

## Minority Education

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### The Hand That Rocks the Cradle

Mothers teach. They teach their children principles that stay with them all their lives. These precepts are reflective of the moral-kind-proper-sound-pleasant-healthy-obedient-favorable-qualified-approved qualities needed for growth and to keep the peace. They lay the groundwork for helping children resolve the conflicts and contradictions they will eventually face as adults. Mothers of minority children are even more key in serving as a conduit between self-growth and some of our society's inconsistencies.

Mothers and grandmothers are sacred persons, instilling a sense of worth, well-being, and identity—both spiritually and physically—in their offspring. Their teachings are, in a way, another "10 Commandments." Mothers are the first to teach the importance of (1) cleanliness in thought and deed. They teach (2) how to pick up behind yourself—not because Santa will not bring anything new if you don't but because you must be respon-

sible for what Santa has provided already. Mother shows you how to (3) cook food, and (4) how to wash and iron clothes, just in case she has to work late or attend a professional, community, or religious meeting.

Not in isolation, and always supportive and in concert with mother, is grandmother. Many minority mothers and grandmothers teach a very important commandment, (5) "Eat as much as you want, but be sure you eat everything on your plate." Those of us who have marketing responsibilities for our households know the only food that is expensive is the food we do not eat. Grandmothers—often called "Ma" and "Mama"—demonstrate through many behaviors why it is important that (6) the family spend time together. When I was growing up, our togetherness consisted of such events as picking figs from the tree, swinging on the porch, catching lightning bugs, or buying from the Hot Tamale Man, "Git yo' hot tamales here."

Because of grandmothers, there is always an opportunity for (7) prayer time, with meals and later when it's time to "Now I lay me down to sleep." My grandmother also knew that everyone needs quiet time, alone, for spiritual and mental growth. Her actions then remind me now of the philosopher who said that all our miseries derive from not being able to sit quietly in a room alone.

Grandmothers blend two other characteristics necessary for growth, (8) respect for the opposite sex, and (9) respect for self. When I was a small boy, for instance, my grandmother constantly reminded me that "a gentleman never leaves the house without a handkerchief." At the time, I knew what a handkerchief was, and now I know what it is to be a gentleman. I can still hear her whisper, "Now Walter-Arthur, you do me proud."

And, finally, the 10th commandment mothers teach a child is that he or she is *somebody*. My grandmother used to

call me "Platinum" because, she said, "It's more precious than gold."

Mothers teach. The impact minority mothers and grandmothers have, and can have, on children is immeasurable. These sacred women, traditionally, have been about survival. Their spiritual and functional energy should be experienced and acted out more by minority youth because these women teach survival and lifelong learning skills. Teach on, mother dear. □

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