

ADMINISTRATION FOR  
CHILDREN & FAMILIES

## AAHMI MISSION

The mission of the African American Healthy Marriage Initiative (AAHMI) is to promote and strengthen the institution of healthy marriage in the African American community.

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Visit the AAHMI Website at: <http://www.aahmi.net>

Please send comments or questions to Darlene.Tart@acf.hhs.gov



# AAHMI NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 1

JANUARY — FEBRUARY 2010

## Black Marriage Day 2010: CELEBRATE THE JOY!

The eighth annual **Black Marriage Day** will be celebrated all across the nation on March 28, 2010. It is anticipated that over 300 cities will organize activities to acknowledge and celebrate healthy marriage in the African American community.

### 10 Ways to Celebrate Black Marriage Day in Your Community!

Here are examples of activities from the "Black Marriage Day" website to celebrate in your community<sup>1</sup>:

**Organize a Film/TV Festival.** Get together in your community and host a movie and/or other media event that shows married African American couples as positive role models (*Why Did I Get Married*, *The Preacher's Wife*, *This Christmas*, *House of Payne*, *Everybody Hates Chris*, *Rock*, *The Parent Hood*, *My Wife and Kids*, *Run's House*, *The Cosby Show*, *Bernie Mac Show*, etc).

**Launch a Marriage Hall of Fame.** This is a great mechanism to honor couples who have been married for "milestone" years! Arrange for a prominent place (church, schools, library, etc) to display their pictures, as well as pictures of their families.

**Organize a "Husband/Wife or Marriage of the Year" essay contest.** Have family and friends write about their favorite married couple or married couples write about why their marriage is exceptional. Prizes could include a gift certificate for dinner or for a night of childcare services.

**Organize a "Tom Thumb" wedding for children in the community.** This is a great opportunity to talk about healthy marriage to children. In addition to the wedding, have the children write an essay on what marriage looks like to them. Children could also nominate their parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles for the "Marriage Hall of Fame."

**Ask religious leaders to talk about "Black Marriage Day" in their sermons.** Invite them to host an activity (or two) to commemorate married couples in their congregation. Several churches will be hosting renewal ceremonies for any married couple wishing to participate, regardless of the number of years that they have been married.

**Have Spouses Create a Love Song CD.** This is great for couples of any age! The CD could be a compilation of love songs or one spouse speaking to the other.

**Organize a "Marriage Strengthening" Seminar or Workshop in your church, neighborhood or local civic organization.** You or another trained professional can offer to speak to a group about healthy relationships and healthy marriage.

**Hold a "Ten Best Marriage Dates" contest** in your church or community organization. Offer a prize to the most creative or affordable responses.

**Teach by example.** Celebrate your own marriage and vow to strengthen it—take a course that's being offered in your area. Tell your other married friends and encourage them to do the same.

**Get the media involved!** Encourage the local media, movie theaters, and theater companies to celebrate with appropriate shows, movies and productions. Send public service announcements about *Black Marriage Day* to local radio stations. Prepare a press release for the community affairs director of the local TV and cable stations in your community- get your information in the news. Wedded Bliss Foundation suggests, "Don't take no for an answer. Be ready and willing with your local statistics to make the case for marriage. Our goal is to reduce out of wedlock births, reduce divorce and strengthen marriage."<sup>2</sup>

*Black Marriage Day* resources can be downloaded at <http://www.blackmarriageday.com>

<sup>1</sup>Black Marriage Day found at [http://www.blackmarriageday.com/Black\\_Marriage\\_Day/Welcome.html](http://www.blackmarriageday.com/Black_Marriage_Day/Welcome.html)

<sup>2</sup>Wedded Bliss Foundation found at: [http://www.weddedblissinc.com/Wedded\\_Bliss\\_Foundation/Black\\_Marriage\\_Day.html](http://www.weddedblissinc.com/Wedded_Bliss_Foundation/Black_Marriage_Day.html)

*“Sometimes, when we’re lying together, I look at her and I feel dizzy with the realization that here is another distinct person from me, who has memories, origins, thoughts, feelings that are different from my own. That tension between familiarity and mystery meshes something strong between us. Even if one builds a life together based on trust, attentiveness and mutual support, I think that it’s important that a partner continues to surprise.”*

**President  
Barack Obama**

Source: Ian Kerner, Ph.D.

“5 Lessons We Can Learn from the Obamas.” MSNBC.msn.com. 3/5/2009.

## **Focus on Fathers: The Greatest Gift a Father Can Give His Children** By Karen Elliott, Ph.D., CFLE

What makes a good father?? Most people probably answer the greatest gift a father can give his children is the gift of time. But a researcher at the University of Nebraska after surveying 700 fathers who felt really good about fatherhood learned differently. The fathers said that the greatest gift a father can give his children is to love their mother.

Beginning in the early 1970’s in American society and continuing today, there is a great deal of interest in fatherhood and encouraging fathers to be more involved in their children’s lives. As reported in the last edition of the AAHMI newsletter, mothers are not happy with the level of participation of fathers in the home and in parenting responsibilities. Also reported was the predictor of mom’s satisfaction with dad is closeness to children and work-family balance. It is obvious to most families that mothers have difficulty balancing work and family. Fathers, too, find it challenging to earn a decent living while attending to family needs. Although fathers are encouraged to be good fathers, the fact remains that mothers still spend more time with children and have more responsibility for their day-to-day care. This arrangement is changing slowly with mothers continuing to bear the major responsibility of childrearing. Thus, it becomes extremely important for fathers to love and respect mothers for what they do. One of the important ways Dad can demonstrate his love for Mom is by investing time with the children: time caring for their basic needs and fun time simply happily being with them.

“But Dad can’t afford to be so involved with his work and in caring for the children’s needs that he forgets Mom’s emotional needs and his own need for genuine connection with her. The marital relationship is the glue that holds the two-parent family together. Its importance cannot be stressed too much, and the relationship needs to be nurtured ever so carefully. ....Fathers in strong families deeply care for their wives, and they let them know this on a regular basis in a wide variety of ways.”

John DeFrain, Extension Specialist with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension, and his colleagues suggest the following ways to show your wife you care:

- Turn off the television while eating meals.
- Tell your wife frequently that you love her (and check with her to see what *frequently* means).
- Open the door for her.
- Hold hands once in a while.
- Hold her tight, especially when you know things aren’t going well.
- Verbally empathize with her feelings.
- Do something for her that’s out of the ordinary. Surprise her.
- Value her opinion when decisions need to be made.
- Help her when she needs help, without being asked.
- Show your kids how much you love their mom.

Information for this article is taken largely from “*Creating a Strong Family, Appreciation and Affection: The Greatest Gift a Father Can Give His Children, G1833*, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension publication.

### **REGISTRATION STILL OPEN!**

**11th Annual National Fatherhood and Families  
Conference**

**February 23-26, 2010  
Westin LAX Hotel  
Los Angeles, CA**

Download full conference brochure and registration at:  
<http://www.azffc.org/files/11thprogram.pdf>

### **SAVE THE DATE!**

**12th Annual International Fatherhood  
Conference**

**June 16-18, 2010  
Sheraton Metairie  
New Orleans, LA**

**“Parents and Communities Working Together to Endure  
Academic Success in Children”**

Visit the National Partnership for Community Leadership  
(NPCL) website at: <http://www.npclstrongfamilies.com>

## Spotlight on Region IV: Georgia and Alabama Marriage Proclamations By Gwendolyn Johnson

The governors of Georgia and Alabama “get it” - both have issued proclamations on marriage! On January 20, 2010, Sonny Perdue, Governor of the State of Georgia proclaimed February 7-14, 2010 as *Marriage Week* with February 14, 2010 as *World Marriage Day* in Georgia. On January 27, 2010, Bob Riley, Governor of the State of Alabama proclaimed February 2010 as *Healthy Marriage Month* in Alabama.

In his proclamation, Governor Perdue stated, **“WHEREAS:** *God ordained the sanctity of marriage as a holy and sacred union between two people who promise to love, honor and respect each other and to give themselves faithfully to each other for as long as they both shall live; and WHEREAS:* *Marriage is one of the most vital institutions in our society and can be the bedrock for stable and loving families, so essential to American life. Based on mutual commitment, marriage partners strive to strengthen and maintain their unity; and WHEREAS:* *The relationship between a husband and a wife is like no other, creating a united entity of what was once two separate lives, with dedication to each other fostering a bond strong enough to survive even the most critical moments; and WHEREAS:* *Marriage promotes the core values of work, responsibility, commitment, sobriety and relationships based upon mutual respect that Americans hold dear. The stability such a bond provides benefits spouses, as well as children, by leading them to live longer, healthier, and more satisfying lives.”*

Governor Riley stated, **“WHEREAS:** *Marriage is not just another lifestyle choice but the foundation of healthy families and a healthy future for America; and WHEREAS:* *Marriage, in every known human society, creates new families, binds men and women together in a network of affection, mutual aid, and mutual obligation, commits parents to their children, and connects children to a wider network of welcoming kin. Marriage is the outward, visible sign of a man and woman’s desire to create a lasting love, and forge a tie so strong that a child’s heart can rely upon it; and WHEREAS:* *Mounting scientific evidence confirms that children raised outside of marriage are more likely to commit crime, to fail at school and on the job, to abuse drugs, to lapse into physical and mental illness, to become teen parents, to suffer material deprivation, and perhaps saddest of all, to become the victims of child abuse; and WHEREAS:* *marriage as an institution deserves our special respect and concern because healthy marriages create a way for children to enjoy the full emotional, moral and financial protection of both parents; and WHEREAS:* *We recognize the special place of marriage in American society and in American hearts; and WHEREAS:* *We honor marriage as the extraordinary vow that ordinary people make and guide their lives every day; and WHEREAS:* *We acknowledge the irreplaceable importance of lasting, healthy marriages to the well-being of children and therefore, to the future of our nation; and WHEREAS:* *We applaud and encourage efforts by our state and local governments, our faith communities and by leaders of civil society to strengthen marriage.”*

For additional information about marriage initiatives in these states, visit <http://www.marriageweekga.com> and <http://www.alabamamarriage.org>.

## Spotlight on Health: Your Family Health History- *What you don’t know can hurt you!* By Barbara Andrews

February is Black History Month, so it’s a good time for African Americans to focus on their *family health history*. Learning more about your ancestors’ health can be a powerful tool to safeguard your own health, your family’s health and the health and well-being of your descendants. When you know more about your health history, you can supply your health care practitioner with valuable information.

Knowing about the illnesses and conditions that affected your parents, grandparents and other blood relatives can help you and your doctor be more alert to possible health challenges and better tailor your health care. To help people record and organize their family health history, the U.S. Surgeon General released a revised Internet-based tool, **“My Family Health Portrait,”** available at <https://familyhistory.hhs.gov>. The improved tool, first released in January 2009, is convenient to access and complete. The information collected using the tool is private. **“My Family Health Portrait”** is maintained by the consumer and can easily be shared at the consumer’s discretion with relatives and health practitioners.

Remember, in the case of your health, *what you don’t know can hurt you!* Knowledge is power, so make it **your** goal to paint a complete portrait of your family’s health history.

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## Youth Insights!

### Media Use Among Youth on the Rise By Bernadette Norton

A recent study by The Kaiser Family Foundation found that the average young American spends a significant amount of his or her free time – except for school time – using a smart phone, computer, television or other electronic device. The longest amount of time, more than 7 ½ hours daily, is spent by children ages 8 to 18 with electronic devices, compared with less than 6 ½ hours five years ago, the last time the study was conducted. In addition to the time spent using electronic devices, they are texting on average 1 ½ hours and talking on cell phones for ½ hour. Many youth are multitasking – for instance, listening to music while surfing the Internet, compressing almost 11 hours of media content into that 7 ½ hours. The prevalent use of electronic devices has become an intricate thread in the social network and culture of most teens. Many teens today feel that their lives would be incomplete without their smart phones, video devices, and computers.

The study points to an alarming correlation between heavy media use to behavior problems and lower grades. Other studies have established a link between screen time and obesity, but surprisingly though, heavy media users and light media users spend a similar amount of time exercising. Many young people in the study got good grades, but the more time spent consuming media the lower the grade average. Those who consumed at least 16 hours a day (47 %) had mostly C's or lower compared to teens who consumed three hours or less a day (23%). The heaviest media users report that they were bored or sad, not happy at school, not getting along with their parents and that they got into trouble.

It is not clear from the study whether the problems are caused by media use or whether troubled young people turn to heavy media use. Dr. Michael Rich, a pediatrician at Children's Hospital Boston who directs the Center on Media and Child Health, said that with the chronic media use, it was time for adults to accept the new reality of children's environment - "like the air they breathe, the water they drink and the food they eat."

The full article by Tamar Lewin appeared in the **New York Times** on January 20, 2010.

### Teenage Pregnancy Rate Up After 10-Year Decline

A new report by the Guttmacher Institute indicated from 2005 to 2006 the rate of teenage pregnancies increased by 3%, births increased by 4% abortions increased by 1%. Overall, the finding was that the rate was 71.5 pregnancies per 1,000 girls aged 15-19. Although the abortion rate increased, it had shown decline by about 33% from 1986 to 2006. The results of the report come after 10 years of declining pregnancies among teenagers.

While the increase in teen pregnancies and births to teenage mothers was observed across all racial and ethnic groups, the pregnancy rate among Black teenagers fell by 45% (from 223.8 per 1,000 to 122.7) between 1990 and 2005 before increasing to 126.3 per 1,000. New York, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Iowa and Minnesota have the highest pregnancy rates among Black teenagers; the rate for this same group was lowest in Hawaii, followed by Idaho, Maine, Utah and Alaska. The states that had the overall highest pregnancy rates were New Mexico

## All Around ACF

### AAHMI Announces 5th Annual Research to Practice Conference

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followed by Nevada, Arizona, Texas, and Mississippi. Texas had the highest rate of births to teens—62 per 1,000 pregnancies and New York had the highest rate of abortions among teens—41 per 1,000. New Hampshire has the lowest pregnancy rate—33 pregnancies per 1,000 followed by Vermont, Maine, Minnesota, and North Dakota.

While Planned Parenthood and the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecologists agreed that comprehensive sex education was more likely to be more effective than abstinence only programs, the report suggested that the increase may be due to “shifts in racial and ethnic composition of the population, increased poverty, the growth of abstinence-only sex education programs at the expense of comprehensive programs, and changes in public perception and attitudes toward both teenage and unintended pregnancy.”

Data from the report was obtained from the National Center for Health Statistics of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Guttmacher Institute, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Population Estimates Program of the U.S. Bureau of the Census.

The full report can be viewed at <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/USTPtrends.pdf>.