Book Review: African American Families by Angela J. Hattery & Earl Smith

C. Annette Wilson, Ed.D.
Assistant Professor, Department of Childhood and Exceptional Student Education
Armstrong Atlantic State University

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The reading of the African American Families by Hattery and Smith is a host of actual events, occasions and mandated causes, delivered in the recording style of the African American Families book outline and chapter repeated referrals. Hattery and Smith (2007) in chapter one (1) produce the questions of social class as described by the “. . . field of sociology has had a traditional focus on the problems that face humanity: poverty, inequality, access to health care, education, poor housing, and of course the social institution of the family” (p.4). From the slave cabins in a west coast state to the front door of the United States, family members have participated in the growing development of the country and participated in controlled and self-induced sociological traditions. African Americans have actively planted and harvested food for the survival of their owners to participating in the printing of money for the elite.

The participation of the African American family parallels the known strand written avenues as floor scrubbers, housekeepers, birthing babies at home and/or the non-sterile or equipped basements of hospitals and back room doctors’ offices. The outline of African American Families notes concrete categories for further research and topical conversations. The authors explored the “. . . realities of African American families in the contemporary United States based on the analyses of empirical data that come from a variety of sources, including the U.S. Census, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention” (Hattery & Smith, 2007, p. 33).

The approach for a course experience would have formulated topics already generated from the written study specifically noted through the strength of the chapter titles Hattery and Smith (2007) designed to organize the book:

- African American Civil Society: Issues, Approaches, Demography, and Theory;
- Family Formation, Marriage Rates, and Cohabitation;
- Childbearing and Childrearing Patterns;
- Intimate Partner Violence;
- HIV and Other Social and Health Issues;
- Access to Opportunity: Educational Attainment and Occupational Segregation;
- Welfare and Wealth;
- African American Males and the Incarceration Problem: Not Just confined to Prison;
Hattery and Smith’s (2007) *African American Families* book outlined a cadre of events that for several historical noted and data driven components, can state a truth of participation or experience and even moments of ordered feats associated with an event. The authors provided definitions of family, race and ethnicity, and race as a social construct. Moreover, the opportunity to discuss such topics as industry segregation, occupational segregation, education and human capital, occupational legacy, incarceration, and an examination of welfare and wealth are consistently part of the data conversation.

When Hattery and Smith (2007) discuss the *African American Families*, it goes beyond the pedestrian conversations of well-known topics as *Brown v. Board of Education* constantly covered in historical recall. Their discussion has concentrated on income versus wealth; income and income disparities; wealth and wealth disparities; wealth disparities and access to the American dream; housing; housing discrimination; housing segregation; stereotypes about welfare and poverty; and welfare reform and family values.

Hattery and Smith work at Wake Forest. The Winston Salem sample studied the closing of the tobacco companies and the building of penal facilities and the integration of the schools. Data set document not only the times of the consent decrees of the federal government to better serve the minority representation in the North Carolina university system but the massive changing of representation when the historically black colleges were changed from teacher colleges to universities, to the redistricting lines drawn for voting, and the affirmative action laws to integrate, give a fair chance, bring minorities to historically white institutions or as the federal definition of affirmation action might be recited or whichever reason swells up in conversation.

The most invigorating organization of this book is that each paragraph could become a dissertation, book, or set of writings about a past era of federal mandates, community groupings, generational poverty, lack of access to education, and lack of representation at the decision making tables. Commerce, education, and transporting up into job promotions and decision making at the corporate, governmental, health, education levels running like trains on two different tracks heading for the same station. Dichotomies, paradigms, and dilemmas frame the triangulated research data collection chosen by the authors. The methodology and scientific research explored focused on the findings related to young African American men and incarceration; the loss in the African American community regarding economic costs and the consequences of community and human capital. Hattery and Smith (2007) extend in each chapter the call to:

> Honestly examine the privileges that accrue . . . through a system of racial oppression. Although the amount and type of privilege that accrues is also shaped by gender and social class, nevertheless, whites have benefited, both individually and as a class of people, by the system of racial domination that is so deeply embedded in American society. (p. 314)

The method of analytical techniques used to produce the book allowed comparisons and correlation of themes “. . .with independent variables such as gender, social class, age, region for the country, employment status, educational attainment, marital status, parental status, and so forth” (p. 320).
References