

## Acknowledgments

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Office of Community Services  
Washington, DC

**Co-sponsor:**

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University of Minnesota  
School of Social Work  
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**Domestic Violence Across the Lifespan of African Americans:  
Traditional Strategies and Contemporary Practices—  
Exploring the Possibilities of Popular Culture Interventions**

*December 4-5, 1998*

*San Francisco, CA*

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## Foreword

*Mr. William D. Riley*

As we approach the new century, the struggle to end domestic violence in all communities continues. Various intervention strategies have been introduced to address this phenomenon; however, none has effectively met the specific needs of African Americans. Culturally relevant approaches to violence prevention and intervention are essential to achieving positive outcomes in potentially noxious situations. The Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community recognizes popular culture as an effective prevention and intervention strategy to effect change among African American populations. Accordingly, the Institute convened its *Domestic Violence Across the Lifespan of African Americans: Traditional Strategies and Contemporary Practices—Exploring the Possibilities of Popular Culture Interventions* forum to introduce popular culture as a violence prevention and intervention strategy. This pioneering effort advanced media, music, theater, and dance as tools to educate African American populations about domestic violence.

Researchers, academicians, practitioners, administrators, and observers of domestic violence in the African American community attended the forum. Plenary sessions provided overviews of traditional strategies used to address domestic violence among African American children, youth, adults, and elders. Traditional synopses were followed by contemporary, culturally specific presentations employing popular culture techniques to address violence for each targeted population. This approach, like any other new strategy, does not preclude the need for traditional approaches to violence prevention and intervention. Instead, popular culture offers a chance to explore new ways of mitigating violence in the homes and communities of African Americans.

Even with the introduction of contemporary approaches to dealing with destructive behaviors, there remains a great deal of work to be done. Each brutal interaction begs the development of new techniques to diminish the prevalence of violence. Each assault reaffirms the need for strategies to eradicate the violence that is destroying African American families. Let us not be content with the innovative popular culture practices introduced at this forum. Instead, let us view these presentations as catalysts, driving us to do more and continue striving to reduce and ultimately eliminate the violence that impacts us all.



## **History and Importance of the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community**

### ***Presenter:***

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The Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community (Institute) is a continuously evolving entity. The Institute's purpose is illustrated by its mission:

*To provide an interdisciplinary vehicle and forum by which scholars, practitioners, and observers of family violence in the African American community will have the continual opportunity to articulate their perspective on family violence through research findings, the examination of service delivery and intervention mechanisms, and the identification of appropriate and effective responses to prevent/reduce family violence in the African American community.*

In order for the Institute to realize this mission, we must bridge gaps that exist between researchers examining the issues that impact African American families and practitioners delivering services to this population. Moreover, our work must remain holistic, recognizing that the African American community is not monolithic, but rather characterized by diversity. We must further acknowledge that violence occurs in diverse households—those that differ in structure, interpersonal dynamics, and socioeconomic status—and we must advance intervention and prevention strategies that are applicable to both common and uncommon scenarios of domestic violence.

### **Important Events in the Institute's History**

A number of important events helped shaped the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community. The first was an impromptu, informal gathering at the National Family Violence Conference, held in Pittsburgh in December 1993. It was at this conference that a group of scholars and practitioners began discussing their concerns about the plight of the African American community in the area of domestic violence. From this discussion, one clear idea emerged: The policies and intervention strategies that had been designed from a “one size fits all” perspective fail to address the needs of African Americans.

Subsequently, a Steering Committee formed and met in Detroit in September 1994. The group was tasked with developing a mission statement for the Institute and outlining the organization's goals and objectives.

The group held its first public forum May 31-June 2, 1995, in Minneapolis. A great deal of work was accomplished in Minnesota. Plenary sessions featured scholars and practitioners who shared cutting-edge research and their comments and viewpoints on domestic violence in the African American community. Proceedings for the forum were published later that year. It was a humble beginning for the organization, but a significant milestone in the Institute's development.

On December 4-6, 1997, the Institute hosted its second forum, *Assembling the Pieces: Leadership in Addressing Domestic Violence in the African American Community*, in Atlanta. There was an amazing synergy amongst the participants of this forum. Presenters focused on such topics as welfare reform, partner abuse, the role of institutions in mitigating violence, and the bridges between the field of domestic violence and other destructive behaviors. Again, proceedings for the forum were published and widely distributed.

June 5-6, 1998 marked a milestone event for the Institute—the Grand Opening of its office at the University of Minnesota School of Social Work. The event theme, *Many Partners, One Goal: Confronting Domestic Violence in the African American Community*, reflected the Institute's recognition of the collaboration required to reduce/eliminate domestic violence in the African American community. It was at this forum that the Institute's focus became one of collaboration. Participants examined ways to forge alliances to begin combating domestic violence in all communities—particularly African American communities. Proceedings have been published for this event as well.

The *Domestic Violence Across the Lifespan of African Americans: Traditional Strategies and Contemporary Practices—Exploring the Possibilities of Popular Culture Interventions* forum affords us the opportunity to write yet another chapter in the history of our young organization. It is at this forum that we will examine traditional methods of violence intervention across the lifespan of African Americans and explore new methods to achieve the overall goal of reducing/eliminating violence in our communities.

Our methods are participatory. We learn with and from each other. As you join us for this forum's activities, we hope that you too will lend your voices, perspectives, and energy to confront violence in our families and communities.

## Executive Summary

The Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community convened its *Domestic Violence Across the Lifespan of African Americans: Traditional Strategies and Contemporary Practices—Exploring the Possibilities of Popular Culture Interventions* forum December 4-5, 1998, in San Francisco, California. Researchers, scholars, service providers, program administrators, and other individuals interested in domestic violence in the African American community attended the event.

The purpose of the forum, as indicated by its title, was to provide an overview of domestic violence across the lifespan of African Americans; address its prevalence in the African American community; examine historical and culturally specific prevention and intervention tools; and finally, share examples of popular culture interventions. The forum included four plenary sessions that addressed violence at each stage of the lifespan: children, youth, adults, and elders.

The session on children explored traditional mental health interventions, as well as alternative popular interactive strategies for engaging children in anti-violence messages. Dr. Gloria Johnson-Powell from the University of Chicago's Chapin Hall Center for Children began the session by highlighting family violence trends in the United States over the last 2 decades. She explained the developmental implications of family violence and conflict on children and explored the effects of psychological maltreatment of children as a result of domestic violence. Ms. Sarah Crowell from the Oakland-based Destiny Arts Center recounted the story of the organization, a small, nonprofit center committed to providing programs that deter youth from involvement in violence. Ms. Crowell introduced youth performers from the center that rendered a compelling performance that included martial art techniques, jazz and hip hop dance, and dramatic presentations.

The teens/youth session addressed youth peer violence prevention and youth dating violence prevention among African Americans. This segment included a discussion on the use of multimedia products in the prevention of such violence. Ms. Renée Wilson-Brewer from the Massachusetts-based Educational Development Center shared research findings on teen victimization and perpetration rates. Ms. Wilson-Brewer probed the audience to consider the frequency with which youth are exposed to violence and how violence is trivialized in American society. She highlighted school-based interventions as a necessary strategy to curb the violence experienced by African American teens. Mr. Ivan Juzang of the Philadelphia-based MEE Productions, Inc. shared results of a national study conducted by MEE, in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and played video footage of focus groups held with urban youth from around the country. Mr. Juzang explained how the lack of verbal and social skills hinders youth from establishing and maintaining successful intimate relationships. He also examined the provocations of disrespect and the acceptance of violence in dating relationships among youth.

The session on adults examined culturally relevant intervention strategies to address domestic violence in adult relationships, including those of heterosexual men and women, lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgenders. Ms. Dána Davis of the City University of New York examined strategies—unorganized, organized, and marginally documented—that have attempted to keep individuals safe from violence. She then probed the audience to critique the strategies and

determine if they were universally applicable. Ms. Kelly Mitchell-Clark of the San Francisco-based Family Violence Prevention Fund played a radio campaign intended to reduce domestic violence against African American women by removing community acceptance of abuse. Ms. Mitchell-Clark's presentation also highlighted a companion effort that uses media advocacy, materials development, and event sponsorship to mobilize Bay Area African Americans against domestic violence.

The elders session identified key issues around the manifestation of elder maltreatment, defined various types of abuse, and explored public service announcements and theater as intervention strategies. Dr. Linner Ward-Griffin, a member of the Institute Steering Committee, emphasized the importance of studying elder maltreatment and presented research findings from a qualitative study conducted on elder maltreatment in African American communities. Ms. Charyn Sutton of The Onyx Group in Pennsylvania shared the development and research findings of the State of Pennsylvania's award-winning elder abuse prevention campaign targeted at African Americans, Hispanics, and the rural poor. Finally, Ms. Rhodessa Jones of Cultural Odyssey, a San Francisco-based performance company, gave a theatrical performance that addressed domestic violence and other issues that impact African Americans. Ms. Jones also shared the history of the Medea Project, a program she conceived that employs an arts-based approach to reduce the recidivism rate of incarcerated women.

Every plenary session offered an overview of traditional strategies to domestic violence prevention and intervention for each of the targeted populations. The plenary sessions also introduced contemporary approaches that entailed the use of media, music, drama, and dance to educate communities on domestic violence. Forum participants engaged in meaningful discussions around domestic violence issues for African Americans of all ages.

Other highlights of the forum included the San Francisco Mayor's proclamation of December 4, 1998 as Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community Day. The forum also included poetry readings from Mr. Ras Mo Moses and a keynote address featuring Dr. Joseph E. Marshall, Jr. of the Omega Boys Club.