

Introduction

Legacy is defined as a gift of property; or anything handed down from the past from an ancestor or predecessor. It implies something positive and uplifting, something that provides direction and continuity from past to future. One's legacy is one's truths about life and strategies for managing life, which is passed on to one's offspring to help ease their struggles.

ONE'S LEGACY IS ONE'S TRUTHS ABOUT LIFE
AND STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING LIFE,
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LEGACY Viewer's Guide

Developed by members of the Association of Black Psychologists, the *Viewer's Guide* identifies sociocultural issues that are embedded in the family's struggle to maintain a sense of purpose, integrity and authenticity as they are plagued by a variety of obstacles. The *Guide* also provides discussion questions and resources as well as an opportunity for audiences to discuss strategies to ultimately eradicate the social barriers faced by the Collins family.

This *Viewer's Guide* provides a culturally-based approach to viewing and discussing the *LEGACY* documentary. It is comprehensive in discussing all of the key issues that impact the lives of the Collins family. Areas covered include: Cultural Retentions, Social Challenges & Obstacles, Community & Neighborhood Issues, Impact of Trauma & Grief, Family-Centeredness, Addiction & Recovery, Race and Racism: Impacts on African American Families, Character Development and Life Skills & Career Development. Each area includes an Introduction, Discussion Questions and Resources.



Nickcole

"The ones who will make it, they have love, they have help, and they have hope."



Alaiisa

"You don't even have a dream on public aid, it's not even a dream there."



Dorothy

"Terrell's on top of the world now... This house has a lot to do with him."



Wanda

"I am a grateful recovering alcoholic and addict...[and] I know who Wanda is today."



Terrell

"Terrell left us with a spirit to not just accept what we have, but to struggle for more."



Jack

"If I can't change, it will be a bumpy road for me. I have to change my life for me."

II. Cultural Retentions

Nickcole reflects on the gift left for the family through Terrell's untimely death: "Terrell has given us a spirit not just to accept what we have, but to struggle for more. He has motivated us to believe in ourselves and make something of our lives."

An enduring characteristic of the Collins family and other African Americans is the value placed on humanity. They have a deep and unwavering concern for the welfare and well-being of others. Indeed, it is this overriding concern for others that moves this family to share their life with us; allowing all of us to get a glimpse of their trials and tribulations. This value, though unexpressed, welcomes strangers into their world, because they know our brief glimpse may lead to a better life for others. Thus, they share their most poignant moments: Terrell's funeral, as they kiss his now lifeless face; Nickcole's graduation and wedding; Wanda's graduation; and all of the special rituals and mundane patterns that reflect and capture their story.

UNDERSTANDING AFRICAN CULTURAL VARIABLES

We recognize and celebrate their generosity, even through their pain. We see the value they place on the unity of all people, reflected in the network of social relationships on which they rely to negotiate the complexities of life.

We also see in the story of this family the importance of values, such as sharing, caring for others, mutual aid, interdependence, social harmony, solidarity and reciprocal obligation. The bonds that hold them together seem to be based on common values, purposes and shared identities. Thus, Nickcole's statement, "You must have love, help and hope from your family and friends and yourself" to manage life successfully. Nickcole continues, "You have to believe in yourself, depend on yourself." These comments reflect yet another cultural value,

the interdependence of opposites. A person cannot develop outside of a community, and the community cannot thrive without the talents of many. The Collins family, therefore, depends on their family network for identity and purpose, yet needs the talent and support of all its members.

In terms of this family's moral compass, its conceptions of right and wrong, they believe that rights are secondary to responsibilities. Thus, when Alaisa reveals that she knew it was wrong to work and receive food stamps, she justifies that she did it because of her responsibilities to her family. The family is held as both a fundamental social and moral value, so family members are raised to think of themselves in relationship to other members.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss your reactions to the Collins family's decision to be filmed periodically for five years. How easy or difficult a decision do you think it was? What benefits do you think they received from it? Would you allow someone to film your family over 5 years? Why? Why not?
2. Based on what you saw during the documentary, what scenes might have ended up on the editor's floor? Why do you think some scenes, although very painful, were left in the film?
3. The racial background of the producer of *LEGACY* is different from that of the Collins family. If the producer were of the same racial background, do you think the documentary would have been the same? If not, how would it have been different? What impact does the producer's racial background have on what members of the Collins family share on screen?
4. What values seem important to this family? What examples, from the documentary, support or contradict those values?

AN ENDURING CHARACTERISTIC OF THE COLLINS FAMILY AND OTHER AFRICAN AMERICANS IS THE VALUE PLACED ON HUMANITY. THEY HAVE A DEEP AND UNWAVERING CONCERN FOR THE WELFARE AND WELL-BEING OF OTHERS.



5. How important is it to this family to help each other? To share? To support? To encourage?
6. Both Nickcole and Wanda talk about needing to do things for themselves, personally. How do those strong personal values fit with their family values?
7. What role could youth service organizations have in supporting this family's cultural values?
8. Sometimes, these strong cultural values are misunderstood in the broader society. Discuss several ways in which the Collins' family values could be misunderstood. What can be done to prevent these misunderstandings? What can your organization do to support the Collins' family values?

RESOURCES

- Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations (ASCAC), (213) 730-1155
- Council of Independent Black Institutions (CIBI)
- American Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi), (310) 568-9264
- Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASAALH), (301) 587-5900

III. Social Challenges & Obstacles

Dorothy feels trapped in the projects: "You're not there because you want to be there."

At the beginning of the documentary, the Collins family appears to be stuck. They are stuck in the projects' inadequate housing, stuck in the struggle to seek better educational opportunities for the children, stuck in the pain of losing Terrell, stuck with the troubles that come from drug use, and stuck in the systemic and oppressive forces of the "inner-city." Although they are stuck, they hold a dream of a brighter tomorrow.

■ POVERTY, DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE: CREATING INNER CITIES

The area of Chicago in which the Collins family lives is often referred to as the "inner-city." People who are very poor, usually black or brown, and isolated from "mainstream" America populate it. The few businesses in the area are pawnshops, beeper stores, check-cashing establishments, fast food restaurants, cheap furniture and clothing stores, and small, but expensive markets. Bars, boards and thick plexiglas shield the store operators from the residents.

Inner-city neighborhoods are mostly very poor and comprised of women and young children. To care for themselves and each other, they establish very strong kinships and/or parakinships. They assist with childcare, household duties and crisis management, the joys and hopes, and fears and pain, as if they are family, even when they are not. The rules with which they learn to survive are often very different from what is seen in mainstream America.

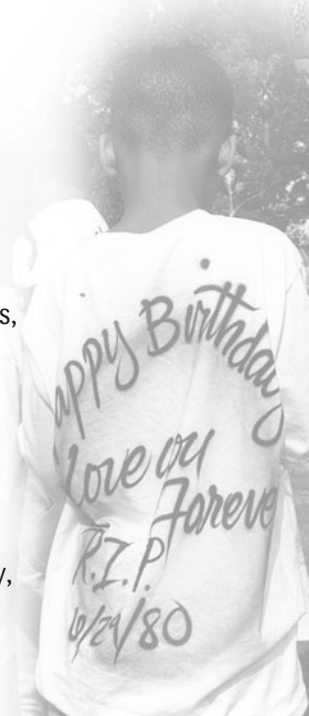
In the inner-city, there is a persistent lack of jobs that pay a living wage; and restricted essential public services, such as police response to crises, building maintenance, trash pick-up, lighting and other services expected in mainstream America. Along with discrimination due to race, the negative impact of drug/alcohol abuse and distribution produces a significant level of alienation and a loss of hope for the future. In addition, inadequate shelter and housing, food and nutrition, clothing, and community resources, result in a social system that is hostile to the viability and survival of African American families.

The absence of material resources and the presence of double and triple sources of discrimination—race, gender and social class—create social obstacles that are very difficult to transcend. Viable solutions are those that address each source—the excess of poverty, racism and discrimination, drugs, alcohol and cigarettes, criminal justice bias and limited examples of positive human potential.

-FACT-

IN 1994, ONE IN SEVEN WOMEN LIVED IN POVERTY—ONE IN THREE AMONG BLACK AND HISPANIC WOMEN.

—THE GIRLS REPORT, PUBLISHED BY THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN, 1998



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the "inner-city?" How was it created? What forces continue to keep the inner-city separate from the larger city? Should steps be taken to revitalize inner-cities? What kinds of strategies would be necessary?
2. How do the forces that create the inner-city impact the residents who live there? What stereotypes exist in the larger city about the people who live in the inner-city? How are those stereotypes influenced by centuries of race-based ideas about the inherent inferiority of African-descended persons?
3. What impact do stereotypes or preconceived notions about the residents of the inner-city have on the development of more effective strategies for addressing their needs? To what degree does racism limit attention to the needs of these residents?
4. Terrell was shot and killed by another youth in the neighborhood, as he was coming home. What impact do the following have on the incidence of violence in the projects: a slower police response time, inadequate gun-control laws, an insufficient police presence in the community and poor community-police relations?
5. Boys & Girls Clubs (B&GC) focus attention on creating a sense of power and influence, competence, usefulness and belonging in young people with whom they work. What strategies would you suggest to increase B&GC's impact on young people in the inner-city?
6. What is the role of youth service organizations and the larger community to eradicate the negative impact of life in the inner-city?

RESOURCES

- The Boys & Girls Clubs of America, (404) 815-5700
- Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, (303) 492-8465
- US Department of Labor—Employment and Training Administration, www.doleta.gov

IV. Community & Neighborhood Issues

Alaissa discusses her reliance on public aid: "We're stuck on welfare...for one reason or another."

Dorothy indicates that when she and her children first moved into the Henry Horner Homes, the projects were safe, quiet and nice: "You could sleep with your doors open." What happened to the public housing initiative that grew out of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society? How did these housing complexes become rat-infested, dilapidated bastions of death, drugs and destruction? How did these residences become places seemingly designed to snuff out the dreams of hope and success for those forced to live in them?

HOUSING, WELFARE & EDUCATION: ISSUES OF COMMUNITY NEGLECT

Consistently, throughout both large and small cities, projects arose. Housing developments are characterized by poor maintenance; inadequate access to public transportation; poor sanitation and poor auxiliary services, such as lighting, telephone, gas; overcrowded, yet under-funded schools; erosion of small businesses and shops; and an increasing influx of and easy access to a wide array of drugs and guns. The steady erosion of basic services has led to frustration, often alienation and isolation on the parts of residents—

-FACT-

NEARLY 70% OF ALL HOUSEHOLDS LIVING IN PUBLIC HOUSING HAVE INCOMES LOWER THAN 30% OF LOCAL AREA MEDIAN INCOME. (FOR EXAMPLE, IF THE LOCAL AREA MEDIAN INCOME IS \$40,000, 30% OF THAT WOULD BE \$12,000.)



LEGACY Viewer's Guide

who over the last 40 years have become progressively more black and brown—and an increasingly callous, victim-blaming analysis from the larger society.

It is in such an environment that the Collins family finds itself trapped. As Dorothy says, “It’s hard living here, really hard.” [Review statistics on poverty, minimum wage, and quality of public housing found in other sections of this *Toolbox*.]

As a result of these factors, the family finds itself relying on public assistance. Yet, receiving assistance requires individuals to subject themselves to demeaning and dehumanizing behavior from those dispensing goods and services—aid, childcare, healthcare, job referral and food-stamps. In addition, to receive aid, one must distance oneself from both men and the more fully elaborated forms of family. Those demeaning and disregarding styles often are internalized, as reflected in Nickcole’s comment, “I am embarrassed because of welfare...[and Mom] not having a job.” Her mother, similarly impacted, feels “trapped on aid” because of her children, lack of a high school diploma and little confidence.

Often in the neighborhoods where public housing projects are located, the education system fails to prepare students adequately. As Nickcole says, “There are no college-prep classes at Madonna [Catholic high school].” Yet, this school was this family’s stretch to seek a better education for Nickcole and to prepare her for college. What did the school do, and what might they have done better? Without sufficient challenge, many children drop out of school, either to seek employment or to raise children.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What impact did living in the projects have on the Collins family?
2. What makes living in the projects so hard for the Collins family? If you lived in the projects, what could you do to maintain your sense of purpose and integrity?
3. Dorothy, the grandmother of the Collins family, said she wished Henry Horner Homes would be torn down. What if anything, could have been done to improve the project?
4. Nickcole was able to attend a “better” school, through sacrifice by her mother, the support of her mentor and encouragement of her grandmother. What impact might attending public school have potentially had on her aspirations and opportunities to seek a college education?
5. What adjustments did this family have to make to handle the realities of life in the projects? How might fear about the safety of her children influence a mother’s decision to work or not work?
6. What obstacles did Alaisa face when she tried to get a job? Discuss the external obstacles like childcare and lacking a diploma, as well as internal issues like fear and being overwhelmed.
7. What strategies might you think of to improve public housing? To improve public education? To improve public assistance?
8. If the Collins family were white, what, if any, opportunities might be more available to them? Are the opportunities to “escape” the projects/inner-city more available to white families than to black families? What role, if any, does race have on the options available to the Collins family?

RESOURCES

- US Department of Labor—Employment and Training Administration, www.doleta.gov
- National Partnership for Work and Family, (202) 986-2500

—FACT—

FAMILIES WITH
A FEMALE
HOUSEHOLDER (NO
SPOUSE PRESENT)
ACCOUNTED FOR
18.2% OF ALL
FAMILIES IN 1996;
YET THEY
ACCOUNTED FOR
54.1% OF ALL
POOR FAMILIES
THAT YEAR.

— BUREAU OF THE
CENSUS, 1997)



V. Impact of Trauma & Grief

Dorothy speaks about hearing the news that Terrell had been shot: “Deep down inside, I knew—I knew—Terrell was gone.”

The Collins family hurt deeply after losing Terrell because they had such a deep bond of connection and belonging. The connection is so strong that his grandmother could almost feel his pain in his last minutes of life. The news about Terrell’s death was devastating. None of the members of the Collins family could believe what had happened. Terrell, after all, had been their “miracle baby”—kidnapped, abandoned and found again—returned to the loving arms of his grandmother. In some ways, Terrell had carried all of the hopes of the family. He had been “the one.” Now he was gone, struck down before he had a chance to discover all of his talents.

Although the entire family was overwhelmed by the loss, Terrell’s brother Jack seemed most affected by it. Jack had been with Terrell when he was shot. He tried to keep his brother alive and voiced feelings of guilt and regret that he hadn’t been able to save Terrell. Jack’s response to the trauma of seeing his brother die, coupled with the violence of living in a community that lacked many of the fundamental requirements for nurturing or fostering human life led him to withdraw and numb himself through substance abuse. The various social, economic, political and cultural realities, and upheavals in the lives of the family, were severe. It seems consistent to expect that most people in similar situations would have negative and displaced responses, like Jack.

UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA:

CURRENT & CHRONIC REACTIONS

Psychological research defines four stages of loss, as shown in these incidences in the documentary:

- ✗ Shock/Denial—expressions of “no no no” (and sobbing) by family members.
- ✗ Anger—“In the news, Terrell’s killing was just another story” —Nickcole speaking about the news report.
- ✗ Sadness/Hurt—“How can I fill the space in my heart?” —Dorothy, expressing her pain.
- ✗ Acceptance/Understanding—“Happy Birthday, Terrell” —the family at the gravesite.

(See also the discussion on trauma in the Youth Development section of this *Toolbox*.)

Traumatic events often create emotional and psychological challenges for survivors. The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) says that emotional injuries are essentially a normal response to an extreme event, and the more direct exposure to the traumatic event, the higher the risk for emotional harm. However, even second-hand exposure to violence can be traumatic. For this reason, the NIMH recommends that all children and adolescents exposed to violence or disaster, even if only through graphic media reports, should be watched for signs of emotional distress.

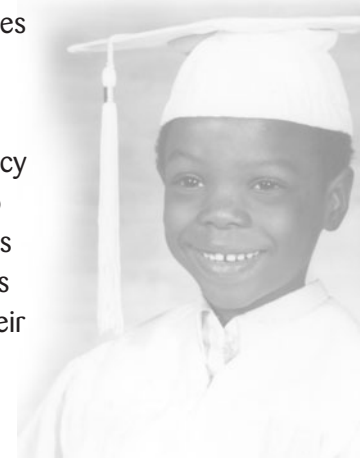
For adolescents and adults, signs may include: flashbacks, nightmares, emotional numbing, avoidance of reminders of the event, depression, substance abuse, problems with peers and anti-social behavior, withdrawal and isolation, sleep disturbances and physical complaints.

It is important to keep in mind three principles of crisis intervention—immediacy, proximity and expectancy. Immediacy emphasizes early awareness and detection by others close to the person, treatment as quickly as possible, and an emphasis on returning the client to their familiar life situation as soon as possible. Proximity emphasizes the need to treat clients in their

-FACT-

ALTHOUGH THE NUMBER OF JUVENILE MURDERS IS HIGHER TODAY THAN IT WAS IN THE 1980S, PUBLIC ATTENTION TO THIS CRISIS (SCHOOL, YOUTH AGENCY, PARENTAL, CHURCH AND COMMUNITY INTERVENTION) HAS CONTRIBUTED TO A STEADY DECLINE IN THE NUMBER OF JUVENILES MURDERED FOR THE PAST FOUR YEARS.

— BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS, US DEPT. OF JUSTICE



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own worlds—not distancing them from the environment. Lastly, it's important to communicate a clear expectancy that although fear and anxiety are normal processes, they do not excuse one from functioning adequately. The wounded role is not reinforced, and there is an emphasis on experiences that demonstrate that they are regaining the capacity to manage their lives.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Imagine that your child, full of unbridled potential, is accidentally killed. Now, suppose, it was murder. Describe the range of your emotions and actions. Would you be shocked? Angry? Depressed? Would you ever accept it?
2. How long do you think it would take you and your family to move on after such a traumatic event? What resources did the family rely on to incorporate Terrell's death into their family's saga and continue to move on?
3. Non-African Americans were in charge of many of the resources that the family relied upon. How might needing to rely on whites for help affect this family's sense of integrity and functionality?
4. Given the realities of their living situation, discuss the cumulative impact of Terrell's death on the Collins family. How did this affect them? Who could have reached out and supported the family?
5. Several of the family members said they kept their grief and stress inside. What effect might holding stress inside have on the functioning of these family members? What strategies can be helpful in accessing these emotional reactions?
6. The Collins family was shown visiting the gravesite to celebrate Terrell's birthday and to commemorate other important passages in the family. What is your opinion of this process as a coping strategy? How important is this process to maintaining the family's strength?

7. How well did the Collins family appear to demonstrate effective crisis management?
8. What other resources might have helped the family?
9. How might youth groups assist their members in managing current trauma and chronic trauma?

RESOURCES

- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, (202) 966-7300
- National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, (802) 296 5132
- National Institute of Mental Health, (301) 443-4513
- National Mental Health Association, (703) 684-7722

VI. Family Centeredness

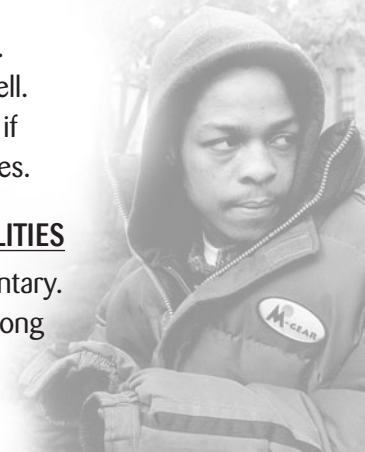
Nickcole described the loving support and protection provided by her grandmother, Dorothy: "Grandma watched out for all the grandkids as the neighborhood became more dangerous."

This deep connection between family members is the basis of the elasticity within African American families. It is often understood as interdependence, as reflected by the statement, "I am because you are and since you are, therefore I am." The idea is that one's sense of personal identity is so deeply connected with one's family, that when one family member is in pain, others feel it. When one family member is joyous, others are pleased as well. The loss of Terrell embodied new hope for the family. It is as if each of them became instilled with a bit of Terrell's possibilities.

AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILY ROLES, RULES & RESPONSIBILITIES

The family's connectivity is reflected throughout the documentary. Nickcole begins her story by describing the relationships among

THE FAMILY ALSO DEMONSTRATES THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES IN THE NGUZO SABA, THAT REFLECT CORE VALUES FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS, AND SERVE TO BUILD AND MAINTAIN FAMILY, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE.



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her grandmother, aunt, mother and their children. Dorothy supports the family through her steadfast resolve to care for her grandchildren during periods when her daughters struggled. Nickcole also commented about how she “kept going back to the projects because [her] family was there.”

The family also demonstrates the seven principles in the Nguzo Saba, that reflect core values for African Americans, and serve to build and maintain family, community and culture. **Unity** is the first value and is seen in the Collins family's deep and enduring connection to one another. **Self-determination** is the second value and is seen in this family's dogged determination to work, find better living environments and become educated. **Collective work and responsibility** is the third value and is seen in the family's mutual assistance that they provide to one another. **Cooperative economics** is seen most through the mother and aunt sharing resources to provide for their collective children. We see **purpose and creativity** in each family member's desire to make a better way. Finally, **faith** is demonstrated in the family's recognition that although Terrell died, his death and their faith would lead to a better life for all of them.

In the documentary, few males were shown as impacting this family—Terrell, Jack, Kenny Butler, Johnny Pierre and Mike Byrnes. According to 1997 Department of Labor statistics, women head the households in approximately 47% of African American families.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think keeps this family together, given all of the obstacles they face?
2. Each member of the Collins family appears to have an expectation that they will eventually have a “better life.” From where do you think those expectations come?

3. Nickcole expressed her need to work hard at school, the Boys & Girls Club, the frame shop. What value is associated with such a commitment? Where do you suppose she learned those values?
4. Nickcole's mother said, at one point in the documentary, “I have to make a better way for me and my family.” What kind of help does someone in her position need to accomplish her goals?
5. At several points, members of the family gather at Terrell's gravesite. While there, they celebrate his birthday, and several engage in conversation with him as if he can still talk with them. What cultural value might this behavior represent? How helpful do you think this is as the family adjusts to Terrell's death?
6. The film demonstrates the family's participation in two of Nickcole's rites of passage: her graduation from high school and her marriage. What impact might the family's participation have on the younger children? How does the family's participation in these activities create legacies for their young?
7. Discuss some of the reasons why African American men may be away from their families in the inner-city. What might youth development programs do to impact the issues of distant male figures?
8. How could youth service organizations help African American families reinforce these cultural values to strengthen the families' ability to “make a better way”?

—FACT—

THERE ARE APPROXIMATELY 6 MILLION AMERICANS ADDICTED TO ILLEGAL DRUGS, INCLUDING 3.6 MILLION CHRONIC COCAINE USERS. THERE ARE NEARLY 10 MILLION FEWER DRUG USERS THAN THERE WERE IN 1985; 74% FEWER REGULAR COCAINE USERS, AND 45% REGULAR USERS OF ILLICIT DRUGS.

— NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON DRUG ABUSE, NATIONAL INSTITUTES ON HEALTH



THE PRESENCE OF
ROLE MODELS
AND MENTORS
CAN GREATLY
HELP IN
THE PROCESS
OF BUILDING
SELF-ESTEEM.
A ONE-ON-ONE
RELATIONSHIP
WITH A MENTOR
CAN BE A
POWERFUL FORCE
IN A YOUNG
PERSON'S LIFE.

RESOURCES

- The Boys and Girls Clubs of America, (404) 815-5700
- Alliance for Children and Families, (800) 221-3726
- Family Resource Coalition of America, (312) 338-0900
- National Center on Fathers and Families, www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu
- National Parenting Association, (212) 362-7575
- Association of Black Psychologists, (310) 568-9274

VII. Addiction & Recovery

Wanda discussed how she became reliant on drugs: "I used drugs to medicate my mind." Wanda also talked about her addiction recovery: "I was tired of being in pain."

Addiction and recovery are two of the central themes in the documentary. Wanda and Jack talked about using drugs and alcohol, and Wanda went through a recovery program to overcome her addiction.

Wanda's story was ultimately uplifting. Before she recovered, she talked frankly about her addictions and her sense of guilt. She described leaving her children home alone, and we learned that Terrell was born during a time when Wanda was using drugs. Wanda confided in the film that she felt she could have been a better mother to Terrell, whom the family called their "miracle baby."

The issue of addiction in urban communities is a complicated one. Considerable questions can be raised regarding how drugs can be found so abundantly within these communities, the ease with which drugs are bought and sold, and the lack of other non-drug related economic opportunities. Indeed, Wanda comments about how she consistently found drugs, even after being clean and

sober, throughout the projects. Although many people still see addiction as a moral weakness, versus a powerful disease, the questions regarding access and availability within urban communities is often insufficiently addressed.

Wanda's words at her graduation from the treatment center were powerful. "I was a lost individual. I didn't know which way to turn. Everything was just going wrong in my life. Other people didn't have respect for me. I really know who Wanda is today. I don't have to go out there and waste my life no more. I put my life in God's hands and I know if I continue to do things on a daily basis, it's going to be OK today. If you haven't ever seen a miracle, look around you because there are miracles all around you."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the reasons that people use drugs?
2. How do you respond to the statement that people use drugs to "escape?"
3. Are illegal drugs an international problem? If so, how?
4. What transnational forces contribute to illegal drug use?
5. Can illegal drug use be eliminated? If yes, how? If not, why not?
6. How do you explain the easy access to and availability of drugs in urban communities?
7. How can churches and other faith organizations respond to the problem of alcohol and other drug addictions in the inner-city?



8. How do you explain the concentration of liquor stores in inner-city neighborhoods?
9. What can youth service organizations do to stop the availability of drugs and alcohol in inner-city neighborhoods?

RESOURCES

- Narcotics Anonymous (Nar-Anon), (310) 547-5800
- Alcoholics Anonymous, (212) 870-3400
- National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), (888) 644-6432
- National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information, (800) 729-6680

VIII. Race & Racism: Impacts on African American Families

"In the news, Terrell's killing...was just another story." Nickcole's comment seemed to reflect her sense that Terrell's shooting and death had been discounted in the major media as simply another example of "Black-on-Black" violence; just another example of the moral chaos and violence so characteristic of inner-city Black neighborhoods. Nickcole seemed to reflect her understanding of the insidious nature of the racial worldview that dismissed and disregarded the welfare and well being of African Americans.

THE RACIAL WORLDVIEW

Race is and has been a pervasive component of American thought and experience. It has been so fundamental and intrinsic to how Americans see and explain the functioning of the world, its meaning or reality is rarely questioned. Race has been used as the ultimate classification of social identity, effecting how we interact with and are influenced by others. Indeed, race has been seen as such a part of the "natural order" of things that the

mere physical variation in humans has been used as evidence of its existence and as justification of mistreatment of broad cross-sections of the human family.

Race, as used and furthered in the US, is essentially about worth and inequality of status; it reflects unassailable social distances; it represents ideas of profound and unbridgeable difference. It is an idea based on the fundamental inequality of humans due to phenotypic differences. Race, as a strategy for organizing the worth of humans, has had long term and significant impact on every institution, idea and system of beliefs existing in the world today.

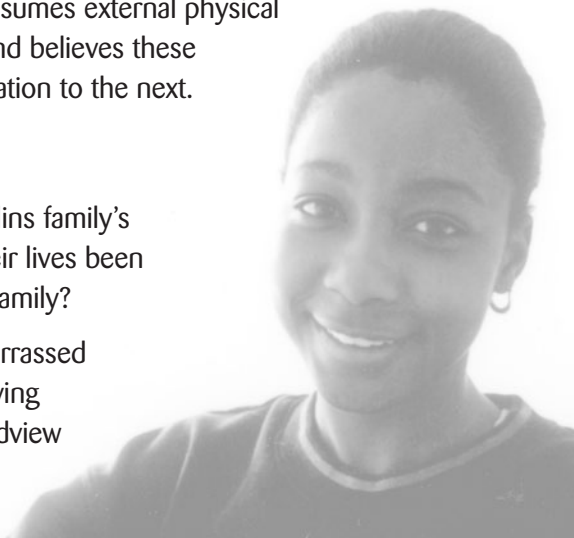
These differences, and the resulting sense of difference, are structured into US society through division of housing; education, training and income disparity; pervasive social taboos against socializing and intermarriage; social restrictions against common memberships in organizations (notably the church); and virtually all means for transmitting culture—music, arts, literature, theater, television, film, recreational activities, businesses, politics and political forums, educational institutions and scientific research.

The Collins family exists under this powerful and racial worldview—a worldview that classifies humans as exclusive members of different groups; judges groups as better or worse based on their similarity to Northern European groups; assumes external physical qualities reflect inferior internal realities; and believes these qualities are passed down from one generation to the next.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What impact does race have on the Collins family's social existence? In what ways have their lives been impacted by their treatment as a Black family?
2. When Nickcole comments, "I am embarrassed because of welfare...[and Mom] not having a job," what impact does the racial worldview

ALTHOUGH ALAISSA WAS STILL BURDENED BY MANY OF THE PROBLEMS OF BEING A SINGLE MOTHER, WITH A MODEST SALARY, SHE REINFORCED HER CHARACTER BY SHOWING HER CHILDREN THAT DIFFICULT CHANGE WAS BOTH POSSIBLE AND ACHIEVABLE.



have on her? How much is she internalizing the devalued worth of her family by the larger white society?

3. Wanda said that other people didn't have respect for her, when discussing her drug use. What impact did racism have on her sense of lack of respect from others?
4. What might have been the impact on the Collins family of having the majority of help-providers, at least depicted in the film, be white?
5. What impact does the racial worldview have on the development of large-scale underdeveloped urban housing developments? Does the presumption that "those people just live like that," impact the provision of basic services to urban communities where Black people live?
6. How comfortable or uncomfortable is it to discuss seriously the impact of the racial worldview on the life conditions of African Americans? How does the difficulty discussing race affect the development of strategies to reduce its negative influence on families like the Collinses?
7. What avenues are currently available to address the deleterious effects of the racial worldview and racism on African Americans? On other ethnic groups? On US society as a whole?
8. What role can youth service organizations have in addressing the impact of the racial worldview and elevating African American cultural expressions and viability?
9. What might you, your agency or constituents do to challenge the hold the racial worldview has on our understanding of human difference in the US? What support do you need from others?

IX. Character Development

Nickcole talks about what matters in becoming successful: "Those who make it have love, they have help, they have hope from their family and friends."

Beauty is seen in human conduct, in humanity itself, and in the character of a person. The struggle to do the right things, to make oneself beautiful is a manifestation of a person's character. Character is the distinctive mark of a person, thing or phenomena.

One way to think about Nickcole's "self-esteem" is to understand it as her struggle to do the right things for her family and in her own life—to develop good character. It was the Collins family's commitment to do the right things—to strengthen their resolve and character—to make themselves more beautiful, that drove them to seek to better their lives.

Nickcole found the challenge to do good things through her school work, sports and helping her family; her mother, through her new work, supporting and teaching her children; her aunt, in her decision to rid herself of drugs and alcohol; and her grandmother, through watching over all her children and grandchildren.

Character is always forged through the opportunities with which one is presented with to make right choices. Character results from chances (opportunities) to make right choices (decisions).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of the statement, "I am, because we are, and because we are, I am?" How does this statement relate to character development?
2. Describe this family's relationships to each other. How did these relationships impact their personal character and the family's character?

-FACT-

AS PUBLIC RESOURCES SHRINK, COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES TO DELIVERING SERVICES AND/OR PROGRAMMING AT THE LOCAL LEVEL ARE BECOMING NOT ONLY OPTIONS, BUT ESSENTIAL STRATEGIES.



3. How can the faith community share the responsibility of developing the character of youth/adults?
4. What role do elders have in developing the character of youth/adults?
5. How does the programming of B&GC's impact the development of good character of the participants?
6. How could youth service organizations have assisted Nickcole and her family in developing good character?

RESOURCES

- Boys and Girls Clubs of America, (404) 815-5700
- National Youth Development Information Center, (877) 693-4248
- National Association for Self-Esteem, (800) 488-6273
- YouthTree USA, www.youthtreeusa.com

X. Life Skills & Career Development

Alaissa speaks proudly about Nickcole: "All my talking paid off and I know she's going to make it."

Alaissa invested countless hours talking with Nickcole about working to fulfill her destiny, that of being a contributor to the community. Nickcole, however, began to question her mother's own commitment, because she misunderstood her mother's own sacrifice for her children. As Alaissa noticed Nickcole's difficulty completing her goals of doing well in school, Alaissa decided that she would have to demonstrate life development. Words alone would not be enough.

So, Alaissa began to challenge herself to overcome her self-doubt. She tried job fairs and job-training programs. Although

her search was limited because of the lack of childcare, limited education, and the condescending attitudes of those providing job training, she continued to sacrifice for her children.

Alaissa's situation improved when she was given a chance to work in the elementary school that Terrell and Nickcole had attended. Thus, Alaissa was provided a chance to make a choice about whether she would provide a conventional model of career development for her children. Gradually, Alaissa moved into a full-time teaching job that garnered respect and gave her the opportunity to demonstrate her commitment to provide for her children.

Although she was still burdened by many of the problems of being a single mother, with a modest salary, she reinforced her character by showing her children that difficult change was both possible and achievable.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What factors contribute to the type of career one seeks?
2. What are some obstacles that inhibit upward mobility for "people of color," and how can the faith community and youth support groups help to prepare youth/adults to confront these obstacles?
3. What lessons did Nickcole learn from her family that impacted her career path?
4. What are some of the difficulties in making life changes, generally? During adulthood? When one has children?
5. What impact does condescension have on job-seeking strategies?
6. The Collins family lacked economic resources. What family resources did they have that contributed to their personal and family career development?

-FACT-

IN FOUR OUT OF EVERY FIVE LARGE CENTRAL CITY SCHOOLS AT LEAST 70% OF STUDENTS ARE POOR AND MORE THAN HALF ARE MEMBERS OF MINORITY GROUPS. RECRUITING HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS IS VERY HARD FOR SCHOOLS WHERE MORALE IS LOW, SETBACKS ARE MANY, AND THE VIOLENCE OF THE STREETS—OR, LITERALLY ON THE SCHOOL GROUNDS—IS NEVER FAR AWAY.

— US GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE



RESOURCES

- Boys and Girls Clubs of America, (404) 815-5700
- US Department of Labor—Employment and Training Administration, www.doleta.gov
- National Partnership for Work and Family, (202) 986-2500
- Alliance for Children and Families, (800) 221-3726

XI. Association of Black Psychologists

National Office	Southern California Chapter
P.O. Box 55999	Cheryl Grills, Ph.D.
Washington, DC 20040-5999	So. CA Chapter President
Tel: (202) 722-0808	The Imoyase Group, Inc.
Fax: (202) 722-5941	8939 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Ste. 208
Admin@ABPsi.org	Los Angeles, CA 90048
	Tel: (310) 568-9274
	Fax: (310) 568-0070

An autonomous organization of over 1,400 members, the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi) sees its mission and destiny as the liberation of the African Mind, empowerment of the African Character, and enlivenment and illumination of the African Spirit. The ABPsi was founded in San Francisco in 1968 by Black Psychologists from across the country who came together to actively address the serious problems facing Black Psychologists and the larger Black community. Guided by the principle of self-determination, these psychologists set about building an institution through which they could address the long neglected needs of Black professionals. Their goal was to have a positive impact upon the mental health of the national Black community by means of planning, programs, services, training and advocacy.

This *Viewer's Guide* was written by Daryl M. Rowe, Ph.D., Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. Currently, Dr. Rowe is the National Chair of

The African Psychology Institute, the training arm of the Association of Black Psychologists, where he has recently coordinated the development of a comprehensive curriculum for African Psychology.

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