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BEST BUY IN THE WEST

The Role Of The Black Mother In Today's Society

By Drs. Julia Hare and Nathan Hare

Black mothers occupy a crucial place in American society today, the ones who have held their families together against all odds and trying times ever since black families were separated and splintered in the storms of the Middle Passage and the horrors of chattel slavery.

Thus to some people black women represent a "matriarchy" but to others they remain "the backbone of the black family," willing to go through thick and thin in the mothering of their children, to see that their children are clothed and fed as well as they can.

In our work with families and male/female relationships at the Black Think Tank we have found that the black woman is proud of her strength but feels that that very strength will someday be the death of her relationship with her man.

The black male also secretly looks up to the black woman but resents it though many will openly regard her as the primary force in holding the family together, a steady leaning post in a wobbly world, and there are men who will call her their rock.

For her part the black woman cherishes her strength but longs for a strong black man to stand beside her, yet if necessary she will go it alone. For this she is labeled a "single mother" or a "single head of household" and accused of "emasculatation."

The black mother is keenly aware of her ambivalent image

in the world today. For centuries she has cringed when she was called a Negress or a wench and she winces now when she is called a "ho" or a bitch, sometimes by her very own who profess to love her.

However to anthropologists the black mother is the mother of the universe from whom all others sprang, the first human being to walk this vast imponderable earth. It was these black givers of life who gave birth to the human race, and their legacy continues today, from the Queen Mothers of Africa to the Single Mothers of today's inner city 'hoods.'

The role of the black mother is all the more crucial today because of black family breakdown and the emergence of so many fatherless children. The mother is compelled to step up and become "a mother and a father" to her boy, but we have known of this long before now.

Langston Hughes, the poet speaks of this most compellingly in "Mother to Son," where the mother is telling her son that life for her "ain't been no crystal stair." She tells him to get up from there and stiffen his back, "don't you set down on the steps cause it's gettin' kind a hard, don' you stop now, cause I'll still aclimbin' and life for me aint been no crystal stair."

The black mother today is challenged once more to recapture the capacity of the old black mother to participate in the development of manhood and masculinity in her sons, not fearing to make him a "sissy" but to make him a man. Just as she does to her

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Sun-Reporter Mother's Day Special Edition

Mother's Day Reflections

By Gail Berkley

Unconditional love, inspiration, a source of guidance and support. These are just some of the qualities that go into making a wonderful mother. As the nation pauses Sunday May 8 to celebrate Mother's Day, the Sun-Reporter asked some Bay Area women to reflect on the important role that mothers play in their children's lives.

Malia and Loretta Cohen

San Francisco Supervisor Malia Cohen is the eldest of five children of Loretta and Evered Cohen. Speaking of her mother Supervisor Cohen said, "She's been that steady rock, during good and bad times."

A native San Franciscan, Loretta Cohen is a social worker currently employed by the Bayview Hunters Point Foundation providing mental health services to students in the San Francisco Unified School District. She and her husband have been married for 34 years. The couple met while both were students at San Jose State University.



San Francisco Supervisor Malia Cohen and her mother Loretta Cohen

"She was my first teacher" said Supervisor Cohen. She said her mother stressed the importance of education and has always been a "sounding board for ideas, dreams and hopes." She added that her mother instilled in her the creed of "giving of yourself." "She is thoughtful, kind, generous and absolutely selfless." Supervisor Cohen said her mother modeled selflessness when after giving birth to four children, due to unforeseen circumstances; she

welcomed her niece Catherine into her home and raised her along with Malia and her sisters Jennifer, Erica and Marlana. Supervisor Cohen said Catherine's addition to the family was "an unexpected blessing." The family has since grown to include one grandchild, an 18-month-old girl.

Burnell Gillis

Longtime Bayview resident Burnell Gillis, 84, is the matri-

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Mrs. Burnell Gillis, pictured bottom row in the center, is a 50-year resident of Bayview Hunters Point. She is shown with granddaughter Danielle Anderson, daughter Roslyn Gillis, grandson Charles Gillis, daughter Rhonda Gillis, granddaughter Brittany Davis, great granddaughter Adina Shepard, granddaughter Martina Gillis-Massey, granddaughter Briana Anderson, great granddaughter Mia Gillis, Mrs. Gillis, great granddaughter Makayla Gillis and great granddaughter Sheena Michael

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daughter she must give to her son the chores and tasks and standards to maintain so that he can learn to respect himself and stick to unpleasant tasks. She must teach him to “keep hope alive” in good and bad times, to make his dreams come true.

In his inspiring autobiography, *Dreams of My Father*, President Obama tells of what his mother did to make him the man he is today. Though she was a white woman, she would have him listen to the music of such as Mahalia Jackson and recordings of the speeches of Martin Luther King to try to get him to see that black is beautiful, so much so that at one point he thought all black people were beautiful. She would make him get up at four o’clock in

the morning and study and practice speaking and recite to her before she went to work at the break of day. When I would complain,” Barack recalls, “she would say ‘this isn’t any fun to me either, buddy.’”

When he would complain of never seeing his father his mother would take up for his father. This is in contrast to too many mothers who will daily down the father of their children and crush a part of the child’s ego that only the father can represent. A boy, and in her own way a girl, who cannot respect their father cannot respect authority figures such as teachers, preachers and parents and in time will not be able to respect themselves. They will be inclined to turn away from their teachers, to turn away from their parents, to turn away from their communities and society as a whole.

Thus it is in large part due



Drs. Nathan Hare and Julia Hare

to our mothers that we will grow up to become what we will, but like former USA Today columnist Kristine Clark Taylor observes in her eloquent new book, *Giver of Life. Black Mothers: Songs of Praise and Celebration*, “mothering never really

stops. It lasts forever, even if we do not.”

“Black mothers leave a legacy,” Clark-Taylor concludes, and it is one “of strength and sustenance for their children. It is part of who we are, and who our foremothers were. If we listen

very closely, we can still hear their words of wisdom, and in listening, comes learning. We can learn to be good mothers. We can learn to nurture our newborn or yet-unborn babies. And because we want to be as strong for our children as our mothers were for us, we can learn, over time, to sway gracefully with the universal motions of motherhood. “

It is at that point that the mothers of the universe, black mothers, will move once more to set the values and the tone for us all and thereby give birth to a new and better world.

Drs. Julia and Nathan Hare are founders of The Black Think Tank. Dr. Nathan Hare also holds two Ph.D.’s (in psychology and sociology). Dr. Julia Hare, a social psychologist, is one of the country’s most sought after motivational speakers.

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Editor/Publisher

Happy Mother’s Day From Attorney General Kamala Harris



California Attorney General Kamala Harris, her later mother Dr. Shyamala Harris and sister Attorney Maya Harris

Mymom was the toughest, smartest and most loving person I have ever known. She came to Berkeley in the late 1960s as an international graduate student with a passion for science. And, she had cut a deal

with her parents. When her studies were complete, she was supposed to return home to India where the plan was for her to settle down into a long arranged marriage. But then she met my father, a brilliant – and handsome – young economics student. The rest, they say, is history.

But like most important history, it turned on a courageous choice. Going against traditions in her family dating back to 500 BC, my mother chose to pursue a marriage based on love, which is one of the greatest expressions of optimism that any one of us makes. That choice made me.

It made my sister Maya. And, for me, it has always summarized what it means to be Californian. Grabbing hold of your destiny, looking relentlessly forward, and having the courage to embrace change each and every day of your life.