Media Discourse of Black Fathers in Contemporary U.S. Society: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

With the recent election of the United States’ first Black president, race has come to the forefront of the political conversation. A major part of the conversation has been the role of Black fathers in contemporary society. The purpose of this research was to explore the current discourse of Black fathers in the media. This case study, using content from both Time Magazine and Jet Magazine, seeks to understand to what extent theoretical models of ideology and hegemony effect how Black fathers are represented. With current lines of research showing that a new, less negative view of Black fathers, research into the subject is warranted. This case study uses the 2007/08 presidential race as a time frame to study this subject.

Introduction

President Barack Obama’s historic campaign and subsequent election as the first Black President of the United States, in 2008, put race at the forefront of the political conversation. Included in the conversation was a call to Black men to step up to their responsibilities as fathers. This challenge came from a man who lives the normative father role with a wife, two kids, and a family dog. While Barack Obama may be living the ideal American family life, the specter of Black fatherhood looms behind him. The national discourse has contrasted his picture perfect family against the decades old stereotype of Black men as inadequate fathers. This study compares how media has portrayed President Obama as a father, with other Black fathers in mass media during the recent presidential campaign. The study involves both a mainstream White news source and a niche market Black news source. The critical analyses of these representations give us a picture of not only current views and representations of Black fathers, but also of the dialectical relationship between mass media and society.

For Black fathers, parenting is often an insurmountable challenge; a challenge that has arisen in part from the roles Black fathers are asked to fill within the United States. The social situation that Black men experience is strikingly different from the situation that created the middle class White ideal father role. Yet, society holds Black men to this concept of the “ideal” or normative father. Ironically, the ideal father role is rarely achievable even for a majority of White American men, let alone Black men who face racial and class discrimination. This construction has contributed to the prevalence of single parent families within the Black community. In fact, in recent years the dialog surrounding the prevalence of these single parent families has shifted its focus from mothers to the role of the non-resident father.

Current discourse surrounding the role of the non-resident Black father can be traced back to the Moynihan report of 1965 (Edin et al. 2009). This government report places blame for the depressed situation of Black families on the pathological structure of the Black family, albeit stemming from former racial discrimination and slavery. This places all responsibility for the health of the Black community and family structure on Black families alone. This personal responsibility approach to social the reconstruction of the Black family has persisted, even though many of the findings of the report have long since been refuted (Edin et al. 2009). Why these ideas persist even with new research showing the ineffectiveness of them is at the core of this case study. What does the current discourse say about Black fathers and how does this compare to research? To answer these questions content from two print magazines, Jet Magazine and Time Magazine, was analyzed with theoretical models of hegemony and ideology.
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Literature Review

Current discourse on the Black father may be traced back to the Moynihan Report (Edin, Tach, and Mincy 2009). Originally intended as an internal memorandum to support President Johnson’s War on Poverty, the report set forth an argument that a large proportion of Black families suffered from instability and breakdown, causing the cycle of joblessness and poverty (Moynihan 1965). In particular, the absence of fathers in Black families was considered as one of the symptoms of the pathological structure of Black families. While it regarded historical contexts of slavery and discrimination as significant, it put the blame of the Black families’ problem on the social and psychological conditions of Black families themselves. Despite the disagreement expressed in Blaming the Victim (1970) by Ryan Williams, and although many of the findings of the report have since been refuted the report continues to generate conversations on the past and the future of Black families (Wright 1995; Gewertz 2007; Edin et al. 2009).

One of the assumptions behind the past discourse on the problem of Black families is, however, the normative or ideological view of fatherhood derived from the idealized tradition of the “nuclear family” in the U.S. Particularly since the 1950s, the nuclear family has been promoted on TV, as if it was achievable to anyone. Leave it to Beaver was, for example, one of the most popular programs in the 1950s, which, according to Coontz, helped to set the nuclear family as an American ideal. Focusing on a white family living in the suburban middle class community, this program successfully portrayed the ideal family structure; two kids, a working father, and a stay at home mother. Leave it to Beaver along with other 1950s family sitcoms provided a model which American families could compare themselves to (Coontz 1997:38).

The “nuclear family” is, however, a historical and social construction rather than an empirical reality for all. In fact, some argue that the nuclear family structure was a product of the industrial revolution (Gavanas, 2004:7; Coontz 1997). Before the advent of industry in the United States, both parents were involved in providing income for the family through farming and other means, and a network of family, friends, and community members helped with childcare (Coontz 1988:22). As the new middle class emerged during this time period, when men left to work in industry, domestic duties were left to the women including housekeeping and childcare. Without the need to be in the paid labor market, women were left with more time at home, communal networks were no longer needed, and childrearing became solely the women’s duty.

While the nuclear family has become an important practice of the middle class in the industrializing U.S. society, it was not for others. In The Way We Really Are (1997), Coontz documents that the family headed by a male who is the solo earner has never been an achievement for a substantial part of the U.S. population. In the 1950s and 1960s the nuclear family became more possible for a greater population in the U.S., thanks to the postwar economic boom and expanded social welfare system, in addition to the cultural pressures from media and communities (Coontz 1997). High wages and government subsidies made it possible for a greater number of families to thrive on one income, enabling 60% of the total families to be counted as nuclear families. Even then, however, 40 % of American families were unable to form nuclear families. By the 1970s the number of nuclear families in the U.S. had declined significantly (Coontz 1997:37) and to date this trend continues.

Taking a historical and critical perspective on the nuclear family brings a critical understanding of the discourse of the “pathological Black families” in the Moynihan Report in a particular historical context. Similarly, it also enables one to see Black fathers as those who needed to develop different social practices in the given historical context of families. For example, Orlando Patterson (1988) provides a historical explanation to the prevalence of Black parents unbound by legal marriages and the absence of fathers in Black families. According to Patterson, being uprooted from their home communities in Africa and brought to the Americas as slaves, Blacks were unable to reproduce their traditional family structures. In addition, their reproductive rights as well as choices of partners were to a great extent controlled by White masters. Rather ironically, masters often allowed romantic partnerships among Black slaves, while granting no legal or social rights to male slaves who participated in such relationships. Masters saw informal romantic partnerships among slaves as beneficial to them. They would reduce social tensions among the enslaved while reproducing more slaves via childbirth and
increasing their property (Patterson 1998:27). Black fathers of the slave children did not have any legal right to play a role in childrearing or their partners’ welfare. It was Black mothers’ status (of being enslaved or freed) that determined Black children’s status. Also, masters were capable of selling slaves individually, regardless of any relationships among the slaves. Thus, the legal role of the slave father was absent while his informal role was subject to the economic situation or caprice of the master (Patterson 1998:27).

Even after slavery, Black men continued to find themselves unable to follow the nuclear family model and to define their own role as the father within Black communities (Hill 2004). Freed from the slavery, Black men and women had far more control over their family structures. However, so many Black families lived and worked for low wages, either in urban areas or in rural areas. Social networks and extended families were imperative to the survival of many rural Black sharecroppers as well as to the sustenance of urban dwellers (Stack 1975). Women were also more socially and economically independent than their White counterparts were, in part because their income was essential to the family’s survival (Collins 1990). Thus, the typical family structure among Blacks did not follow the nuclear family model because of the specific social and economic forces. Patterson (1998) maintains that Black men were not so easily integrated into Black communities because their masculinity could not always be liked to the role as the primary provider of the family. The lack of educational and formal employment opportunities made life stressful, but also created a situation where “marriageable” men were hardly available.

The change in the makeup of the urban community led to the disappearance of a role model for Black men. According to Wilson (1990), as middle class Black families left the inner cities for the suburbs, employment opportunities and social support networks for poor Blacks disappeared and urban ghettos further deteriorated. One of the effects of this change was the lack of positive models for young Black families. Elijah Anderson (1990) chronicles this in his book *Streetwise*. Anderson postulates that the street crime, gangs, high pregnancy rates, and drug activity he witnessed in a predominantly Black neighborhood were the result of a loss of stable manufacturing jobs in the area and the flight of middle class Blacks to the suburbs (1990). Without a legitimate way of making a living or obtaining self worth through employment, many young men in the neighborhood had to resort to the illicit drug trade for income and for respect from peers (Anderson 1990:77). Drug related crime also made the remaining “old heads” of the community (older men and women respected in the community and traditionally seen as role models) less likely to interact with youth in the neighborhood.

While historicizing the problem of Black families and fathers shed a light to the structural inequalities, this line of research tended to explain why Black men have been deprived of the opportunity to play the role of “father” as defined in the context of nuclear family, but did not explore the actual practice of Black fathers. Being a Black father does not always have to be the same as being a father in a stereotypical nuclear family. In fact, being a father is a set of social practices that are part of “doing gender” (Coltrane 1989). Like any other gender role, one achieves to be a father through mimicking, challenging, and testing boundaries, being sanctioned, assessing the effect of actions, and creating meaning of fatherhood through these activities (West and Zimmerman 1987). From this constructionist perspective, and in search of alternative perspectives on Black fathers, a new line of research has emerged and examined how Black fatherhood has been practiced, contributing to a better understanding of the role of non-resident or unwed fathers and the significance of social parenting, particularly in the context of extended family and community.

Non-resident fathers had long been regarded as absentee fathers. Recent research has found, however, that regardless of the residential or marital status, Black fathers are more involved in their children’s lives than those in other major racial groups in the U.S. Mincy (2007) and Edin et al. (2009) report that non-married Black fathers, resident or non-resident, have stronger relationship with the mothers of their children, in comparison with such relationships among the White or Hispanics. Edin et al. (2009) argues that this is due, in part, to the institutionalization of the non-resident father in the Black community. Their findings also show that non-resident African American fathers are more likely to be involved in their children’s lives.
Some researchers examine how Black fatherhood is institutionalized. In particular, in Black communities it is not solely biological fathers who play paternal roles. Other male members of the family and the community also provide father-like support to children. According to Allen (2007), all men in a Black family share the responsibility to provide guidance and act as role models to children in their family and others in the community. White and Connor (2006) conceptualized this as “social parenting” and explored who performs generative parenting, which encourages growth in the children and the parent. They found that social parenting was much more common than what is usually assumed. White and Connor (2006) also looked at more specific effects of social and generative fathering on children in the Black community and found that such parenting involving non-biological social fathers is significant to the welfare of children. A study by Hawkins and Amato (2008) further revealed that, while the involvement of the non-resident father did not affect the well-being of their adolescent children, the involvement of stepfathers who lived in the house and provided social parenting, did have a positive effect on the well-being of the adolescent.

Even when Black fathers do not live with their children, they may be involved with their children’s lives at a higher degree than often assumed (Eggbeen 2002). A study conducted by Coley and Chase-Lansdale (1999) showed that a majority of non-resident unmarried Black fathers were involved with their children’s lives, not only through financial contribution and as a respite care provider, but also in many other aspects of care work that would be expected of a resident father.

The impact of these alternative ways of fathering children seems positive, but research has not produced definitive answers. In the meantime, the child support requirement appears to have created a negative incentive for Black men to play the alternative fathering roles. Haung (2006) argues that while the greater state enforcement of child support has led to a significant increase in the amount of child support payments and visitation days this legalistic practice has also promoted the idea that the legal role of the non-resident father is an economic provider. By granting more control and contact with the children in exchange of child support payments, the father begins to see the child support payments as a way to buy his role as a father. In the case of Black fathers, making child support payments is not necessarily correlated with their level of involvement with children’s lives. In fact, the state enforcement of child support may discourage Black fathers from being involved with their children’s lives. The challenge of making child support payments can lead to legal consequences that prevent Black fathers from having access to children’s lives (White and Connor 2006). The integration of other fathering practices beyond fiscal support into the child support system may be needed to reverse the trend.

While this new line of research has brought to our attention the socially, historically and culturally specific construction of fatherhood and the actual practice of Black fathers in contemporary U.S. society, it is unclear how these findings affect the contemporary media discourse of Black fathers. This study attempts to answer this question.

Theory

What media represents and to what end is a hotly contested subject. Mayfield and Shoemaker (1984) maintain that media content is influenced by the journalistic education, personal bias, structure, and practice of journalism, ability to represent reality truthfully, and economic and political bias (1984). McQuail (2005) added technology as an emerging force (2005). While all these factors could have some impact on the patterns of media representation, they also need to be understood in the context of media as a social institution that plays a particular role in a society at large. This research is informed by this perspective.

Particularly in a capitalist society, media can be understood as an institution that serves the interests of capitalists who have ultimate control over the economy. According to Marx and Engles (1976:59-62) mainstream ideas in capitalist society are part of the superstructure built upon the economy that is dominated by the capitalists’ interests. Following this model, we can see media as part of the superstructure that is directly affected by the capitalist mode of production. Media, then, represents the interests of those who have control over the economy. In practice, media contribute to the maintenance of the capitalist ideology and the continuous reproduction of false consciousness among workers.
This model has been criticized as overly deterministic. In particular, to what extent capitalist economic interests control the media needs to be considered. Those who do have direct control over the production of media content, such as journalists and editors, do not always seem to be under the direct control of the capitalists. The ideas that circulate through the media do not necessarily reflect class interests either. Critics have asked how these questions can be reconciled with this theory (McQuail 2005:95).

The idea that the superstructure has the limited autonomy has been developed from the writings of Antonio Gramsci (1971). While recognizing the connection between the economy and the ideas that govern the society, Gramsci offered that the structure of society itself maintained the capitalist ideology. For example, the presence of generic genre reporting enables reporters to produce very similar news articles. News reports of a fire at a manufacturing plant that are written by different reporters can be found in multiple news sources, but they may appear similar to each other (Fairclough 2003:74). The production of such reports is certainly dependent upon the economic system, but little direct capitalist influence is observed in this instance. Rather, the reproduction of news reports and other discourse occurs because it is often in the best interests of the media companies that need to compete with each other within the already established structure of reporting. Individual journalists and editors also participate in this process, utilizing their educational, professional, and cultural background. It is their habitus that determines what they see in an event and what to emphasize or ignore.

Gramsci (1985) recognized that within a society, the ruling class gains power from their legitimization by the society. By maintaining and reproducing the capitalist ideology, they create a hegemony that acts in their favor. This allows the ruling class to exert their authority by making their power seem natural by the careful crafting of ideas and representations in the society. To achieve this level of control the use of media sources is needed. In fascist Italy where Gramsci was a political prisoner, he noted how all forms of media, newspapers to street names, were controlled by the state. He was later able to show how this worked for all ruling social groups even outside of totalitarian regimes; even American media was not immune to the ideological control of the ruling class (Durham and Kellner 2001:34-34).

This study takes Gramsci’s point of view and analyzes the media representations of Black fathers as a production of hegemonic discourse on race, gender, and class. With the role of media as an ideological tool for the ruling class, we should expect that even different media sources catering to different cultures within the same society should have comparable representations. Given this, it is expected that Jet magazine and Time magazine will have similar representations of Black fathers.

**Method**

This study evaluates the media representation of Black fathers. In particular, it hopes to find how the current media discourse reflects the evolving scholarship on Black fathers during the past 40 years. For this purpose, the author chose two distinctive sources for media representations: Jet Magazine and Time Magazine. They are both weekly magazines and well established in the market, but for different readerships. Jet is a digest of Black culture, and provides a window to the discourse on Black fathers in the Black community in the U.S. Time magazine targets a general audience and thus shows the general discourse on Black fathers in the U.S. By comparing these two magazines with differing markets, the author hopes to show how the discourse on Black fatherhood is shaping in today’s mainstream print media.

To analyze the discourse, the author conducted a content analysis of each of 183 articles and pictures selected from both magazines. These articles were published during the 2007-08 Presidential race, when Barack Obama, a viable Black Presidential candidate nominated by a major political party, gave numerous speeches on Black fatherhood. To observe the discourse on Black fatherhood, this period appeared ideal. In total, 185 references to Black fathers were found in the two magazines. Of these 185 articles or pictures reviewed, 153 were found in Jet Magazine and 32 were found in Time Magazine.

The selected materials for the content analysis included articles that discussed Black fathers as well as pictures that depicted Black fathers. Because of the limitations in keyword searches in the electronic versions of these publications, the author paged through each issue searching for appropriate articles and pictures. Selected articles all mentioned Black fathers in the title or in the first paragraph. Selection of the pictures were, however, more challenging. While most pictures had a caption, which made deciphering the parental status of the Black man easy, some pictures only provided an ambiguous identification of Black fathers. For example, a picture of a
Black family in the car gave an impression that the man driving the car was the father. However, no verbal statement was available. In this case clues were taken from the article and the set up of the picture to assume that the male driver was in fact the father of the two children in the back seat.

After the selection, the author subjected the articles and pictures to a series of questions and coded them accordingly. The first set of the questions asked was “Was the article or picture meant to merely identify a man as a father, to show how a man fathers, or to represent fatherhood?” Second, articles and pictures were analyzed for the level of abstraction. Specifically, the author asked whether the representation indicated an identifiable individual, the group category of Black fathers, or the general category of fathers. Third, the author reviewed whether the father was represented as the active subject or not. If the father in the picture was pushing a child on a swing, with a description of a father pushing his child on a swing, then, this was coded as “active.” If the caption had said “A child being pushed by her father on the swing,” it was not considered as an active depiction of the father. In addition to the analysis of the ways in which Black fathers were depicted, the author also coded each article or picture by the presence of verbal identification of the father. In particular, the author coded fatherhood as “Father” if no overt references to fatherhood were present. An article that refers to children as belonging to the mother, but does not mention her husband as the father, was coded as a case of assumed father. Articles regarding Obama and his daughters were coded as “Obama as a father” and those depicting his father were coded “Obama’s Father.” Ideally, the coding would call for a procedure that involves a disinterested third party. Due to financial and time constraints, however, the researcher completed all of the coding.

To supplement the content analysis, the author also examined selected articles for more in depth analysis of the discourse. These articles were selected from the sample for the content analysis, and they all discussed Black fathers as the category, rather than individuals. They were analyzed for any trends or discrepancies between them.

Findings

As noted earlier, 185 articles and pictures were reviewed and coded for the content. Results of the content analysis for Time and Jet Magazine articles and pictures are summarized respectively in Tables I and II. Table III pulls data form both magazines for comparison.

The most obvious finding is that Jet Magazine had more representations of Black fathers. 153 out of 185 were found in Jet Magazine and 32 were found in Time Magazine. 81.7% (N=125) of these articles focused on actual fathers in the Black community, while less than 20% (N=29) made more abstract references to the category of Black fathers or general fathers. These individual references were generally stories about celebrity divorce, child support, paternity tests, and births. Few articles focused solely on the role of Black fathers.

Time Magazine also focused on individual fathers (71.8% or N=23). However, 65.2% (N=15) of them were referring to Obama or Obama’s father, while only 47% (N=8) were about other Black individuals who play the father role. Even when Time Magazine made references to Obama as a father, half of those references were assumed instead of verbally asserted (50% or N=6; see Table II). For example, a picture of Barack Obama, his wife Michelle Obama, and their children was accompanied with a caption that says “the Obama family at the beach.” The relationship between Obama and children in the picture is not overtly stated. This assumes either that the reader knows that the two children in the picture are actually his children. In fact, out of the twelve references to him as a father, only one used the word father and dad to describe him. In contrast, Jet Magazine, which reported on Obama as a father in only five cases, actually employed “father” or “dad” to describe his relationship with his children in three of the five articles/pictures.
Table III shows that Time Magazine tends to represent Black men as fathers as if there is no need to explain their relationships with women and children in the article or picture. In 31.3% (N=10) of all of the articles and pictures, fatherhood was assumed without an overt description of the man as father. Jet Magazine, however, only assumed fatherhood in 10.5% (N=16) of the articles.
These findings point towards a difference in the type of discourse in the two magazines. Jet Magazine had a Black fatherhood discourse that is much more based in observations of actual people and their lives, while Time’s discourse was more likely to deal with more abstracted or universal themes. While these differences in discourse may be apparent in this quantitative analysis, looking at individual articles shows similarities in how Black fathers are represented in these two magazines.

For example in the June 30th Time article The Blame Game, an article discussing Obama’s “Fathers Speech” at a Black church calling on more Black men to take responsibility for their children, discusses current research and the history of the Black fatherhood issue. Michael Dyson, a sociologist form Georgetown University, is the author, not a staff writer for the Magazine. The article itself is formatted differently than other articles in the issue with an off-white background and red border. Time Magazine describes Dyson as a Sociology professor and author of a book on Dr. Martin Luther King’s death. In his first sentence, he tells us that the Obama’s rebuke of absentee fathers on Father’s Day will not help to solve the problem. Dyson then goes on with a laundry list of Black leaders who he states have wrongfully placed the blame on Black fathers and families asking them to take responsibility for the situation that poor Black families find themselves in. His list included, Martin Luther King, Jesse Jackson, Bill Cosby, and Barack Obama. However, he never explicitly explained what the problem with Black fathers is. From the article one can assume that Black fathers do not live with their children and that this somehow causes “suffering” and “trauma” for the Black community, but other than that it is assumed that the audience knows what the issue is. In sum, the article point out Black leaders’ misguided or politically motivated stance on Black fatherhood.

Without explicitly stating what Black fathers are being barred from or what the trauma, suffering, and bad behavior is, we can see a major trend in how Black fatherhood is discussed in Time Magazine; as a unspeakable ghost, a specter which haunts the Black community and the American public.

Time ran another article involving Barack Obama and Black fatherhood. This time it was Obama’s own role as a father. The December 1 article’s main point is that there will be a Black family in the White House, but throughout the article James Poniewozak, the author of the piece, repeatedly reminds us that he is anything but the stereotypical Black father, with a “broken family” (2008). Here again there is a specter of Black fatherhood haunting the article but never fully showing its self. The positive nature of Obama’s relationship with his family is overt in the article, taking his kids to school, hosting sleepovers, inviting his mother-in-law to live at the White house, and living a Cosby show type of life, but the negative is fleeting. What Obama is being compared to is not explicitly written but is definitely negative.

A third example of the type of discourse found in Time Magazine regarding Black fatherhood is the short article naming The Cosby Show as one of the most influential TV shows of all time. The September 17, 2007 article briefly describes The Cosby Show (Poniewozik 2008). Although most of the description has abstracted the family to the status of an American family and not a Black family, there is a
reference to the show being about an upper middle class African-American family. It then goes on to say how the show offered a family that “America could actually learn from.” Here it is evident that the writer felt it necessary to qualify the description of the African-American family as upper middle class. Most likely to clarify that this is not an average Black family; this is one that America can actually learn from. Again, there is the assumption that the Black family, which is in contrast to the Huxtable family, is something negative.

The Black fatherhood discourse in Jet Magazine does not differ much from that in Time Magazine. Jet also acknowledges that there is an issue with Black fatherhood, but their discourse does not include what exactly the problem is or where the source is beyond the failings of Black men. The June 18, 2008 issue of Jet had an article that reported on two athlete single fathers taking an active role in raising their children (Hoffman 2008). The article is full of references to the personal responsibility that these people had, words like “dedication,” describing then men as wanting to raise their children responsibility, being motivated, fighting, and matured. These words and phrases about personal responsibility are contrasted against negative words and phases such as “baby daddy,” “Black fathers,” “No male role model.” This contrast between the concrete actions of the good father and the abstract descriptions of the Black father all point to the idea that any Black man-if he has the will-could be a good father and that the default definition of a Black father is negative unless it is somehow qualified. In addition, while the personal responsibility that these men have taken in their children is explicit, how social and economic capital has played into their ability to raise these children is not explicit. Money obviously plays a large role on one father’s life as an ex-professional football player and a doctor; therefore, the ability to provide for his children was not an issue. For the other father his team and family are mentioned in passing as helping him with the stresses of fatherhood in college, but are not elaborated on.

In another article from June 9, 2008 a new book that chronicles three Black doctors reconnecting with their fathers (Christian 2008). All three men grew up in a fatherless home and reconciled with their fathers recently. Again, the theme of personal responsibility comes up constantly in the article. No mention of other factors beyond lack of will on the part of the father was mentioned as contributing to the issue. Not only was the full blame on the fathers, but there also was no elaboration on why female headed single parent households are negative or why children need a male role model in their lives. Again, the issue of Black fatherhood is abstract and undefined beyond being a problem.

In yet another article, the issue of non-resident fathers is even more abstracted. The July 28, 2008 issue of Jet contained an article with Jesse Jackson’s apology and explanation for his “Crude, hurtful and wrong” remarks about Barack Obama and his recent speeches regarding responsibility and Black fathers (Waldron 2008). While Jackson is quoted as saying, “My appeal was for the moral content of his message to not only deal with the personal and moral responsibility of Black males, but to deal with the collective moral responsibility of government and the public policy which would be a corrective action for the lack of good choices that often led to their irresponsibility.” Other than that sentence, the rest of the article was devoted to personal responsibility. In fact, half of the article was regarding an event Jackson organized to get parents to take more responsibility for their children’s education. In the entire article, there is no description of what the problem is or what the government could be providing to assist fathers in making responsible choices.

These six articles are representative the how the discourse of Black fatherhood is similar in both magazines, even though each approached the subject in a different manner.

Discussion and Conclusions

While the content of the two magazines did differ significantly, the message being communicated was similar. Time Magazine had an impersonal approach to reporting on Black fathers, which may be understandable given that Time Magazine is marketed to a primarily White reading base. The focus on the pathology of the Black family and the lack of responsibility of Black fathers also makes sense since both readers and editors are likely to profit from the same factors which make fathering inaccessible to many Black fathers. Segmented labor practices in the U.S., benefit White workers in many sectors (Kim and Tamborini 2006). Addressing the economic issues which keep Black men from being more involved
with their children would involve acknowledging the privileged role White workers have in the U.S. These similarities are also what we would expect as part of a hegemonic discourse.

Jet Magazine, however, is not primarily owned, run, or read by White people. Even with the more personal nature of the articles (articles addressing individual Black fathers) in Jet Magazine, the articles still contain the same implicit assumptions of Black fathers as Time Magazine does; that Black fathers are almost by definition bad, and that it is the responsibility of Black men to remedy this personal problem. This is offset by the numerous representations of fathers in the magazine. One explanation for this discrepancy is that this ideology is formed not because of pure economic motives, but that it steams from the structure of society itself.

What we can conclude from this case study is limited; it represents a small sample of representations from two media sources during a politically exceptional time period. A more extensive study would be needed to make stronger ascertains. What can be concluded is that while these two media sources are aware of current research showing that Black men face many socio-economic barriers to being generative fathers, they still perpetuate an ideology of personal responsibility with little regard for how these men, even with the best of intentions, could fulfill these responsibilities. With the economy being dependant on low paid workers and current labor segmentation the prospect of even Jet Magazine addressing economic and political barriers to fatherhood is slim.
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