

RESPECT DUE

Only the BLACK WOMAN can say "when and where I enter, in the quiet undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole...race enters with me."

Anna Julia Cooper, 1982



By Althea Knibb

Black women and more specifically Black mothers, have been looked upon over years with respect and admiration. Their hard work, commitment to their children and resilience have been celebrated and glorified. Whether single mothers, working mothers or housewives, these strong women are responsible for childbearing, nurturing, nursing, counselling, educating, comforting, disciplining and preparing us for life.

Manning Marable, professor of political science at the University of Colorado, gives credit to his mother for the development of his manhood and self-discovery, "From my mother I learned the value of spiritual strength and blessing of caring for others and gained a passion for scholarship and writing. I learned in this secure environment that life is rational and predictable, knowledge is power and any problems can be overcome by analysis and hard work."

Black women's experiences have produced a set of values and perceptions that challenge stereotypes. They understand the oppression of sexual discrimination and the importance of making connections between the dynamics of race and gender.

As a result of the struggles some women (especially single mothers) encountered in giving us a good home, not all of us grew up feeling loved. Whether we realize it or not there are many reasons for our mothers behavior. For some there might have been times when our mother's love was not in her eyes, her voice or her touch; and at times it almost seemed she feared intimacy and tenderness. This may be hard to understand. But trying to understand her struggle — what depressed and silenced her, and why she seemed so distant — will free us from personalizing her behaviour.

Whatever our mothers gave us it was their best, based on their own level of personal develop-

ment and happiness.

From my own experience, the nexus of beauty, warmth and strength within Black women has taught me to redefine my understanding of power and social change. Black women are the mothers of civilization, and indeed they are the strength of our culture. During Black History Month we should all take the time to honour our mothers, the foundation of the Black family.

"My mother has exemplified our culture's strength and beauty. She has taught me and encouraged self respect, which has proven to be a characteristic that is necessary in

life, in order to love one another and push on through life's let downs."

-Carol 23

"My mother has continued to amaze me with her quiet but accurate direction though out my life. It seems that she knows her children all so well and could simply and calmly lend a word of encouragement or note of advice, almost always correct. I really could say that no one knows me better than my mother. I have carried that confidence with me through my life and she has redefined what the Black woman means to me and our culture."

-Trevor 23

"My Mommy gives the best hugs, better than a teddy bear. No one beats my Mommy's hugs and smiles."

-Stephanie 4

"Through the most difficult times in my life, my mother has always encouraged me and taught me to laugh. I think that is the most valuable thing that my mother has taught me. There are times in life where you have to cry, equally when you have to laugh."

Michelle 16

"After my father left when I was 13, my mother provided me with what I need in life. She has

been both my mother and father. It is because of her that I give credit to single mothers, because there are many of us who could not do the same as they do and keep our sanity. My mother has showed how to be strong and how to love. I think that in this culture, this is a common characteristic, that needs to be exercised a little more in order for our race to get closer to one another and understand what makes us tick."

-Dwayne 21

"Sometimes children as old as me sit around and complain about those foolish things our mothers used to do, say to us and make us do, but when you look back, it was done in our best interest. My mother has taught me how to discipline my own children. Although we complain, discipline is necessary in our race because we have to work harder in this society, than any other. Discipline and hard work is necessary when you're born into this race. Young people must always remember that"

-Yvonne 43.

"Believe it or not, my mother has taught me that all Black women are not feisty or rude. I have watched my mother and her encounters with people, over the years and questioned things that she has done. She has been brought up the same as many Black daughters have, having self-respect and not making yourself vulnerable to anyone, especially men. I have found that there is nothing personal toward Black men, it is just a way of protecting ourselves. I have learned to appreciate this quality in Black women because they are firm and stand their ground. The best girlfriend or wife, is one who you can trust. If these women were easier to approach and pick up, imagine who could take her from under your nose."

-Ian 24.