

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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From NCAAMP and the Institute for American Values - The Marriage Index: A Proposal to Establish Leading Marriage Indicators

According to the report issued recently by the National Center on African American Marriages and Parenting (NCAAMP) and the Institute for American Values, *The Marriage Index: A Proposal to Establish Leading Marriage Indicators*, “the absence of clear, compelling, and commonly-agreed upon set of leading marriage indicators” has been a cause for almost ignoring the health of marriage in our nation by policy makers and stakeholders. Some would argue that such a measurement is unnecessary, but a bipartisan group of academics and stakeholders disagree. They counter-argue that a U.S. Marriage Index is necessary and valuable because: (1) it demonstrates where this country is in terms of marriage as a social institution, why it matters, and where we should go from here, (2) social progress is impossible sans shared and measurable outcomes, and (3) the future of our nation is as dependent on leading marriage indicators as economic indicators. As a result, five Leading Marriage Indicators (LMI) have been developed. They are: (1) percentage of adults married (ages 20-24), (2) percentage of married persons “very happy” with their marriage (ages 18 and up), (3) percentage of first marriages intact (ages 20-59), (4) percentage of births to married parents, and (5) percentage of children living with own married parents. Data is compared from 1970 through 2008, in ten-year increments through 2000, then in 2008.

Percentage of Adults Married (ages 20–54) Research indicates that the percentage of adults married has steadily declined over the 38 years studied, from 78.6% in 1970 to 57.2% in 2008. The decline is even sharper in the African American community—from 70.3% in 1970 to 39.6% in 2008. One reason could be that more young adults are entering into non-married co-residential living arrangements and/or having children outside of marriage than in the past. This suggests that the status of marriage may no longer be viewed as “special” in today’s society.

Percentage of Married Persons “Very Happy” with Their Marriage (ages 18 and up) The quality of marriage has declined, but at a less drastic rate than the other indicators. In 1970, 67% reported that they were “very happy” in their marriage, compared to 62%

in 2008. For African Americans, the decline was even less—from 53.5% in 1970 to 50.8% in 2008. University of Texas family sociologist Norval Glenn suggests that the decline is correlated in part to the “decline of the ideal of marital permanence.”

Percentage of First Marriages Intact (ages 20-59) This indicator showed decline, both for the general population (77.4% in 1970 to 61.2% in 2008) and the African American population (69.7% to 50.1%), but most notably for both populations between 1980 and 2000—from 71.5% to 59.9% for the general population and from 64.1% to 49.5% for the African American population. However, the indicator has risen (1.3% and 0.6% respectively), giving hope that the notion of lifelong commitments to marriage has been renewed.

Percentage of Births to Married Parents The sharpest (and steadiest) decline occurred within this indicator. In 1970, 89.3% women in the general population were married to their child(ren)’s father but only 60.3% in 2008. During that same period, 62.4% of African American women were married to their child (ren)’s father, but only 28.4% in 2008. The significance is that social scientists have already demonstrated the link between marriage and child outcomes—a healthy marriage helps children have better social, emotional, and health outcomes.

Percentage of Children Living with Own Married Parents Finally, the Marriage Index indicates a decline in this category for both the general population and the African American population (data was not provided for the period 1970 through 1989). In 2008, 61% of children in the general population were living with their own married parents, down 7.7% from 1970; 29% of children in African American families were living with their own married parents, down 5.8% from 1990. The good news is that the decline has leveled since 2000 (there was an increase for the general population between 2000 and 2008). But as previously stated, the correlation between child outcomes and healthy marriage is clear—“families headed by married, biological parents are best for children.” Furthermore, “children from one-parent families are more likely to drop out of high school, to be unemployed, and to become teen mothers.”

MAMA SAYS: A National Survey of Mothers' Attitudes on Fathering Top 14 Findings

“A greater proportion of adults are realizing their dreams of an enduring, happy marriage & a greater proportion of children are growing up with their own two parents.”

The Marriage Index: A Proposal to establish Leading Marriage Indicators (p.23)

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

On December 1, 2009, The National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) released the first-ever survey examining today's mothers' views on fathers and fatherhood—*MAMA SAYS: A National Survey of Mothers' Attitudes on Fathering* (a companion study, *POP CULTURE: Dads' Attitudes on Fathering* was completed in 2006). The online study was conducted by the University of Texas Office of Survey Research that surveyed 1,533 mothers over the age of 18 with at least one child in the household under the age of 18. The top 14 findings were¹:

- 93% of moms believe there is a father absence crisis
- Most moms think dad is replaceable
- Married and cohabiting moms were happier with dads' performance than moms not living with dad
- Married moms believe more in the power of marriage to help dad be the best he can be than moms who are cohabitating or separated from dad
- Dads of young children got better marks than dads of teens
- Closeness to children and work-family balance were the biggest predictors of mom's satisfaction with dad (after living arrangement)
- Most moms said they could do a better job of work-family balance if dad provided more help
- Moms said that “work responsibilities” were the biggest obstacle to dad's success in fathering
- Strong religious values are beneficial to helping dads be better fathers
- Moms think communities of faith are the top place for dads to get fathering help
- Nonresident dads think they're doing a better job than the moms who co-parent with them think they are
- African American moms weren't as happy as white or other minority moms, but most of the difference can be explained by living situation or family structure
- New romantic relationship for dads equals less happy moms
- Moms who aren't living with the father of their children identified more and stronger obstacles to his ability to parent

View the full document at <http://www.fatherhood.org/mamasays/download.asp>

Continued from page 1

How We Can Improve America's Current Score

David Blankenhorn (Institute for American Values) and Linda Malone-Colon (NCAAMP) have devised 101 ideas for improving the nation's current score of 60.3 (the average of all five indicators for the general population). While all of the ideas would benefit both the general population, suggestions especially relevant to the African American community include²:

- Begin a national conversation about Black marriages,
- Excite and mobilize Black intellectual leaders, community activists, and institutions (particularly Black churches and colleges) around the goal of strengthening Black marriage,
- Especially in urban America, develop economic strategies aimed at providing more job opportunities for young males, particularly poorly educated minority males, since jobless young men are less likely to marry and are less desirable as marriage partners,
- Enlist more clergy as leaders for marriage in all communities, including the African American community and other communities of color,
- Develop a better knowledge about marriage formation and marriage success in communities of color and
- Develop and disseminate effective, research-based marriage preparation and enhancement programs suited for culturally diverse and low-income communities.

How The Marriage Indicator Can Be Used

The *Marriage Index* report suggests the following ways that organizations and community stakeholders can use the index to impact change³:

- *Publicize the Index.* Write a letter to the editor; submit an op-ed to a newspaper or write an article for a magazine or journal to highlight the importance of improving our Leading Marriage Indicators. Share this Index with your community, civic, religious, and online networks.
- *Institutionalize this Index.* Policy makers, opinion shapers, and leaders of civil society: Please introduce the Marriage Index to your colleagues and explain to them its importance and uses. Encourage your networks to publish and annually review the Marriage Index.
- *Customize the Index.* Customize it for a particular ethnic, racial, or religious community. Customize it for a particular geographical area, such as a state or a region.
- *Mobilize to improve America's Index score of 60.3.* Pick one or more of the 101 ideas to improve our national score of 60.3 and work personally to achieve the goal or goals. Join or support an organization devoted specifically to strengthening marriage in the United States.

The complete report can be found at <http://www.americanvalues.org> or <http://www.hamptonu.edu/ncaamp>.

¹National Fatherhood Initiative. *MAMA SAYS: A National Survey of Mothers' Attitudes on Fathering*. Top 14 Findings. <http://www.fatherhood.org/mamasays/findings.asp>

²Suggestions were selected based on the applicability to African Americans; the complete list is contained within the full document.

³*The Marriage Index*. Page 22, “How Can You Use The Marriage Index.”

Spotlight on Region VI

LIFE Matters & CARES Team Apartment Life Ministry: IGNITE FRIDAY NIGHTS! By Helen Wilson & Elma Goodwin



Couples enjoy the meal and five-star treatment of the evening

Ignite Friday Nights had a fiery kick-off on Friday, December 4, 2009 at Churchill at Pinnacle Park Apartment Complex in Dallas, Texas! *Ignite Friday Nights* are a series of Date-Your-Mate nights that include relationship skills education from the *Married & Loving It!* curriculum. This project is the creation of LIFE Matters Healthy Marriage Initiative (Helen Wilborn Wilson, Marriage Enrichment Coordinator) and its partner, the CARES TEAM Apartment Life Ministry (David and Shaun Estrada). LIFE Matters has been teaching couples, singles, and youth healthy relationship skills since 2006 through innovative activities, diverse partnerships, and evidence-based curricula. The CARES Team's (a component of the CARES Program in nine U. S. cities) mission is to host activities that increase the spirit of community among apartment residents. LIFE Matters recognized the similarity in goals and formed a partnership with CARES Team to include relationship skills as an activity.

Families are more likely to fellowship with other families when they feel good about their own family.

LIFE Matters' volunteers, led by Jean Clack, transformed the apartment community room into an intimate, romantic, and relaxing setting for couples. Child care was provided onsite; the food was donated by Luckie's Smokehouse and the couples were given five-star treatment by the "Dream Team Volunteers." The evening consisted of food, fellowship, prizes and music. Michael and Zandra Rutledge (LIFE Matters Certified Relationship Skills Facilitators) amazed the couples with effective communication skills.

The eight couples attending the kick off were excited about the opportunity to learn and fellowship in such a relaxed setting and agreed to serve as ambassadors for the upcoming Ignite events. It was indeed a night to be treasured by the couples who wanted it to last forever.

Four additional *Ignite Friday Nights* are planned at the Pinnacle Park Apartment Complex and all attending couples will be engaged in other LIFE Matters activities, such as Black Marriage Day, Couples Retreats, Couples Day and Couples College.

For additional information about Life Matters Healthy Marriage Initiative please contact Helen Wilborn Wilson at slc5787@aol.com, or <http://www.youmattertome.org>. For more information on the CARES Program, go to <http://www.caresteam.org>.

Spotlight on Health:

H1N1 and the African American Community By Barbara Andrews

H1N1, an influenza virus sometimes referred to as "swine flu" is a new contagious virus. Since first detected in 2009, the H1N1 virus has been spreading worldwide among all racial and ethnic groups. Like seasonal flu, illness in people with H1N1 can vary from mild to severe.

Although most people who have become ill with this new virus have recovered without requiring medical treatment, many medical conditions are associated with an increased risk of serious complications from the H1N1 virus, including conditions such as asthma, diabetes and sickle cell disease which disproportionately affect African Americans. In addition, the risk of serious complications may be increased for some African Americans because of a lack of health insurance or transportation limits their access to health care. There is no epidemiological or clinical evidence to suggest that African Americans are more susceptible to the 2009 H1N1 flu or to poorer health outcomes due to race. However, a study of hospitalizations in thirteen metropolitan areas during 2009 indicated that African Americans are more often hospitalized with H1N1 than other groups.

The CDC recommends a three-step approach to fight the flu: (1) get vaccinated, (2) take action to prevent contracting and spreading flu and (3) use antiviral drugs correctly if recommended by your doctor. Currently, vaccination is the best protection against contracting the flu. The CDC reports that many African Americans are concerned about the safety of flu vaccines due to historical experience with health care and public health; so it is particularly important that African Americans get the facts about vaccine safety and effectiveness to make an informed decision. Information about vaccine safety and where you can get vaccinated is available at <http://www.flu.gov> and <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu> or by phoning 1-800-CDC-INFO. You should also consult with your health care provider. **Get and stay informed—it's important!**

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Regional Roundup

Tri-Church Marriage Retreat in Wichita, Kansas

Three Wichita, Kansas churches (*Tabernacle Bible, Saint Mark United, and Dellrose United Methodist*) joined together to celebrate marriage in Kansas City, Missouri on December 11-13, 2009. The Metropolitan Missionary Baptist Church in Kansas City, Pastor Hartsfield II presiding, graciously allowed the utilization of their facility to conduct the session on Saturday from 9:00am-3:00pm. Twenty-seven couples participated. The idea was to do something different. The economy surely hampered many in making the trip, but for those who did attend, it was a true deposit and investment in celebrating love, commitment and joy. Marriages ranging in tenure from 3 months to 49 ½ years received vital information on how to keep the “Honey in the Honeymoon!” Subjects covered in the sessions included: (1) Guarding Love, (2) 5 Love Needs and (3) The Marriage Map. Pastor and wife teams from each church covered a section. It was very well delivered and received - “more dialog than monolog.”

The general emphasis and teaching came from the book, *Divorce-Proof Your Marriage* by Dr. Gary and Barbara Rosberg. Married more than 30 years, the Rosbergs have two married daughters and four grandchildren. Pastor Hartsfield commented that hopefully next year, the marriage ministry team could travel to Wichita, KS.

“Marriage is being celebrated in the Black Community and we need to do a better job in getting the word out.” – Sherdeill H. Breathett, Sr.

ACF Happenings

National Fatherhood Initiative’s *Legacy Wall*

The **Legacy Wall**, part of the National Fatherhood Initiative campaign gives individuals an opportunity to express why it is important for two individuals to be married and raise children in a two-parent household. It is also a vehicle to celebrate why it is important for African Americans to talk about the experience they are having in their relationships. Stories are written and posted to the wall about the importance of marriage.

There are national spokespersons like Allan Houston who share stories; other national spokespersons are doing ad campaigns for television radio announcement. Everyone is invited to talk about their experience about relationships and raising children—most will agree that a healthy marriage and a strong family is a work in progress!

Visit <http://legacy.fatherhood.org> to share your story on the wall. PSA’s are available for download that can help your organization spread the word about the **Legacy Wall** Campaign. Remember - Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood go hand in hand!

Black Marriage Day 2010

Black Marriage Day 2010 will be celebrated on March 28, 2010. Families Matter (New Orleans—Cherita Harris-Tanks 504.373.6374) will host *One Name, Two Voices, Our Future* March 22-28; Anthem Strong Families (Dallas—Nancy Vance 972.833.0044) will host a celebration on March 26th, and Life Matters Healthy Marriage Initiative (Dallas—Helen Wilson 214.876.3050) will host a conference featuring Dr. Linda Malone-Colon on March 27th and a city-wide vow renewal ceremony at Friendship West Baptist Church on March 28th. Stay tuned for more listings!

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!

The 2010 AAHMI Research to Practice Conference
Will be held
June 22-24, 2010
Additional information will be forwarded as it becomes available!

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS!

Deadline: January 30, 2010

The Institute for Responsible Citizenship is currently accepting applications for its summer leadership program in Washington, DC. The Institute provides America’s best and brightest **African American male college students** with unparalleled networking opportunities, leadership development, and life-long mentorship. Program highlights include:

- Exposure to members of Congress, Supreme Court justices, doctors, business executives, educators, and other influential leaders
- Rigorous academic seminars
- Roundtable discussions, including seminars on leadership development
- High-level internships around Washington, DC
- Activities that promote strong bonds with each other

The program runs from June 5th to July 31st, 2010; students must commit to two summers. Housing is paid by the Institute. Students work at paid internships based on their career interest.

The student should be a **college sophomore** to apply. The Institute does not have a GPA requirement; however, the median GPA for recent classes is 3.65. An applicant’s GPA is not the only criterion that is evaluated during the admissions process. Campus involvement, awards earned, athletics, and volunteer work are also important factors.

The application can be found at <http://www.i4rd.org/application.htm>. Applications must be received, not postmarked, by the deadline. Inquiries should be directed to info@i4rd.org or (202) 659-2831.