

## Believing in Male Supremacy Will Not Save Us

By Ron Simmons, Ph.D.

If we are to succeed, among the many beliefs that the African-American community must challenge is its belief in male supremacy. Male supremacy is the belief that men are superior to women and ordained by God to head the family, the church, and the planet. The belief in male supremacy and the adoption of a Eurocentric definition of manhood and masculinity limits our community's ability to overcome the obstacles we face in a racist society.

I believe that too often Black men aspire to have the wealth and power of White men; since America denies such an acquisition, the control of women becomes a significant definition of Black masculinity. Many Black women also believe in male supremacy and feel that a "real man" is a man who takes charge. They would like a man to be the head of their household and provide for them and their children. The problem is that there are not enough Black men with either the ability or the desire to be the perfect man that many women dream.

In reality, Black women are the backbone of the Black community and instrumental, if not the determining factor, in the success of our families, churches, and educational systems. Single women head most Black families. There are about 1,434,000 Black women in college compared to approximately 864,000 Black men. Yet, we do not teach Black girls to lead, to take the initiative, to be independent, and self-sustaining.

**We devalue Black girls.** Surveys find that even Black girls devalue themselves and feel their worth is measured by their ability to catch a "real" man. You hear more people complaining that rap videos influence Black boys to be gangsters than you hear complaints that rap videos influence Black girls to be sex kittens. We are constantly trying to save Black boys as a strategy for community success and I suggest that is because of our belief in male supremacy.

When I give lectures on "down low" men, inevitably a Black woman will ask me if I think Black men have to tell women that they have sex with other men or have HIV. Because the culture of our community believes in male supremacy, the practice is no. He does not have to tell her. It is his business, men's business and ultimately cultural practice indicates that she does not have a right to know. The same is true if he is sleeping with other women.

When I was in college pursuing a degree in African-American history, I could not understand why a racist society's preference to give jobs to Black women and not Black men led to the destruction of the Black family. My professors would say that

the unemployed and underemployed men felt emasculated and turned to drink or domestic violence, often abandoning their families. **But why, I would ask myself, did not the men think strategically and stay at home to raise the children, clean the house, and help their women who were employed? The answer is that the men believed in male supremacy and "real" men could not do that.**

Today, I am convinced that if our community is to succeed and overcome all the obstacles we face, we will have to think outside of the box. The old paradigm of "lifting up the Black male to lift the community" has not worked. Our community's belief in male supremacy and patriarchy will not save us. Black women are our greatest asset; in some respect our final asset. They must be empowered to lead. It is not about walking behind their man or even alongside their man. They must lead.

####

Published online in 2006 by Port of Harlem Magazine:

<http://www.portofharlem.net/features/malesupremacy.html>