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Abstract	<p>In 1974, the American sitcom, <i>Good Times</i>, introduced the fictional character of James Evans Sr. played by actor John A. Amos Jr. as the golden standard of black fatherhood. While featured on the sitcom for only three seasons, the magnitude of his character and the show's overall influence on the black community are both forever sacred. Long before the black male fathers featured on sitcoms such as <i>The Cosby Show</i> (Dr. Heathcliff "Cliff" Huxtable), <i>The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air</i> (Uncle Philip Banks), and <i>Family Matters</i> (Carl Winslow), James Evans Sr. stood as the black community's flagship male role model. He is characteristically described as a strong, black family man who took honorable measures to protect his family from the pervasive structural and cultural forces that often destroy black families.</p>	

### AUTHOR QUERIES

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## We Miss You, James Evans Sr.

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In 1974, the American sitcom, *Good Times*, introduced the fictional character of James Evans Sr. played by actor John A. Amos Jr. as the golden standard of black fatherhood. While featured on the sitcom for only three seasons, the magnitude of his character and the show's overall influence on the black community are both forever sacred. Long before the black male fathers featured on sitcoms such as *The Cosby Show* (Dr. Heathcliff "Cliff" Huxtable), *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* (Uncle Philip Banks), and *Family Matters* (Carl Winslow), James Evans Sr. stood as the black community's flagship male role model. He is characteristically described as a strong, black family man who took honorable measures to protect his family from the pervasive structural and cultural forces that often destroy black families.

*Good Times* features lead characters James Sr. and his television wife, Florida Evans (Esther Rolle), along with their three children, James Jr. "J.J." (James Walker), Thelma (Bern Nadette Stanis), and Michael (Ralph Carter). Each was a star on the show. They lived in apartment 17C in the Cabrini-Green housing projects in Chicago, Illinois. The show was created to feature the family attempting to overcome the structural and cultural burdens of poverty, lack of employment opportunities, family matters, and gangs, which were all importantly addressed in many episodes.

In the early years, the show was a huge success largely in part to the character of James Sr. However, disagreements over the direction of the show coupled with the writers making J.J. a buffoonery type character that fit the typical stereotypes of black males, did not sit well with the

27 lead actors, Amos and Rolle. Esther Rolle's ire at the show and writers  
28 dated back to when they initially wanted to cast her as a single mother of  
29 three. She insisted on having a strong, black male character to provide the  
30 show with that needed presence. On the other hand, John Amo's friction  
31 came when writers began to marginalize his character and would not allow  
32 him to continue to be a strong parental figure. This rift led to his depart-  
33 ture, and after three seasons on the show the CBS network decided not to  
34 renew Amo's contract.

35 Before leaving the show, the fictional character of James Sr. had made  
36 his mark as a pillar of strength for black males and the family structure. His  
37 visibility provided a nuclear family structure in contrast to single-parent  
38 households often seen in the black community. Earlier episodes of *Good*  
39 *Times* did an excellent job of exhibiting how the family, as a social group,  
40 was able to overcome serious economic and cultural issues. James Sr. was  
41 the stabilizing force that guided the family through those struggles. For  
42 example, James Sr. works numerous jobs to provide for the family. On  
43 the show, he shields J.J. from the influence of Sweet Daddy Williams,  
44 the neighborhood loan shark and numbers runner, and from joining the  
45 Satan's Knights street gang. He is a symbol of parental security for Thelma  
46 and pushes her to be selective in her choice of men. His guidance shows,  
47 Michael, how to channel his pro-black and rebellious nature.

48 James Sr. is also paramount in building the self-esteem and confidence  
49 of his children. He encourages them to venture beyond a life that confines  
50 them to the Cabrini-Green housing projects. Despite not being a great  
51 student in school, J.J. was an excellent artist who painted his way out of  
52 the ghetto. Thelma is encouraged to continue her education beyond high  
53 school, attend medical school, and become a surgeon one day. Toward  
[A54] the end of the show she marries an NFL player. James Sr. supports the  
55 elevated consciousness of Michael who has aspirations of becoming an  
56 attorney, and ultimately, a Supreme Court Judge.

57 James Sr.'s life comes full circle in season three when he is reunited with  
58 his own father. He did not have a relationship with his father who walked  
59 out on the family when James Sr. was a child. In the episode, *The Family*  
60 *Tree*, Thelma brings the two men together. She finds while doing a family  
61 tree project for school that her allegedly deceased grandfather, Grandpa  
62 Henry, is alive. James Sr. had previously told the family that his father was  
63 died. Their reunion is met with a painful exchange between father and son  
64 who had not seen each other for over 35 years. James Sr. emotionally tells  
65 his father, "There is one thought that never crossed my mind and that was

walking out [on my family] because I knew how my family was going to feel. So I stayed, man! I stayed!” He continues to tell his father that walking out on the family thrust James Sr. to become the man of the house, and he has upheld that role with his own family to ensure that his children have a strong, positive father in their lives.

## PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE

The positive role of black fathers in the social science literature has largely been ignored. Limited is the academic space that explains how strong, positive black fathers inject positivity in the lives of their son in an effort to avoid the pervasive structural and cultural forces in the black community (see Bowman and Forman 1997; Grief et al. 1998; Reynolds 2001; Ransaw 2014). The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the influence that a black father can have on shaping, molding, and helping to channel the attitudes and behaviors of black males from adolescents to adulthood. Using the city of Chicago, Illinois as the social environment, this is a valid attempt to explain how the presence of strong, positive black fathers in the home has the ability to offset deviant, criminal behaviors and subsequent arrests and imprisonment of young black males in the city. More importantly, this chapter argues that a black father’s presence can help his son better understand the social structures which evokes a Darwinistic, survival of the fittest, culture leading to the high number of black males in Chicago who devalue the lives of other black males (i.e., black-on-black murders).

Determinants behind the cultural epidemic of black-on-black murders have ranged from the social disorganization of the environment, lack of education, high black unemployment, generational poverty, territorial battles between gangs, drug wars, to absentee fathers. This chapter posits that the absence of strong, positive black fathers in the home is one of the chief determinants that lead to black-on-black murders. Using an auto-ethnographic method, which analyzes personal experiences in an attempt to better understand cultural experiences, this chapter provides case studies of three black males from Chicago (see Appendix). The goal of each case study is to show that black fathers, such as the prototype of James Evans Sr. bestow value to the lives of their sons. Their guidance counteracts the detrimental effects of negative structural and cultural factors. Furthermore, it leads the majority of young black males to learn to subvert attached stereotypes, become more personally responsible, culturally

103 progressive, and inspires them to enormous heights of black male achieve-  
 104 ment. In short, this chapter extends our depth of understanding of how a  
 105 black father's presence propels black male achievement, and counterbal-  
 106 ances the perceived cultural pathology in the black male subculture that  
 107 potentially leads to the devaluation of black male life.

108 THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

109 Chicago, Illinois, or so inhumanely named in the twenty-first century,  
 110 Chiraq, Killinois, is much like a war zone. Given this description by local  
 111 rap artists such as King Louie and the news media, the number of murders  
 112 in the city over the last decade has been comparable to *Operation Iraqi*  
 113 *Freedom* (OIF). OIF started on March 20, 2003, and ended December  
 114 15, 2011, recording a total of 4422 casualties. In that same timeframe,  
 115 Chicago recorded just fewer than 4200 murders. What underscores the  
 116 comparison of Chicago murders with wars overseas is the fact that some  
 117 of those being killed are innocent adult bystanders and children, the col-  
 118 lateral damage of the dehumanization of black human life in the city.

119 In the city, on average at least one black male is murdered every day.  
 120 The Chicago Police Department (CPD) has recorded an estimated total  
 121 of 4992 murders in the past decade, 2004–2014 (see Table 4.1). In prior  
 122 years from 2001 to 2003, the total number of murders each year was  
 123 above 600. There were 667 in 2001, 656 in 2002, and 601 in 2003.  
 124 Despite decreasing patterns after 2003, it again climbed to over 500 mur-  
 125 ders in 2008 (513) and 2012 (506). In 2012, the city had 506 murders,

t1.1 **Table 4.1** Total murders  
 t1.2 in Chicago 2004–2014

t1.3	2004	453
t1.4	2005	451
t1.5	2006	471
t1.6	2007	448
t1.7	2008	513
t1.8	2009	459
t1.9	2010	436
t1.10	2011	433
t1.11	2012	506
t1.12	2013	415
t1.13	2014	407

t1.14 *Source:* Chicago Police Department, 2004–2014 Murder  
 t1.15 Analysis Report

increasing the murder rate to more than 19 % (433) higher than that reported in 2011. The city reclaimed the title “Murder Capital of the World.” While other major metropolitan cities have had higher murder rates based on total population, Chicago has consistently averaged the highest number of murders per year. In 2013 and 2014, the total number of murders declined with the city recording the fewest murders since 1965. However, the total remains high at 415 and 407, respectively.

The prominent dilemma is that black males are murdering other black males. While intraracial murders are not a new phenomenon, the vast majority of murders in the city result from black-on-black gun violence. Large proportions of the murders occur in black communities on the South and West sides of the city where gang violence is a key contributing factor in the total deaths of black males. According to the CPD Murder Analysis report, blacks have been the offender and victim in over 76 % of total murders in the last decade (see Tables 4.2 and 4.3). The bulk of these individuals are young black males between the ages 17 and 25, which aligns with the central assertion that more James Evans Sr.’s are needed in a social environment that fosters such violence between black males.

t2.1 **Table 4.2** Percentage of murder victims in Chicago, 2007–2011

t2.2	<i>Year</i>	<i>All male victims</i>	<i>Black victims only</i>	<i>All age group (17–25) victims</i>
t2.3	2007	87	75	40
t2.4	2008	88	72	42
t2.5	2009	88	76	43
t2.6	2010	88	76	40
t2.7	2011	90	75	45

t2.8 *Source:* Chicago Police Department, 2007–2011 Murder Analysis Report

t3.1 **Table 4.3** Percentage of murder offenders in Chicago, 2007–2011

t3.2	<i>Year</i>	<i>All male offenders</i>	<i>Black offenders only</i>	<i>All age group (17–25) offenders</i>
t3.3	2007	90	72	44
t3.4	2008	91	80	52
t3.5	2009	93	74	53
t3.6	2010	93	76	49
t3.7	2011	88	71	53

t3.8 *Source:* Chicago Police Department, 2007–2011 Murder Analysis Report

## ABSENTEE BLACK FATHERS IN CHICAGO

144

145 The presence of the black father is the most promising crime-fighting  
146 strategy in the black community. A plethora of studies have conceded  
147 that the probability of criminal activity increases when the father is absent  
148 from the home (see Harper and McLanahan 2004; Anderson et al. 1999;  
149 Beaty 1995; Biller and Baum 1971). According to Popenoe (1996), in his  
150 book, *Life Without Father*, he states, “Father absence is a major force lying  
151 behind many of the attention grabbing issues that dominate the news:  
152 crime and delinquency, premature sexuality, out-of-wedlock teen births,  
153 deteriorating educational achievement, depression, substance abuse, and  
154 alienation among teenagers, in addition to the growing number of women  
155 in poverty” (p. 3). The consensus among these scholars is that the father’s  
156 parental authority and guidance is important in the maturation process of  
157 children. Unfortunately, the black community has the highest proportion  
158 of children living in households without their biological father.<sup>1</sup>

159 David Blankenhorn (1996), in his book, *Fatherless America*, states that  
160 “the decline of fatherhood is the most harmful demographic trend of this  
161 generation” (p. 1). It is the impetus behind social problems such as crime.  
162 Horn and Sylvester (2002) derives at a similar conclusion, finding that  
163 children whose biological fathers are absent, tend to be two to three times  
164 more likely to participate in criminal behavior than those living in a struc-  
165 tured, two-parent household. In contrast, children with involved biologi-  
166 cal fathers are significantly more likely to “exhibit empathy and pro-social  
167 behavior, and avoid high-risk behaviors such as drug use, truancy, and  
168 criminal activity” (p. 15).

169 According to a 2015 *New York Times* article titled, *1.5 Million Missing*  
170 *Black Men*, it was estimated that 625,000 black men between the ages 25  
171 and 54 were missing from everyday life because they were either impris-  
172 oned or dead. The disappearance of fathers in the household is mainly due  
173 to the high incarceration rate of black men. The city of New York led the  
174 study with 120,000 missing black men, Chicago ranked second at 45,000,  
175 and Philadelphia rounded out the top three at 36,000.<sup>2</sup> One of the main  
176 premises of the article is that missing black men disrupt the family forma-  
177 tion and the molding process of individual children. The report indicates  
178 that for every 100 black women, there are only 83 black men.<sup>3</sup> This out-  
179 come has fractured the nucleus of the black family, and subsequently, more  
180 black women are left to raise these young black males alone.

181 Focusing on the city of Chicago, Table 4.4 shows that 68.5 % of black  
182 teens aged 15–19 in Chicago live in single-parent households headed by

t4.1 **Table 4.4** Type of household percentage of Chicago teenagers, 15–19 years old,  
t4.2 by race/ethnicity, 2007–2011

t4.3	<i>Type of household</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>
t4.4	In married-couple family household	22.3	64.5	60.3
t4.5	In male householder, no wife present, family household	7.6	6.1	11.2
t4.6	In female householder, no husband present, family household	68.5	21.4	27.0
t4.7	In non-family household	1.6	8	1.5
t4.8	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

t4.9 *Source:* US Census Bureau, 2007–2011 American Community Survey (ACS)

females compared to only 27 % for Hispanic and 21 % for whites. Assessing 183  
the cultural conditions in which some young black males are born and 184  
raised, the social environment of the city is a case study itself to illustrate 185  
the school-to-prison pipeline, inferior educational system, unequal job 186  
opportunities, and an uncontrollable gang problem, which are all ante- 187  
cedents to the black-on-black murder crisis. 188

The quality of public education in Chicago has long been under 189  
question and subject to intense scrutiny. The city has the third largest 190  
school district in the USA, serving nearly half a million students, 90 % 191  
of whom are students of color and 84 % are from low-income families 192  
(Lipman 2002, p. 380). In the past decade, Chicago has closed more 193  
than 80 underperforming and underutilized schools.<sup>4</sup> The Chicago 194  
Public School (CPS) system has indicated that the closures were a way 195  
of improving the quality of low-performing schools. In May 2013, the 196  
Chicago Board of Education approved the closure of 50 public schools. 197  
CPS explained that the closures were an effort to restructure and real- 198  
locate funding needed to improve current schools and open charter 199  
schools. One implication of the school closures is the worsening of the 200  
academic performance of black male students who, in general, already 201  
show remarkably higher dropout rates and lower graduation rates com- 202  
pared with their white counterparts. Black male high school students 203  
in CPS have lagged behind whites and Hispanics (see Table 4.5). Data 204  
gathered from CPS for 2007 to 2012 show that black males fell behind 205  
considerably in their pace to graduate high school in four years. In con- 206  
junction, the dropout rate among black male high school students was 207  
significantly higher than whites and Hispanics. Table 4.6 shows that 208  
more than half of black males in CPS have dropped out of high school 209  
from 2007 to 2012. 210

t5.1 **Table 4.5** Percentage of male freshman students' on-track rate in Chicago  
 t5.2 Public Schools (CPS), by race/ethnicity, 2007–2012

t5.3	<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2012</i>
t5.4	<b>Black</b>	43.6	47.2	52.8	58	61.4	63
t5.5	<b>White</b>	65.4	67.6	71.3	76.5	78.9	81
t5.6	<b>Hispanic</b>	52.6	52.5	57	62.5	69	69.9

t5.7 *Source:* Chicago Public Schools (CPS), Research Evaluation Accountability (REA) 2007–2012

t5.8 *Note:* On-track rate represents rating of first-time CPS freshman students. Per CPS measure, students are  
 t5.9 on-track if at the end of their freshman year, they earned at least five course credits and failed no more than  
 t5.10 one semester course in a core subject (English, Math, Social Science, or Science)

t6.1 **Table 4.6** Dropout percentage among male high school students in Chicago  
 t6.2 Public Schools (CPS), by race/ethnicity, 2007–2012

t6.3	<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2012</i>
t6.4	Black	55	53.8	54.5	54.1	51.3	50.9
t6.5	White	41.1	41.3	40.2	38.6	34.3	32.4
t6.6	Hispanic	47	47.9	46.9	43.8	39.7	35.5

t6.7 *Source:* Chicago Public Schools (CPS), Research Evaluation Accountability (REA) 2007–2012

t6.8 *Note:* Rates are based on 5-year cohort dropout rates. For example, 2007 rate tracks ninth grade students  
 t6.9 who started in CPS in 2002–2003 school year and dropped out of CPS by August 2006–2007 school year  
 t6.10 (CPS, REA 2008)

t211 In 2011, the city of Chicago had one of the highest black unemploy-  
 t212 ment rates in the nation at 19.1 %. Chicago ranked third among major  
 t213 metropolitan cities.<sup>5</sup> Due to the scarcity of available employment oppor-  
 t214 tunities for black males, this emerges as a contributing factor that influ-  
 t215 ences black-on-black murders. As William J. Wilson describes in his 1996  
 t216 book, *When Work Disappears*, the impact of joblessness is significant in the  
 t217 black community. The majority of uneducated black males are limited to  
 t218 low-skilled, manual work. When these job opportunities are not available,  
 t219 levels of poverty increase and the rate of crime goes up. According to the  
 t220 US Census Bureau's 2011 American Community Survey (ACS), Chicago  
 t221 also had the third highest rate of those living below half of the poverty line  
 t222 among major cities. Twenty-one percent of Chicagoans lived in poverty  
 t223 compared to 13.1 % for the state.

t224 The majority of black-on-black murders in Chicago are in neighborhoods  
 t225 on the South and West side of the city where street gangs fight over turf,  
 t226 sell drugs, and there are a large number of stolen and unregistered guns.

t7.1 **Table 4.7** Gang arrests in Chicago, 2007–2012

t7.2	<i>Year</i>	<i>Arrests made where offender was identified as a gang member</i>
t7.3		
t7.4	2007	41,293
t7.5	2008	37,433
t7.6	2009	36,958
t7.7	2010	35,588
t7.8	2011	33,090
t7.9	2012	40,831
t7.10	<b>Total</b>	<b>225,193</b>

t7.11 *Source:* Chicago Police Department, 2007–2012 Murder Analysis Report

A 2012 CPD gang audit found that there are more than 600 gang factions in the city of Chicago. As a result, the CPD makes an absorbent number of arrests each year of gang members. In 2012, over 40,000 identified gang members were arrested. According to Table 4.7, more than 225,000 were arrested from 2007 to 2012. Despite arrest and incarceration, new members surface and become a part of the numerous gangs. This continues the cycle of black-on-black violence.

In the next section, personal narratives are provided in the first person from three black male Chicagoans. The autoethnography method allows these participants to provide a self-narrative to describe the impact of having a strong, positive black father, and how influential their father was in shaping, molding, and helping to channel their attitudes and behaviors from adolescents to adulthood in the social environment of Chicago. The guiding questions provided to the three participants to formulate their narratives were: (1) Explain the influence of growing up with a father. (2) How did his presence affect your personal development? (3) Identify specific attributes you learned from your father. (4) Describe how your father taught you to deal with neighborhood violence and gang pressures. (5) How instrumental was your father in helping you to understand the importance of respecting and valuing the lives of other black males?

### CASE STUDY #1: POPPA KNOWS BEST 247

It was the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. that most notably stated, “The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education.” My father first uttered this quote during my adolescent years. During that

252 time, he continuously filled my mind and spirit with positive rhetoric. He  
253 was a third grade math teacher. In our home, he kept a chalkboard in the  
254 den. My father would use half of the board to teach my siblings and me,  
255 the educational lessons. On the other half, he would write motivational  
256 quotes and place the name of the author at the end. Sometimes he would  
257 write a phrase or personal quote and sign it with, "Poppa Knows Best."  
258 His rhetoric became the moral guide of my life.

259 I am fortunate to have grown up with a father. I do not take that for  
260 granted. My father played a vital role in my personal and career success.  
261 Today, I am a Bishop and community leader in the city of Chicago. My  
262 goal is to blaze a spiritual trail for young black males in my community. It  
263 is important to become and forever remain a presence in the community.  
264 Amazingly, as I reflect, it was my father who imparted another one of Dr.  
265 King's quote after I graduated from college that led to my decision to  
266 become a community leader. The day after graduation, I was lying in the  
267 bed sleeping in late. He walked into the room to wake me. We had a brief  
268 conversation about life after graduation and before exiting he said to me,  
269 "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for  
270 others?'" As much as I wanted to dismiss the quote as another motiva-  
271 tional method, the words penetrated. I had graduated from [Midwestern  
272 University] with a Bachelor of Science in Education degree. I wanted  
273 nothing more than to walk in my father's footsteps and become a teacher.  
274 But it was at that moment that I now believe my father was telling me to  
275 do more with my life.

276 When I think back to identify all the life lessons and specific attributes  
277 learned from my father, the more important attributes are ambition, cour-  
278 age, goal-setting, responsibility, and last but certainly not least, the ability  
279 to be observant. It was the ability to observe the environment around me,  
280 along with the direction from my father, which made me want to dedicate  
281 my life to helping others, particularly young black males in need of leader-  
282 ship and love. I, like many other black males who went on to prosper and  
283 avoid the systemic traps of the inner city, recognize through observation  
284 that the city of Chicago is in turmoil. From the major structural challenges  
285 of the CPS closings to the death toll of young black males by other black  
286 males, we know that solutions need to be proposed and implemented to  
287 bring righteousness back to the city. Personally, I am tired of turning on the  
288 evening news and the lead story features black-on-black gang violence. The  
289 schools fail these young black males and the alternative is to fend for them-  
290 selves "by any means necessary." In my one-on-one encounters with young

black males, I preach to them that violence is not the way to rise above the 291  
depths of our circumstances as black people, but with many not having 292  
a father and some with no mother in the home, the message is not rein- 293  
forced. Many times it eerily feels as if I am talking to a dead man walking. 294

All in all, I applaud my father for protecting me from the violence 295  
that happened in our neighborhood. I give him more credit for using 296  
the violence as teachable moments to understand that actions have con- 297  
sequences and it is important to value the lives of other black males. To 298  
avoid gang solicitation and violence, he employed two methods. First, he 299  
would always tell me to communicate with him about whether gangs were 300  
attempting to pressure me to join. For instance, when I was 12 years old, 301  
an older member of the Gangster Disciples tried to pressure my friend, 302  
Tony, and myself to join the gang. On the way home after school, mem- 303  
bers of the gang would attempt to intimidate us and threatened to beat 304  
us up if we did not join. As scared as I was, I told my father. After I told 305  
him, he picked me up from school for the rest of the school term. Tony 306  
refused to ride home with us because he did not want anyone to think he 307  
was afraid. Eventually, he succumbed to the pressure and joined the gang. 308  
Second, my father had tight rules for playing with friends and outside in 309  
the neighborhood. It was a rule that my father and mother had to meet 310  
each and every one of my friends. The other rule was that I had to be 311  
home by 7 p.m. every night. I was never allowed to stay over at a friend's 312  
home. However, he did allow friends to stay over at our home. 313

My father passed away several years ago. Before passing, he raised me 314  
from a boy to a man. There is an old adage, "It's not what you leave for 315  
your children, but it's what you leave in them." He reared me to love and 316  
respect people and appreciate the blessings of life. Poppa knew best. 317

#### CASE STUDY #2: WHEN HE TALKED, I LISTENED 318

I have the greatest father in the world. He has taught me so many life les- 319  
sons. As a child, wherever he went, I went. When he talked, I listened. He 320  
was and continues to be my hero, role model, and best friend. He truly is 321  
the best father any person can have. 322

What I have appreciated the most is that he has made a conscious deci- 323  
sion to allow me to choose the path that most exhibits my masculinity. My 324  
father was a two-sport athlete in college. He went to college on a football 325  
and track scholarship. I have never played football nor run track. In fact, 326  
I have never had a desire to play sports. During my childhood, my father 327

328 was an avid book reader. While I observed him doing athletic activities  
329 such as lifting weights in the garage, I took to reading because I observed  
330 him reading book after book. I developed a love for reading that grew to  
331 an overall passion to learn. When other black boys in the neighborhood  
332 were asking for a new bike, a football or basketball for Christmas, all I  
333 wanted was a new book. Reread that sentence again. Now, read it one  
334 more time. From reading it, you should derive that my interests as a young  
335 black male did not, and still does not, fit in the traditional mold of black  
336 masculinity. I was different. I knew it. And more importantly, my father  
337 did not try to change me.

338 My father's hobbies included working out, reading, visiting art muse-  
339 ums, and collecting music. He actually used each of these hobbies to teach  
340 me valuable lessons about life. In his many talks with me, he would say  
341 that working out teaches discipline, reading expands the mind, visiting the  
342 museum allows the mind to develop creativity and learn artistic expres-  
343 sion, and music is a universal language spoken by all. My father is deep like  
344 Furious Styles in the movie, *Boyz n the Hood*. He believes there is always a  
345 lesson to be learned.

346 Due to his approach for living life, combined with my own self-interests,  
347 it was easy back then for me to avoid the pitfalls of participating in deviant  
348 and violent behaviors or joining a gang. For example, in middle school  
349 and high school, I participated in the band. During the peak times of the  
350 day, 3–6 p.m., when most adolescents get into trouble or commit crimes,  
351 I was at band practice. Afterwards, either my father or mother would pick  
352 me up from school. The “after-school” gap was never really present. On  
353 days there was no band practice, I'd participate in another type of after-  
354 school program. After-school programs are powerful antidotes to provoke  
355 positive social involvement among youth and offset potential deviant and  
356 criminal behaviors. My father was a stickler for programs that fostered  
357 positivity for youth such as after-school programs, YMCA, band camp,  
358 summer camp, and so on. The many activities were consuming, but they  
359 helped to keep me on the right track.

360 The closest I have ever come to gang violence was around 14 years old.  
361 A childhood friend died from a stray bullet. When my father heard the  
362 news, it was our first talk about gangs, violence, and respecting black life.  
363 His message was for me to always respect black life. He wears his black  
364 skin with great pride and wants me to do the same. My father strongly  
365 believes that black pride helps to protect black life. His belief is that we  
366 are all in the same struggle and need to be a conscious group of people.

My father is the single most important person in my development as a human being. I would be remiss not to mention that my mother, as well, had an unforgettable hand in my upbringing, but my father guided me. He gave me the roadmap to success and led me down a path to explore and discover all of my talents. In 2010, I received my Ph.D. and became a college professor. His words guided me down this path. During my senior year in high school, he told me to write down three career goals. At the top of the list was "Become a high school teacher." My father reinforced the idea and said he could see me teaching at [major university in the city]. When I replied that my list said, "Become a high school teacher and not a college professor," his response was, "Why are you setting your goals so low? You can become a college professor." I then asked my father, "What is a college professor?" He advised me to do some research. My father knew exactly how to push my buttons. From that conversation, he knew I would research "what is a college professor?" and the criteria to become one. He is a master motivator. His tactics worked and challenged me to be my best. For him, I am forever grateful.

### CASE STUDY #3: WHIPPINGS SAVED MY LIFE 384

My father is a disciplinarian. Growing up, I received a ton of whippings. I received whippings in public, at school, but the majority at home. This form of physical punishment saved my life. I understand we now live in a society that believes such punishment is unjust and inhumane. However, without the many whippings I may have ended up in jail or in the grave. I was bad, very bad. I can confidently say now, whippings saved my life.

I love my father. He is a no-nonsense type of guy. My father spent 24 years in the Army. He fought in the Gulf war and retired as a Master Sergeant (MSG). After retiring, he worked a number of odd end jobs before eventually opening his own place of business. It was in this setting that I observed my father's attention to detail, work ethic, and discipline. Discipline is his core. He learned that in the military. At an early age he attempted to instill in me those same attributes, but I rebelled. Rebellion was part of my DNA. Because of that, we clashed.

I am 39 years old, married with two children, and he still believes he can discipline me. But I will say, if more fathers acted like him, I believe there would not be as many young black males on the streets of Chicago killing each other. Although I hated his approach, my father used discipline to keep me in line. Besides being a disciplinarian, he was also a great

404 communicator. He is old school—beat first, talk later. Each whipping  
405 came with a talk to address my behavior and reassurance of his love for me.

406 When I was about 7 years old, I began stealing from local convenience  
407 stores. I rotated between three stores. One day, the clerk behind the coun-  
408 ter approached me. I ran out of the store. Little did I know, she had  
409 already alerted the police. They arrived on the scene and arrested me for  
410 theft. I was released into the custody of my parents. My father was so upset  
411 that I did not receive a whipping that night. He talked to me for three  
412 hours about the importance of making good decisions. That talk went  
413 into one ear and out the other.

414 The next major incident came when I was 10 years old. A group of  
415 friends and I began stealing bikes. We would either break the parts down  
416 and sell them or ride the bikes around for a couple of days and ditch them.  
417 One of my friend's parents reported us to the police. We were cited for  
418 possession of stolen property and sent home. I received the whipping from  
419 hell after that incident. My father became even more of a disciplinarian.  
420 I had curfew at 6 p.m. and could not watch television after that time.  
421 Unfortunately, the more he attempted to ensure that I stay on the straight  
422 and narrow, I strayed even more.

423 Soon, many of my friends were joining gangs. Over time the pressure  
424 mounted for me to follow their lead. At the age of 14, I had made up my  
425 mind that I was going to join a gang. However, I did not know how to  
426 keep this a secret from my father. Before getting “jumped into” the gang,  
427 they asked me to break into a house in my neighborhood and steal as  
428 much stuff as possible. When I was told which house, I could not oblige  
429 their request. It was one of my parent's friends house. After I told them  
430 “No,” several members of the gang beat me up. They broke my jaw. I then  
431 had to go home and explain this to my parents. Needless to say, my father  
432 was not happy. He was quiet on the way to the emergency room. After  
433 I was released from the hospital, he talked, yelled, cursed, and grounded  
434 me (even more). No whipping was needed. The thing I remembered most  
435 about that day was that my father could not stop crying. Even after I went  
436 to my room, I could hear him crying while talking to my mother. I could  
437 hear the pain in his voice. I had disappointed him before; however, this  
438 time was different.

439 That day changed my life. I realized that my father was attempting to  
440 create an atmosphere of love and respect. The next day he explained to me  
441 that he too contemplated joining a gang as a youth but decided against  
442 it after one of his friends went into sudden cardiac arrest and died while

being “jumped into” the gang. After that incident, my father decided he would join the Army as a way out of the hood.

In our discussion, he was most disappointed because he understood that a lot of black males who do not have fathers join gangs. It pained him to think that possibly I thought he did not love me and that was the reason why I contemplated joining. It was not the reason. I was a follower. I was following the example of my friends when I should have been following the example of my father.

For the first quarter of my life, I was a trouble kid. I have now gone on to become a medical doctor. I owe much of my success to my father. He never gave up on me. Even after the gang incident, I continued to get into minor trouble. My father was steadfast in his discipline and dedication to make sure I stayed on the right path. When I graduated from medical school, he gave me a card that read at the end, “After the storm, there is a rainbow. I knew you would make me proud.”

#### CONCLUSION

The self-narratives from the three black male Chicagoans reinforce the premise that black fathers must be a fixture in the lives of their sons, to help them overcome the pervasive structural and cultural forces that lead many down the wrong path. The presence and influence of the black father plays an integral role in educating, fortifying morals and values, making them more personally responsible, culturally progressive, shaping their masculine identities, teaching them how to value the plight and triumph of other black males, and breaking the generational cycle of absentee fathers. Derived from the narratives, we extract the sentiments that most young black males need a normative family structure and support system to maximize their full potential.

In contrast, too often young black males grow up without fathers. Black mothers and family members by default become central to shaping the masculinity of young black males. This contributes to the dysfunctional cycle that continues to permeate in the black family. Some of these black males view the single-parent household as a place of survival, and consequently, they must be able to provide food, clothing, and shelter for their mother and siblings at all costs. Beyond that, in their search for masculine norms and a sense of family, many of them in the city of Chicago join gangs to establish external family bonds, and the deviant and criminal acts associated with it are a part of the gang culture. Subsequently, this

480 leads to the high volume of black-on-black violence and murders among  
481 black males in the city of Chicago.

482 The year 2014 marked the 40th anniversary of *Good Times*. The mythical  
483 Evans family headed by James Sr. exhibited the importance of a strong  
484 black masculine presence in the lives of young black males. The fictional  
485 character of James Sr. showed the world that the growth and development  
486 of a young black male is enhanced through present, active fathering. He  
487 was a television father figure for a generation of young black males who  
488 grew up without one, especially in the city of Chicago. Decades later,  
489 reruns of the show on television allow the world to see the important  
490 paternal role he played in the home while attempting to dismantle the  
491 negative stereotype of absentee black fathers. The question that black  
492 Americans deal with in the real world is, what has happened to the proto-  
493 type of James Evans Sr. in the black community? He is *missing*.

#### 494 NOTES

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498 p70-126.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/p70-126.pdf)
- 499 2. See Wolfers, J., Leonhardt, D., and K. Quealy. 2015. "1.5 million missing  
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501 interactive/2015/04/20/upshot/missing-black-men.html](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/04/20/upshot/missing-black-men.html) (April 20).
- 502 3. Ibid., 1.5 million missing black men.
- 503 4. See Zubrzycki, J. 2012. "Phaseout plan pains Chicago neighborhood."  
504 *Education Week*. Available at: [http://ew.edweek.org/nxtbooks/epe/ew\\_  
505 10172012/index.php?startid=12](http://ew.edweek.org/nxtbooks/epe/ew_10172012/index.php?startid=12) (October 17).
- 506 5. See the Illinois Department of Employment Security, Economic Information,  
507 and Analysis: <http://www.ides.illinois.gov/page.aspx?item=2509>; Also see,  
508 "Black metropolitan unemployment in 2011," by Algernon Austin, July 2,  
509 2012, *Economic Policy Institute*, Available at: [http://www.epi.org/files/  
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