be a part of the village that “raises the child.” This village should teach Black boys responsibility, respect, good communication and decision-making skills, and independence. Those mentoring Black males should teach their mentees to respect women, those in authority, and one another; to not become an inmate of the Department of Corrections; to remain the head of their households; to think about their actions before making a decision; that it is ok to communicate their problems; it is ok to cry when they feel hurt and pain; and to leave the nest, never forgetting the values and character that it instilled.

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