



Honor. Acknowledge. Love.

Ashanti Bryant and Family



February 2022

Strong Fathers / Padres Fuertes



Celebrating Black History, our history.



"Love takes off the masks we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within."

James Baldwin

February's focus on Black History Month offers us an opportunity to demonstrate love of people through honoring lived experiences. Doing such, gives way to growth of our humanity. There have been times of impactful change deserving of celebrating every day; we are currently living in one of those moments as we reflect on Black history and understand it as American history.

Here are three ways to observe it. Honor the numerous and too often not recognized contributions of Black Americans. Acknowledge their central role current day and in U.S. history. Love by supporting community and addressing racial inequity.

1 *Educate*

by seeking out and understanding black history. Online libraries and credible websites help.

2 *Enhance*

your knowledge of the past and present pain and progress of Black Americans.

3 *Engage*

in ways to celebrate love and culture and stand against injustices toward Black Americans.

“Fatherhood is one of the most challenging and beautiful life experiences a man can have! From nurturing and pampering to correction and coaching, healthy fathers have a range of emotions and experiences with their children. In my family, I’m the source of encouragement and counsel while simultaneously being the voice of accountability and assertive discipline. In my house, you’d observe hugs and laughs in the same hour with crocodile tears and a shouting match!

There are added complexities to being a black father of black children living and being raised in West Michigan. Not only do I carry the responsibility of providing and caring for my children, but I have to prepare them for the unfortunate yet common experiences of being profiled, discriminated against, minimized, misjudged, hyper-observed or virtually ignored. In their education, I have to equip them to be advocates for themselves in schools who often have become comfortable with low expectations for black children. Regardless of my graduate degrees, accomplishments, homeownership or income level as a father, I still encounter people surprised by my involvement and commitment to my children-- as if I’m some kind of unicorn or special outlier! It’s an unnecessary burden, but one that I’ll gladly bear to position my children for every opportunity for success possible.”

Ashanti Bryant

“To truly love we must learn to mix various ingredients — care, affection, recognition, respect, commitment, and trust, as well as honest and open communication.”

Bell Hooks



Beauty in Fatherhood

William Burress and Family



"This love is understanding; it knows that we will fail and not even like ourselves at times. But this love will choose us every time we fall."

"As February 14th nears, it can be a time of sadness and loneliness for us single people as society teaches us to play the comparison game. So much energy surrounds finding your forever one, other-half, or soulmate in this world. However, before we can succeed in a relationship with another person, we must first learn self-love. So let's take advantage of this time to practice some self-love regardless of if you are in a romantic relationship or single.

But what is self-love? First, we have to know what love is. My definition of love comes from William J O'Mailey, SJ. "Genuine love isn't just a feeling. Love is an act of the will, a commitment that takes over when the feelings fail, when the beloved is no longer even likable for a while." from their book *Own Yourself: How to form your Conscience*. This definition allows us grace. This love is understanding; it knows that we will fail and not even like ourselves at times. But this love will choose us every time we fall.

As people, we need to do better to embrace our full humanity. Expecting happiness 24 hours a day is unrealistic and sets us up for failure. Knowing that we will laugh and cry, be proud and shameful, and feel joy and hurt makes us stronger. There is no shame in feeling hurt, pain, or sadness, but we must recognize all of our emotions. And self-love gives us that space to be whole.

As men, we have often learned that we must be tough, stoic, and not show emotion. Unfortunately, this limited framework has emotionally held us back. We have been told not to cry, to rub dirt in our wounds, or that "if you want something to cry about, I'll give you something to cry about." We must unlearn these lessons and learn that we are worthy of love, especially from ourselves.

Self-love is understanding we are works in progress. And we may never become finished products. But despite our status, we are still worthy of love. And this, self-love, is no small act. First, we must unlearn the capitalistic lessons that we are not enough. We are not defined by our possessions, but by the richness of our connections. When we show up for ourselves, we can better show up for others. We cannot pour into our partners, children, or families if we barely make it ourselves. These are the lessons to pass on to our children, our nieces and nephews, our godchildren, and to those who look up to us.

But we cannot love ourselves without accountability. We must establish boundaries. And these boundaries are not limits, but invitations for others to treat us how we deserve to be treated. Doing the self-work, honoring our boundaries, and showing up as our authentic selves are the keys to self-love. So this February, as we love those in our lives, we cannot forget the most important person, ourselves."



Santiago Gayton , M.A.



Self Love



Martin Luther King Jr. Park

The Parks Commission purchased the land for Franklin Park in 1911. A swimming pool and lodge were added in 1919, and tennis courts were removed in 1956 to make way for a playground. Franklin Park was renamed as a memorial to Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in June, 1969.

MLK Park, nicknamed King Park by the neighborhood, is a large community park on the city's southeast side.

In addition to a playground underneath aged shade trees, there are numerous tennis and basketball courts for local and team playing, baseball diamonds, and everyone's favorite: a large pool with a massive water slide!

This 16-acre park has room for anything you'd like to do.

The lodge at MLK Park is home to local neighborhood meetings and is slated to undergo renovation in 2022 to facilitate community activities and rentals. It has restrooms and changing rooms for the pool.

South East Area Farmer's Market is found on select Saturdays during the growing season and the park is home to many community events, like Movies in the Park and neighborhood celebrations.

Address = 900 Fuller Ave SE Grand Rapids, MI 49506

Our parks in winter

More snow gives us more to do! Stay active and always play. Here is a park to check out!



Checkout this Book

at your local library or barbershop.

Matthew A. Cherry wears many hats as a film director, producer and editor. With his debut picture book, *Hair Love*, he can now add children's book author to that list. A colorful collaboration with illustrator Vashti Harrison (*Little Leaders*), *Hair Love* was inspired by an animated short of the same name created by Cherry to spotlight the lack of appreciation for African American textured hair in animation. He's transitioned the story from film to page, and the result is an ode to the incredible versatility of African American hair and the charming resilience of a dad dedicated to his daughter.

Zuri is a young African American girl who introduces readers to her fabulous hair, which "kinks, coils, and curls every which way." Harrison's dreamy digital artwork showcases Zuri's different styles, including a 'fro that literally sparkles, intricate braids and afro puffs that look as soft as the curling clouds that border the page. There's even a nod to the "magic" of shrinkage, when stretched or straightened hair curls up tight and "shrinks" after getting wet. Using before and after visual vignettes, Zuri explains, "From large to small it went. Presto! Just like that! There is nothing my hair can't do!"

[Breanna McDaniel](#)

The book focuses on Zuri, the go-getter preschooler who thinks her big and fluffy hair is magical and Stephen, the 20-something working father who is committed to his daughter even if it means watching YouTube to learn how to do her textured hair

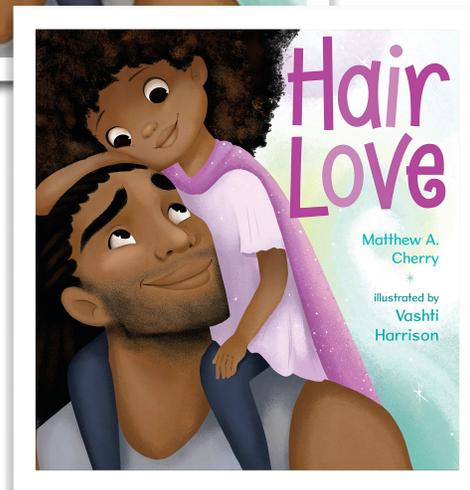
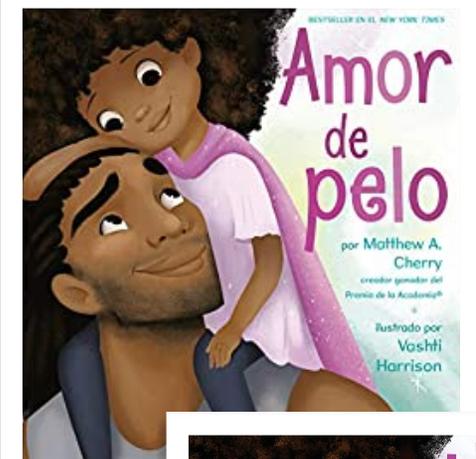
Cherry collaborated with Illustrator Vashti Harrison to develop every aspect of both characters. Cherry said he imagined Zuri's dad as the type of guy people would stereotype. Stephen has a noticeable tattoo on his right arm and wears shoulder length dreadlocks.

"We really wanted him to be a representative of the new wave of young black fathers who may look a certain way, but when it comes to their kids they would do anything for them," Cherry said.

NPR



Matthew A. Cherry



Reading is fun!

Manhood Monday

JOIN US THIS MANHOOD MONDAY:

February 14th , 2022, 5-6pm Watch the event **LIVE** on [facebook.com/StrongDadsGR/](https://www.facebook.com/StrongDadsGR/)



Don and Mary Williams :

A proud mother of 3 grown children, 7 grown grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren, member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. and very active in her local chapter - Grand Rapids Alumnae Chapter, and Rutgers University graduate, Mary E. Williams is a giant in the Grand Rapids community. She remains busy in her bible studies, sorority activities and with her grandchildren and great grands.

A retired dean of Grand Valley State University, Donald Williams is recognized as the first African American person to receive the title of Dean Emeritus. Originally from the west side of Detroit, Dean Williams is an alumni of Eastern Michigan University and West Virginia University. As a member of Sigma Pi Phi, Kappa Alpha Psi, Urban League of West Michigan, Dean Williams is tirelessly involved in the needs of his community.

Together for 60 years, Don and Mary will converse with us on what love means to them as a partnership kept in faith, lived in hope, and made new every day.

Fatherhood team members Maximiliano Velasco & William Burress will be facilitating our conversation as well as guiding us to a deeper understanding of history, family, and self love.



William Burress & Maximiliano Velasco



Healthy Kent Dads Count! Coalition

"Dads Count brings together a variety of organizations that serve families, including public health, social services and education. The Coalition and its member organizations host professional, educational opportunities for those who work with families, as well as occasionally holding community events that educate and empower fathers.



Partnership Spotlight



STRONG FATHERS

What about fathers?

Children whose fathers are involved in their lives are more confident, get better grades and avoid risky behaviors. Our fatherhood initiative seeks to strengthen families by encouraging fathers to play an active role in nurturing and raising their children through mentoring, education, and father-child activities.



Strong Fathers/Padres Fuertes is available to male partners of Strong Beginnings clients and to men raising a child through 18 months.

Male staff can meet virtually, in your home or other convenient location.

Services include:

- Education on topics like men's health, healthy relationships, and infant care
- Ideas on how men can support their partners during pregnancy and after
- Information on parenting and child development
- Help with getting transportation, job training, food, legal advice, baby supplies and medical care
- Referrals to counseling for stress and depression
- Help with building life skills such as communication, budgeting, goal-setting, and resilience

For information contact William Burress

Fatherhood Coordinator at:

616-340-2981, william.burress@spectrumhealth.org

or visit our website

www.strongbeginningskent.org/Enroll

PADRES FUERTES



¿Y los padres?

Los niños cuyos sus padres están envueltos en sus vidas tienen más confianza, obtienen mejores calificaciones, y evitan comportamientos peligrosos. Nuestra iniciativa de paternidad busca fortalecer a las familias alentando a los padres a desempeñar un papel activo en la educación y crianza de sus hijos a través de la tutoría, la educación, y actividades de padre e hijo.



Padres Fuertes

"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

Frederick Douglass

Strong Father / Padres Fuertes está disponible a los socios masculinos de las clientes de Strong Beginnings y para los hombres que están criando a un niño hasta los 18 meses.

Personal masculino le puede visitar virtualmente, en la casa o otro lugar conveniente.

Los servicios incluyen:

- Educación sobre temas como la salud de los hombres, relaciones saludables y cuidado infantil
- Ideas sobre cómo pueden apoyar a sus parejas durante el embarazo y el después del parto
- Información sobre la crianza de los hijos y el desarrollo del niño
- Ayuda para obtener recursos tales como transporte, capacitación laboral, alimentos, asesoría legal, artículos para bebés y atención médica
- Remisión a asesoramiento para el estrés y la depresión
- Ayudar a desarrollar habilidades para la vida como la comunicación, la presupuestación, la fijación de metas y la resiliencia.

Para más Información contacte a Maximiliano Velasco al:
616-250-8445, maximiliano.velasco@spectrumhealth.org

o visite nuestro sitio web:

www.strongbeginningskent.org/Enroll

Strong Fathers

Strong Beginnings is a community-wide effort to improve maternal, paternal and child health among African Americans and Latinxs, promote father engagement and advance racial equity in birth outcomes.

- We are family support teams of...
 - Community Health Workers
 - Nurses
 - Parent and health coaches
 - Counselors
- Here to...
 - Connect with you to provide support and guidance during pregnancy and for 18 months after the birth of your child.
- You can expect...
 - To talk with your team about having a healthy pregnancy, help with getting medical care, parenting and co-parenting education, connecting to resources, goal setting, support to help you deal with stress that comes with pregnancy and parenting and other things that are important to you.
 - Services provided in English and Spanish
- And...
 - Individual support for male partners, weekly discussion groups for men, and father-child activities.
- Get started with us if you...
 - Live in Kent County
 - Are pregnant
 - The partner of someone pregnant
 - A mom or dad with children younger than four months
- Contact us by...
 - Calling: 616-391-3940
 - Emailing: info@strongbeginningskent.org

