

Fathers Of The '80s

They're Better Than Ever!

By LORA VANDERHALL
Lifestyles Editor

With more women in the work force and the constant changes of our society, more black men are taking active roles in child rearing. Some have always taken an active part in the upbringing of their children, but it's becoming less of a rarity to see them in this capacity.

Thomas Bradley, the father of Toure' and Tahirah, said the best two days of his life were the days his children were born.

"I was in the birthing room when both of the children were born. To watch the child-birth...it gives you a feeling of satisfaction. Personally, I have never felt better," Bradley said.

He was the only child of Thelma and Thomas Bradley, Sr., but he said he was never lonely.

"I adjusted to being an only child by becoming creative. I created characters...I created my own brothers and sisters and they were always better than me," he said.

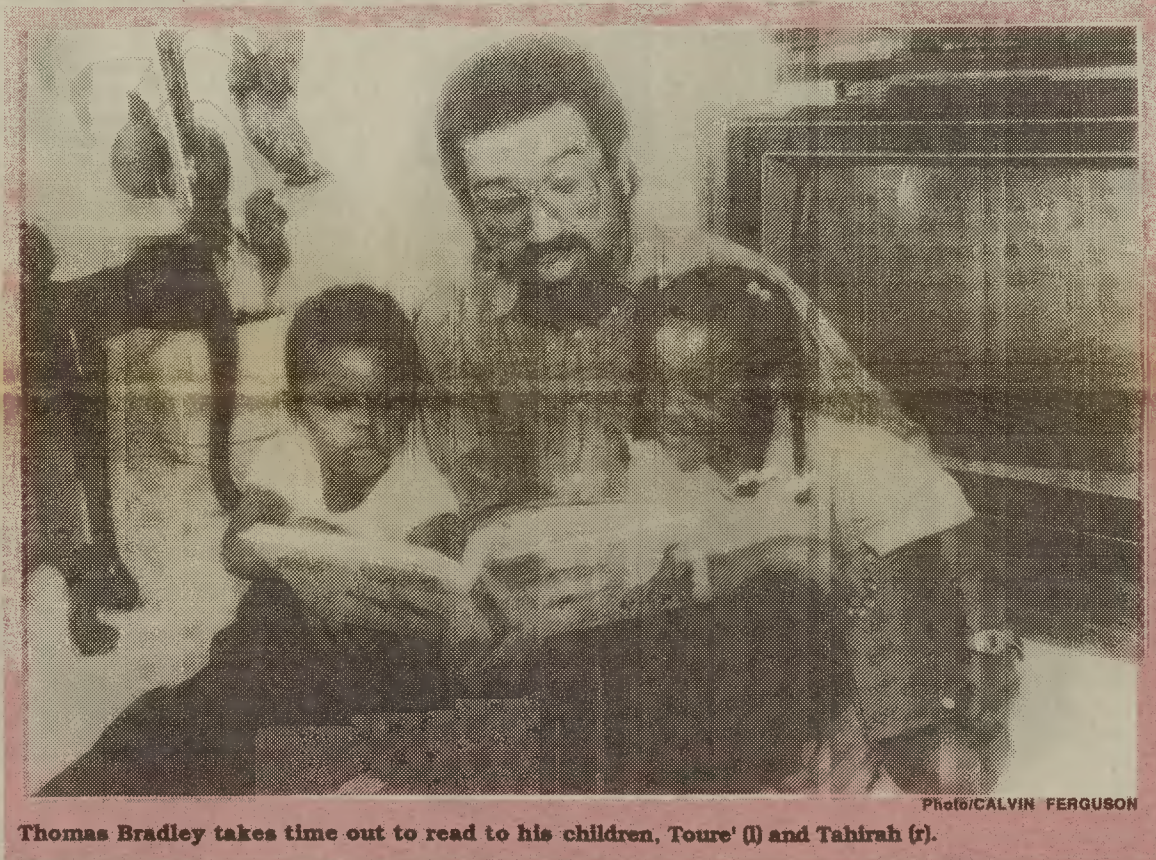
"Growing up I never really established a life goal. My goal was to learn as much as I possibly could about everything to hopefully maintain something that would sustain my interest."

After high school Bradley attended Morehouse College. He also studied and worked at Malcolm X Liberation University.

Today, he is an administrative analyst with a local company.

Bradley, 38, said when he was younger he never had any intentions of getting married or having children.

But he has done both.



Thomas Bradley takes time out to read to his children, Toure' (l) and Tahirah (r).

"I was 30 years old when I got married in 1981," he said.

He and his wife, Fran, had talked about adopting because they thought she was unable to have children.

Their son, Toure' was born in 1984 and their daughter Tahirah was born in 1985. Toure' is named after Ahmed Sekou Toure', who was the president of

Guinea and Tahirah is named after an African princess. Bradley said he wanted them to have names they could be proud of as well as culturally and historically meaningful.

"The first thing that hits you is that you have this human being who you're responsible for...and that brings about adjustments," he said.

Having been an active participant in the night feeding, day feedings, changing diapers, giving medicine and the general realm of things, Bradley has made quite a few changes to become an active participant in the upbringing of his children.

"I use to play golf in the afternoon but now that's out because I have to pick the kids up from

day care. Small kids are very demanding in terms of time and it's physically exhausting. The time for reading or whatever free time you have becomes limited or reduced," said Bradley.

Because of his wife's work schedule and other activities Bradley says he does his part.

"I would like to think that I would do my part even if Fran was not as busy as she is. Children are the creation of two people and the responsibility should be shared by two," he said.

Children are amazing to watch as they grow and develop, both physically and intellectually.

Bradley says it's exciting to see that gleam in their eyes because they recognize their parents.

"How quickly they learn never ceases to amaze me," he said.

Being a good father also means playing the role of mediator.

"The children have different personalities. Toure' is extroverted, energetic, outgoing and personable. Tahirah is more reserved in her approach and she makes careful decisions. I have to try and tone Toure' down, without stifling his energy, while I have to try and pull Tahirah out," he said.

Fathers are often looked upon as the disciplinarian within a family. But as with most things, effective discipline requires a careful approach.

"The children get a verbal warning and an explanation, first. If they ignore that they will be put on some type of restrictive punishment or receive

a spanking. "I've never reacted in a violent manner to either one. Parents must be in control of themselves so that they don't react violently to the kids," Bradley said.

Education also plays an important, never ending part in the lives of parents and children.

"I want my children to be educated...not trained. I want them to be able to draw cross references and make decisions for themselves. Everything they will be confronted with in school will not be true. I want them to be as objective as possible so that they will be balanced when exposed to other things," he said. "You have an obligation because there are no absolute rights or wrongs."

"We, as parents, have an obligation to make sure the family unit stays in tact. It might mean sacrificing some personal happiness," he concluded.

Bradley offers the following advice to new fathers:

- 1.) Respect the life you helped bring into the world.
- 2.) Make very careful observations of your children; be in tune to their world, what they're seeing and hearing. Remember that they are constantly learning.
- 3.) You have an obligation to improve the quality of their lives. That might mean, but especially if you're African-American, that you'll have to struggle.
- 4.) You must read and study yourself, in order to balance the kind of education they'll receive.

Photos/CALVIN FERGUSON

Childhood Holds The Building Blocks For Fatherhood

By LORA VANDERHALL
Lifestyles Editor

"The ruin of a nation begins in the home of its people."
African Proverb

T. J. Reddy believes that all men should take the above proverb seriously, when taking on the responsibility of fatherhood.

Reddy, 43, is thankful for having a good upbringing and he feels that it should be passed on.

"Somebody had to give us attention. So that what we've been endowed with...we should give back," he said.

Reddy, a renown artist, is also the father of three children. He and his wife, Karyn, have two daughters: Jamila Imani, 6 months and Chem'n Joy, 18 months. Reddy also has another daughter, Niambi, 11, from a previous marriage.

"I'm a father twice over," he said jokingly. "And I'm all into it."

Growing up, Reddy had the opportunity to experience life in a small town as well as a large city.

He was born in Savanna, Georgia, where he and a younger brother were reared by his great-grandmother. But at age 14 he moved to Brooklyn, N. Y.,

to live with his parents.

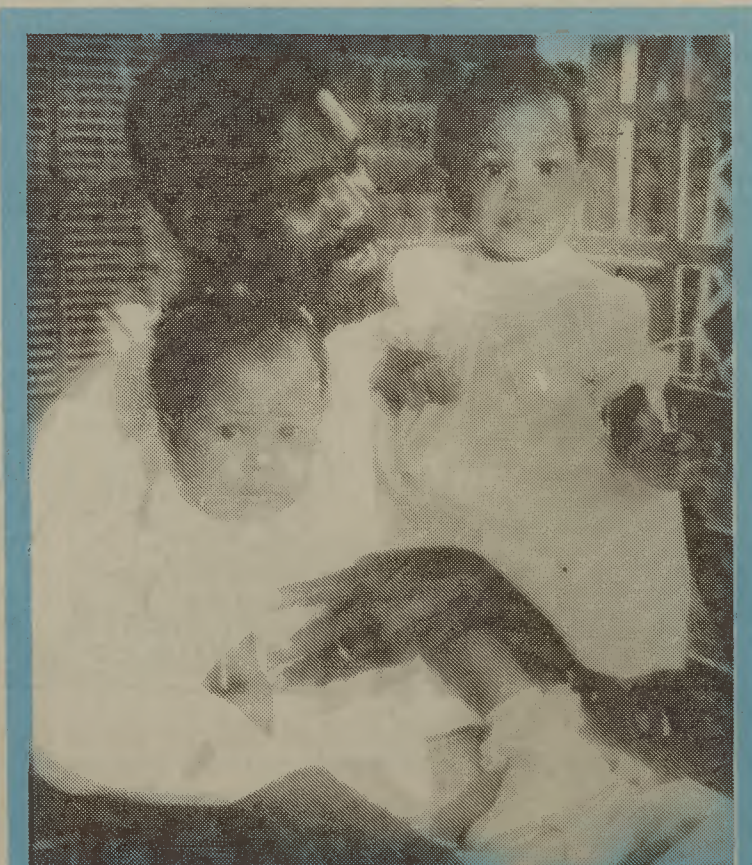
"My parents moved to Brooklyn because my father wanted to be a master craftsman and he couldn't find work in Savanna," he added.

Reddy says he began to cultivate parenting skills at a very young age while living with his great-grandmother.

"I grew up going to church, Bible school, church school and I was in the church choir and the Boy Scouts. My grandmother made sure we went to church and had a sense of community. She made sure we were courteous, respectful, hard working and educated.

"We had no electric lights, telephone or television...but we were not without what we needed. When I would get an award or something at school there was always someone there. My relatives were always there urging me on. It gave me a strong sense of identity and self respect," said Reddy.

He said she also made them very mindful of those who were less fortunate. "She would always say, giving, when you have the least, makes you more spiritual and God-like," Reddy recalls.



T. J. Reddy is shown above holding his daughters, Jamila (l) and Chem'n (r).

After moving to Brooklyn, Reddy not only had to deal with the culture shock but with the fact that he had five other brothers.

"I learned how to take care of babies, cook, and clean," said Reddy.

One of his brothers became very ill with Hong Kong flu for about 18 months and he says that's still very vivid in his mind. This incident helped him learn a lot about care taking.

"I felt that if I could give my brother some attention then that would help and keep him from becoming retarded...he was really in bad shape. I learned a lot about touching and the spiritual reference of laying on of hands," he said.

"All of these things I'm trying to pass on to my children."

Reddy has taken an active part in the upbringing of his children. He has done everything from feeding them to changing their diapers.

He recently started a job with Charlotte Parks and Recreation as a cultural arts specialist. His wife, a registered nurse in the intensive care nursery at Presbyterian Hospital, works weekends which allows lots of

family time.

"At the end of each day, when we meet, we embrace each other and we take about three minutes each to talk with each other. We take nothing for granted," said Reddy.

"We spend a lot of quality time together. Usually, twice a month we have a family get-together which includes Karyn's family."

For the birth of both of their daughters they used the Bradley Method, where the husband coaches the childbirth. Reddy was involved with the training for delivery which placed emphasis on diet, nutrition and exercise.

"I try to be conscience of the fact that parenting is a joint responsibility," he added.

Knowing the enormous demands of parenting, Reddy received a vasectomy after the birth of his youngest daughter.

"Having a vasectomy is very unpopular among black men but it should be considered...they always expect the woman to do something," he said.

Reddy believes that in order to be a good father one must understand the full meaning of commitment and devotion.