



Whatever Happened to Daddy's Little Girl?: The Impact of Fatherlessness on Black Women

By Jonetta Rose Barras

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What happens to a little girl who grows up without a father? Can she ever feel truly loved and fully alive? Does she ever heal--or is she doomed to live a wounded, fragmented life and to pass her wounds down to her own children? Fatherlessness afflicts nearly half the households in America, and it has reached epidemic proportions in the African-American community, with especially devastating consequences for black women. In this powerful book, accomplished journalist Jonetta Rose Barras breaks the code of silence and gives voice to the experiences of America's fatherless women--starting with herself.

Passionate and shockingly frank, *Whatever Happened to Daddy's Little Girl?* is the first book to explore the plight of America's fatherless daughters from the unique perspective of the African-American community. This brilliant volume gives all fatherless daughters the knowledge that they are not alone and the courage to overcome the hidden pain they have suffered for so long.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Passionate and provocative, *Whatever Happened to Daddy's Little Girl?* explores the impact of fatherlessness on black women from a thoughtful and highly personal perspective. A woman who has herself "lost" three fathers, Jonetta Rose Barras interweaves her own experience of the "fatherless woman syndrome" with those of other fatherless black women, observations by psychologists and sociologists, and research findings. Barras concludes that factors such as the shift to a service economy, the "gender war of the 1970s through the 1990s," and affirmative action and quota policies caused black men to be "kicked to the curbside." Consequently, many black men began to perceive themselves as superfluous to their families, and by 1996, 60 percent of all black children were living in fatherless homes.

While some attention has been given to the impact of fatherlessness upon sons, Barras notes that very little has been paid to the effect on daughters. She powerfully shows the seriousness of this oversight, arguing that fatherless daughters often believe themselves unworthy and unlovable; strongly fear abandonment, rejection, and commitment; possess strong aversions to intimacy or, conversely, act promiscuously; overcompensate in work and relationships or oversaturate with food, alcohol, sex, or drugs; and experience extreme anger, rage, and/or depression. Barras offers suggestions to begin the healing process (on several fronts, for she is concerned too with the related issues of daughterless fathers and broken maternal trust). Perhaps one of the most important means of healing (both individually and societally) is the conversation Barras opens with this significant work. --*Stephanie Wickersham*

From Publishers Weekly

Integrating a personal narrative with other women's testimonies and research findings with self-help remedies, Barras sheds light on the profound impact fatherlessness can have on black women. In her 30s, Barras learned from her mother that the man she had thought was her father was not. Though stunned by the news, Barras also believed it explained much of the loneliness she endured as a child. She began to try to come to terms with the guilt she felt not only about her father's departure, but about her ruptured relationships with two surrogate fathers, each of whom left her mother while Barras was still a girl. She also recounts her heartrending efforts to mend broken trust with her mother while forging a bond with her own fatherless daughter. The study deepens in subsequent chapters, as Barras intertwines the diverse voices of other black women who grew up without their fathers. Unfortunately, her ambitious effort is marred by overly broad conclusions. She attributes a vast range of dysfunctional behaviors--from promiscuous sexual relationships and a longing for motherhood to the inability to trust and uncontrolled fits of "rage, anger, depression"--to fatherless women. And her reliance on simple solutions at times minimizes the issue's gravity. Her work is stronger when she locates the chasm between black men and women in gender war stereotypes of "good women" and "bad men" and affirmative action policies that have allowed black women upward mobility while moving black men out of the workforce. Her study should stir useful debate. Agent, Victoria Sanders. (May)

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From Library Journal

Like her 1995 work, *The Corner Is No Place for Hiding* (The Bunny & the Crocodile Pr.), Barras's new book is a brilliant, heartfelt exploration of the human condition, with numerous excellent suggestions for rising above desperation and healing deep personal wounds. Although written from the unique perspective of a fatherless black woman, Barras's investigation of "fatherless woman syndrome" has universal appeal. The

Washington Times columnist meticulously describes her spiritual evolution from pain, resentment, and anger to healing, reconciliation, and forgiveness, offering practical, self-efficacious "home remedies." Intimate, loving relationships and "platonic friendships," she believes, can fill the void of fatherlessness. Not addictive relationships or habits or pretending to be an "Amazon woman." In the spirit of Hope Edelman's *Motherless Daughters* (LJ 5/1/94), Barras's guide compassionately addresses a social crisis. Fatherlessness affects almost 50 percent of American households and is highly recommended for all libraries.

-DChogollah Maroufi, *California State Univ., Los Angeles*

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