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ROCHELLE RILEY

## Be a fill-in for failing parents

August 3, 2007

BY **ROCHELLE RILEY**  
FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

*This is the first of Rochelle Riley's final five columns for the Detroit Free Press before she begins an eight-month sabbatical. She is writing about what she hopes will happen while she is away. Today: Our youth.*

Why on Earth does Bill Cosby keep coming back to Detroit?

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The answers are simple: Because he cares. Because he can. Because he's not just coming to Detroit but has visited more than 200 cities nationwide on his three-year campaign to encourage personal responsibility and improved education.

And then there's this, and I've said it before: Detroit is Ground Zero for nearly all problems facing black Americans, partly because of the large concentration here, partly because those problems are exacerbated in Detroit by the economic and education crises gripping Michigan. Our high school graduation rates are low, our illiteracy rates are high, and our brightest children are heading out of the state like rats from a sinking ship.

But most important, it is because some of us see the fire burning and are standing around watching. We are waiting for children to ask for help instead of doing what we know must be done. We know what time it is, but we look away from the clock.

The bottom line? Some people with children will never be parents. They don't know how. In some cases, they don't care. To continue to tell them to read to their children, feed them before school and attend PTA meetings is sheer folly. We need to stop pretending we can make them.

Folks, they ain't listening. But that doesn't mean we can turn our backs on their children, on our children.

Not anymore.

When Cosby returns for his next Detroit visit this fall, he wants to encourage people to work directly with children whose parents are not parents. He wants to encourage the creation of a league of mentors, former military officers, retired teachers and tough guys who can work directly with youth, particularly boys, to offer them structure, guidance and a kind of hope they are not getting at home. A legion of Detroiters already do this -- separately -- in as many as 500 programs, none more worthy than Communities in Schools, Big Brothers Big Sisters, the Police Athletic League and Neighborhood Service Organization.

But we need more. If we aren't willing to step up and take over parenting responsibilities from parents who won't be responsible, then we as a community will continue to raise children like the thug who hit a 91-year-old man 21 times to steal his car.

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In the next eight months:

- I hope the state will make school attendance mandatory until age 18, or graduation.
- I hope the mayor, while developing a plan to improve education for all Detroit children, also will find a way to force all children under 17 into structured life-training, the kind we used to call "home training" that many kids now don't get at home.
- I hope the mayor will encourage ARISE Detroit to continue its work: connecting programs with similar missions to each other and connecting people with problems with existing programs that can help them. The goal: to ensure that every child in Detroit has a place where they can learn rules, ambition and pride.
- But even with no programs, I hope every adult in big Detroit, from Howell to Clinton Township, from River Rouge to Grosse Pointe Park, will choose to help a Detroit child, to read to, counsel and teach the things he or she should learn outside of school. Yes, it's somebody else's job. But when it comes to children, do we really still need to debate a job that isn't getting done?

Cosby had a specific suggestion.

"Let's put together a group of military men who can specifically show young people that your personal behavior is your uniform," he said. "That which you are is who you are. ... We need to tell children, 'I don't think at this point that you are the best person to parent you.' "

We can't solve every problem immediately, but we can immediately start. And it begins with realizing the truth and working from there.


Children are our truth. Even if we disagree on everything else -- how to solve budget crises, whether to allow more charter schools in the city -- we must agree on that. And those who don't have parents, or whose parents aren't parents, need us.

Contact **ROCHELLE RILEY** at 313 223 4473 or at [riley99@freepress.com](mailto:riley99@freepress.com).

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"The Wrestler"

5 and counting..... 

Posted: Fri Aug 03, 2007 8:26 am

wzjpkp

Fill in for failing rents?...Jeez that might be quite a burden..As far as I am concerned 99% of the Yuppie rents that drop off Toddy and Tabitha every morning are failing. I see it all the time after they are teens Mom and Dad are so distraught.."but why dont they share our values?" they ask the pastor , rabbi etc or counselor. And then stand in denial when they get the answer "Because they were raised by a stranger at the day care down the street who really was jsut waiting to punch out and go home."..

Might have to give up the Audi or the vaulted cieling for somthing thats truly within your means so your family can come before your career...I guess my point is that the problem isnt just in the city proper...but in the burbs as well.

Posted: Fri Aug 03, 2007 5:54 am

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