It takes a whole village to raise a child.—African proverb

I don’t think during my high school years I really fully comprehended the vastness of leadership, the integrated nature of it. But when I finished law school and came back and became a part of the community and began to take part in civic and political activities, I could see the value of the network, the value of talking to people.—Vernon Jordan

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My father...was a Mason, a Shriner. He was the head of the Masons and the head of the Shriners. And he would go to these conventions and he was an Elk and he was an Odd Fellow...[A]nd the way that people went to conventions in those days—this is interesting—is that there was this network of homes because you couldn’t stay in the hotels if you were African American. We had a home that had rooms in it that my mother made available to conventioneers. And so the network grew because you would meet people who were from other places who would stay in your home and everyone knew they were staying in your home. They were like family. And they were treated like family.... I think that my mother was involved with the companion organizations of the Masons...Daughters of Isis. She was also a Lady Elk....[B]ut she helped found the sorority, branch chapter of Iota Phi Lambda in Buffalo. So we had all these tangents that right,—that helped me and my brother and my sisters as we ventured forth.... There was always somebody you called when you went to another city... And somebody that my parents knew. “Call up Mrs. So-and-So and tell her you’re, tell her you’re my daughter. And let
her know that you’re there.” Even when I went to college...my family doctor...called up a physician in Durham who was a friend of his and said, “We’ve got Yvonne coming down. I want you to look after her.” And so when I got to Durham I called them up...That pattern sort of continued. When I went to the University of Minnesota, Carl Rowan was in Minneapolis writing for the paper there. Carl Rowan’s wife is from Buffalo. She was the daughter of—or is the daughter of a family, a large family the sister of which was the head of the Urban League and the brother of which family was my mother’s physician. So when I went to Minnesota, I called up Carl Rowan because Vivian was his wife and “I’m from Buffalo. Mother said to call you up.”...There is this network, and it developed because two things. Because we did not have access to the major support, commercial institutions that people—that non-black people, white people and other people—relied on when they moved from city to city. And because it was dangerous. It could be dangerous out there.\

Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich sums up the multiple ways in which networks and connections, both personal and institutional, provide grounding and safety. In some cases, the relationships are deeply personal and demonstrate the power of mentors or role models. In other cases, positive identity is nurtured through group associations. Group memberships may be voluntary or involuntary, but the lessons learned often create lifelong values and habits that lead to productive and successful lives. The networks and connections that exist beyond family and beyond educational structures, illuminating the “village” ideal of community, dominate in this chapter.

Five black leaders—Dorothy Height, Elaine Jones, Vernon Jordan, Robert Franklin, and Bobby Rush—illustrate the central importance of networks and connections in their evolution to leadership. Whether the goals were personal empowerment, community advancement, political organizing, or spiritual growth, these leaders developed strong personal confidence along the way. A sense of self was fundamental to their emergence as leaders. But their self-esteem was deeply rooted in a sense of place. The leaders highlighted here explain how their households and communities functioned and how individuals and institutions protected them from the *anomie* so characteristic of modernity. In numerous ways, these black leaders were products of their “villages.”

Hillary Clinton brought national attention to disparities faced by children in America with her 1996 best-selling book, *It Takes a Village*. She focused renewed energy on how we might level America’s playing field so that all children can grow into resilient and productive adults. She did not deny the fundamental role of parents and family members in child-rearing. But she also recognized the need to create healthier communities so that responsible adults can do their