



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on December 6, 2017

Denzel Washington on Building Strong Black Families: “It Starts in the Home”

Academy Award-winning actor Denzel Washington recently offered his opinion on what is behind the breakdown of black families in America, and for an inordinate number of young black men ending up in prison.



Speaking at a special screening of his latest movie, *Roman J. Israel, Esq.*, the iconic star of such blockbusters as *Glory* and *Training Day* said that the black community must focus on creating strong families with in-house fathers in order to bring needed change.

“It starts in the home,” he told the online news site [thegrio.com](#). “If the father is not in the home the boy will find a father in the streets. I saw it in my generation and every generation before me, and every one since.”

He added that “if the streets raise you, then the judge becomes your mother and prison becomes your home.”

Washington told reporters that “it starts with how you raise your children. If a young man doesn’t have a father figure, he’ll go find a father figure. So, you know, I can’t blame the system. It’s unfortunate that we make such easy work for them.”

In mid-November, Washington told Reuters, “I grew up with guys who did decades [in prison] and it had as much to do with their fathers not being in their lives as it did to do with any system.”

Recalling his growing-up years, he said that “by the time we got to 13, 14, different things happened. Now I was doing just as much as they were, but they went further.... I just didn’t get caught, but they kept going down that road and then they were in the hands of the system. But it’s about the formative years. You’re not born a criminal.”

This is not the first time the actor has challenged the black community to take responsibility for the societal ills it faces. In a 2012 *GQ* interview, Washington said, “One of the things that saddens me the most about my people is fathers that don’t take care of their sons and daughters. And you can’t blame that on The Man or getting frisked. Take responsibility. Look in the mirror and say, ‘What can I do better?’”

He added that “there is opportunity; you can make it.... Keep the body in tune — it’s your temple. All things in moderation. Continue to search. That’s the best part of life for me — continue to try to be the best man.”

New York criminal defense attorney Kenneth Montgomery concurred with Washington’s observations on the need for fathers in the home. “I think a father in the home ... facilitates stability,” Montgomery told the *Atlanta Black Star* newspaper. “Stability sometimes breeds better decision making. It provides



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a sense of belonging and comfort.”

He added that there is a “strong correlation” between the presence of fathers in black households and the direction young black men turn in life. “If you study a majority of criminal cases across the board, the lack of a father in the home is a common denominator, among poverty and other issues.”

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