

WHEN EBONY MAGAZINE DEVOTED ITS SPECIAL ISSUE IN AUGUST OF LAST YEAR TO THE CRISIS OF THE BLACK FAMILY, IT WAS BUT ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF THE MANNER IN WHICH THIS SUBJECT HAS COME TO DOMINATE DISCUSSION.

THE PROBLEMS ARE VERY REAL.

AS EBONY RIGHTLY SUGGESTS, IT MAY BE THAT IN THIS TURMOIL IN FAMILY STRUCTURES, BLACKS FACE THEIR GREATEST CRISIS SINCE SLAVERY.

THE ROOTS OF THE PROBLEM ARE MANY AND VARIED.

ONE PART OF THE PROBLEM IS BASED IN THE TROUBLED ECONOMY OF OUR NATION. AS OUR ECONOMY HAS UNDERGONE RAPID, MASSIVE CHANGES, SHIFTING FROM A MANUFACTURING ECONOMY TO ONE BASED ON SERVICE AND THE INFORMATION INDUSTRY, THE JOBS THAT ONCE PROVIDED ECONOMIC STABILITY AND SECURITY FOR BLACK FAMILIES HAVE VANISHED.

SO, OUR FAMILIES -- ESPECIALLY IN THE OLD MANUFACTURING CENTERS OF THE NATION -- HAVE LOST THEIR ECONOMIC UNDERPINNINGS.

AND THE TROUBLED ECONOMY HAS WORKED ITS DESTRUCTIVE WILL IN ANOTHER WAY.

WHILE MANY OF OUR YOUNG WOMEN ARE BEARING CHILDREN IN THAT TROUBLING PHENOMENON KNOWN AS BABIES HAVING BABIES, THEY SEE LITTLE ECONOMIC SENSE IN MARRYING THE FATHERS OF THOSE CHILDREN.

AFTER ALL, THESE UNEMPLOYED -- AND SOMETIMES UNEMPLOYABLE -- YOUNG MEN MAKE POOR MARRIAGE PROSPECTS.

WHEN THE NUMBERS OF THESE UNFORTUNATE YOUNG WOMEN ARE ADDED TO THE RANKS OF BLACK WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN WIDOWED OR DIVORCED AND THOSE WHOSE HUSBANDS ARE INCARCERATED, THERE IS THE POTENTIAL FOR THE FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLD, A MAJOR FACET OF WHAT SOME CALL A NEW CULTURE OF POVERTY.

I HASTEN TO SAY THAT THERE IS NOTHING INHERENTLY WRONG IN THE FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLD. ALL OF US KNOW OF STRONG BLACK WOMEN WHO, FOR WHATEVER REASONS, RAISED FAMILIES TO STABLE AND PRODUCTIVE MATURITY, AND WHO DID IT BY THEMSELVES.

THERE IS NO INDICTMENT OF THE FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLD.

THERE IS CONCERN BECAUSE SUCH HOUSEHOLDS ARE MOST APT TO FALL INTO POVERTY.

POVERTY IS THE CULPRIT, NOT THESE WOMEN.

I WANT TO EMPHASIZE THAT POINT IN THE STRONGEST POSSIBLE TERMS.

THAT DOES NOT MEAN THAT WE SHOULD NOT BE CONCERNED ABOUT SOME GRIM ASPECTS OF THIS PROBLEM.

THIS MATTER OF BABIES HAVING BABIES MUST TROUBLE US, AND IT MUST CHALLENGE ALL OF US TO ACTION.

#3

JUST FOR A MOMENT, LET'S SUSPEND DISCUSSION OF THE MORAL ISSUE.

I CERTAINLY DON'T MEAN THAT THERE IS NOT A MORAL ISSUE HERE.

BUT ASIDE FROM MORAL CONSIDERATIONS, THERE ARE PROFOUND REASONS TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT TEEN-AGE PREGNANCIES.

ONE REASON IS THE THREAT THAT IS POSED TO THE HEALTH OF YOUNG MOTHERS.

AND THEN THERE IS A THREAT TO THE HEALTH OF THE BABIES BORN TO THESE YOUNG MOTHERS.

THEN, THINK ABOUT THE GREATER LIKELIHOOD THAT THESE GIRLS AND THEIR CHILDREN WILL BE CONDEMNED TO POVERTY.

AND WHERE THERE IS POVERTY, THERE IS A WELFARE COST THAT MUST BE BORNE BY SOCIETY,

SO, EVEN IF WE WERE TO STRIP AWAY THE MORAL CONCERNS ABOUT THE USE OF SEXUALITY -- WHICH WE CANNOT DO -- WE STILL MUST CONFRONT THE ISSUE.

THAT IS BUT ONE ISSUE.

ANOTHER IS THE DREADFUL IMPACT OF THE CURSE OF DRUGS ON OUR COMMUNITIES. HEROIN AND CRACK ARE CONDEMNING OUR YOUNG WOMEN TO PROSTITUTION AND OUR YOUNG MEN TO PRISON OR TO DEATH.

WE HAVE TO FIGHT THIS EVIL.

SOMETIMES, IT MUST SEEM THAT WE HAVE NO STRENGTH, NO WEAPONS, NO RESOURCES FOR THIS WAR.

BUT WE DO HAVE WEAPONS.

ONE OF OUR WEAPONS IS OUR STRENGTH AS A PEOPLE.

WE MUST CALL AGAIN UPON THAT STRENGTH THAT SUSTAINED US THROUGH SLAVERY AND SECOND-CLASS CITIZENSHIP. IN THOSE DAYS, IN SOME WAYS HARDER THAN THE BATTLES WE FACE TODAY, WE FOUND A WAY TO HOLD ON AND TO KEEP ON GOING.

WE MUST FIND IT AGAIN.

I BELIEVE WE WILL FIND IT WHERE WE HAVE ALWAYS FOUND IT IN THE PAST.

WE WILL FIND STRENGTH IN OUR FAMILIES. OUR FAMILIES MUST AGAIN BECOME UNITS OF LOVE.

FAMILIES MUST LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

WE WILL FIND STRENGTH IN RENEWED LOVE OF OURSELVES AS A PEOPLE. WE MUST LOVE OURSELVES, OUR PEOPLE. IN THE WORDS OF THE REV. JESSE JACKSON, "WE MUST TURN TO EACH OTHER, NOT ON EACH OTHER."

AND WE WILL FIND OUR STRENGTH WHEN WE GO BACK TO THE OLD LANDMARK -- THE CHURCH.

IT WAS IN THE CHURCH THAT WE LEARNED TO SAY, "O LORD, THOU HAST BEEN OUR DWELLING PLACE IN ALL GENERATIONS."

WE MUST SAY THAT AGAIN. WE MUST SEEK GOD'S FAVOR AND HIS GRACE AND HIS BLESSING ON OUR FAMILIES.

THE CHURCH HAS BEEN OUR GUIDE IN DAYS GONE BY.
IT HAS BEEN OUR SHELTER AGAINST STORM.
IT HAS BEEN THE RESTING PLACE FOR WEARY BODIES
AND TIRED SOULS.

WE MUST GET BACK TO THAT INSTITUTION, WHICH HAS
DONE SO MUCH FOR US IN THE PAST.

WE MUST BEGIN AGAIN TO TAKE -- NOT SEND -- OUR CHILDREN
TO SUNDAY SCHOOL AND CHURCH.

YES, THERE IS A CRISIS IN THE BLACK FAMILY. YES,
OUR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS ARE SERIOUS.

BUT OUR FOREPARENTS FACED "HARD TRIALS, GREAT TRIBULATION"
IN THEIR DAY.

BY GOD'S GRACE, AND THROUGH THEIR FAITH IN HIM, THEY
PREVAILED.

SO CAN WE.

LONG AGO, WORDS OF WISDOM DESCRIBED THE TASK
OF WOMEN --AND THE GLORY OF THEIR LIVES.

"WHO CAN FIND A VIRTUOUS WOMAN?" ASKED THE WRITER
OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS.

"THE HEART OF HER HUSBAND DOTHS SAFELY TRUST IN
HER, SO THAT HE SHALL HAVE NO NEED OF SPOIL.

"SHE WILL DO HIM GOOD AND NOT EVIL ALL THE DAYS
OF HER LIFE.

"SHE SEEKETH WOOL AND FLAX, AND WORKETH WILLINGLY
WITH HER HANDS.

"SHE IS LIKE THE MERCHANTS' SHIPS: SHE BRINGETH
HER FOOD FROM AFAR.

"SHE RISETH ALSO WHILE IT IS YET NIGHT, AND GIVETH
MEAT TO HER HOUSEHOLD, AND A PORTION TO HER MAIDENS.

"SHE CONSIDERETH A FIELD, AND BUYETH IT: WITH
THE FRUIT OF HER HANDS SHE PLANTETH A VINEYARD.

"SHE GIRDETH HER LOINS WITH STRENGTH, AND
STRENGTHENETH HER ARMS.

"SHE PERCEIVETH THAT HER MERCHANDISE IS GOOD: HER
CANDLE GOETH NOT OUT BY NIGHT.

"SHE LAYETH HER HAND TO THE SPINDLE, AND HER HANDS
HOLD THE DISTAFF.

"SHE STRETCHETH OUT HER HAND TO THE POOR: YEA, SHE
REACHETH FORTH HER HANDS TO THE NEEDY.

"SHE IS NOT AFRAID OF THE SNOW FOR HER HOUSEHOLD:
FOR ALL HER HOUSEHOLD ARE CLOTHED WITH SCARLET.

"SHE MAKETH HERSELF COVERINGS OF TAPESTRY: HER
CLOTHING IS SILK AND PURPLE.

"HER HUSBAND IS KNOWN IN THE GATES, WHEN HE SITTETH AMONG THE ELDERS OF THE LAND.

"SHE MAKETH FINE LINEN, AND SELLETH IT: AND DELIVERETH GIRDLES UNTO THE MERCHANT.

"STRENGTH AND HONOR ARE HER CLOTHING: AND SHE SHALL REJOICE IN TIME TO COME.

"SHE OPENETH HER MOUTH WITH WISDOM: AND IN HER TONGUE IS THE LAW OF KINDNESS.

"SHE LOOKETH WELL TO THE WAYS OF HER HOUSEHOLD, AND EATETH NOT THE BREAD OF IDLENESS.

"HER CHILDREN ARISE UP, AND CALL HER BLESSED: HER HUSBAND ALSO, AND HE PRAISETH HER.

"MANY DAUGHTERS HAVE DONE VIRTUOUSLY, BUT THOU EXCELLEST THEM ALL. . . ."

TODAY, OF COURSE, THE BLACK WOMAN HAS MANY ROLES, OTHER THAN THAT OF HOMEMAKER. SHE IS TO BE FOUND IN COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY, IN THE WORKPLACES PREVIOUSLY FREQUENTED ONLY BY MEN, IN ENTERTAINMENT, RELIGIOUS LIFE, IN GOVERNMENT SERVICE AND IN THE MILITARY.

YET, IT REMAINS OUR SPECIAL PROVINCE TO TEACH AND TO GUIDE, TO CONSOLE THE BROKEN SPIRIT, TO KEEP THE DREAM ALIVE FOR THE GENERATIONS COMING AFTER US, BORN AND UNBORN.

THIS, STILL, WE MUST DO --EVEN AS WE DO ALL THE OTHER THINGS THAT ARE REQUIRED AND DEMANDED. THERE IS NO ONE ELSE.

BUT THIS IS NOT NEW. WE HAVE BEEN MEETING THIS CHALLENGE FOR A LONG TIME.

THANK YOU FOR THE KIND AND GRACIOUS INTRODUCTION.
IT IS A PLEASURE TO BE WITH YOU TODAY, TO HONOR MOTHERHOOD.
MOTHERS ARE THE VITAL LINK IN THE FAMILY. THEIR ROLE IS
ALL-IMPORTANT. YOUR PRESENCE HERE TODAY TESTIFIES TO YOUR
BELIEF IN THAT FACT.

THE POET, EDGAR ALLAN POE, REMINDED US --
THE ANGELS, WHISPERING ONE TO ANOTHER,
FIND AMONG THEIR WORDS OF LOVE
NONE SO DEVOTIONAL AS "MOTHER."
AND A JEWISH PROVERB TELLS US --

"GOD COULD NOT BE EVERYWHERE, AND THEREFORE HE MADE
MOTHERS."

SO, IN THIS CRISIS-RIDDEN TIME FOR BLACK AMERICANS, WE
MUST TURN AGAIN TO THE MOTHERS OF THE RACE FOR GUIDANCE AND
FOR COMFORT.

-- M O R E --