

# A new dawn of fatherhood accountability is needed

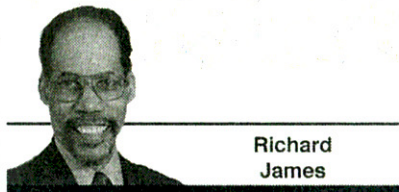
**"Y**ou know the only people who are always sure about the proper way to raise children? Those who've never had any." — **Bill Cosby**

To be honest, my father wasn't much of a father. The prospects of fatherhood didn't appeal to the handsome nineteen-year old teenager when I was born. He begrudgingly assumed minimal responsibility for my care. As I grew up, I rarely saw him. I was never the primary reason for his infrequent visits. They say that he died of Cancer at age 39 in 1966. But, he really died of too much cigarettes, liquor, illegal drugs and philandering. He was a "playa".

Comedian, and social activist, Bill Cosby says that the best experts on fatherhood are those that have no children. I qualify for the job. Here's my unique view of fatherhood...

If George Washington is the father of our country, then his successors are our step-dads. The 44th stepfather of our nation will be an African-American, Barack Obama. The inauguration of President Obama has been described as a new dawn of accountability. It has been called the Obama era.

On Father's Day, 2008, Mr. Obama aired some dirty laundry. He spoke about a truth that many avoid — absentee fathers and the destruction of the African-American family. He said families are like rocks on which we build communities and that fathers are critically important to a strong foundation of American life. "But if we are honest with ourselves, we'll admit that what too many fathers also are missing — missing from too many lives and too



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many homes. They have abandoned their responsibilities, acting like boys instead of men. And the foundations of our families are weaker because of it." Mr. Obama said.

"You and I know how true this is in the African-American community. We know that more than half of all black children live in single-parent households, a number that has doubled — doubled — since we were children. We know the statistics — that children who grow up without a father are five times more likely to live in poverty and commit crime; nine times more likely to drop out of schools and 20 times more likely to end up in prison. They are more likely to have behavioral problems, or run away from home or become teenage parents themselves. And the foundations of our community are weaker because of it." He said.

Mr. Obama's early life was the exception to the rule. He was lucky. His father abandoned him but he had a strong support system in his grandparents. "I screwed up more often than I should've, but I got plenty of second chances. And even though we didn't have a lot of money, scholarships gave me the opportunity to go to some of the best schools in the country. A lot of kids don't get these chances today. There is no margin for error in their lives. So my own story is different in that way." Mr. Obama said.

While we might savor the "warm fuzzies" of a true success story — fatherless boy makes good — but we must also recognize the huge task before us. Mr. Obama has said that his administration will be accountable. He must set the example for the millions of men, and boys, who are absentee fathers. We must encourage and support the re-establishment of two parent families as the foundation of our society. Single parent female-headed households need our help.

But fathers must have good jobs that pay decent salaries to build strong families. They need to be respected as men. They need hope for a brighter future. African-American men can't hide behind old excuses of racial discrimination or lack of resources in the black community. The time has come for Black fathers to "man-up" and be the leaders that they were meant to be.

If nothing else, the Obama presidency will be a shining example of black fatherhood. He can become a beacon of possibilities for millions of men everywhere. And that represents real change.

My last conversation with my father was in 1965. I was home on leave, from the military, to attend my father's funeral. My father asked if I saw the new TV show, I-Spy. Bill Cosby co-starred as a leading man. My father was pleased to see a strong black role model on TV.

I am sure he would be pleased to see Mr. Obama become our 44th step-dad.

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