



THE BLUEPRINT

REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER



Welcome to *The Blueprint*

Fathers Incorporated (FI) is a national 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with a 16-year history as a nationally recognized fatherhood promotion organization. FI is a leader in the fatherhood field and is known for its national and local media and outreach focused on improving father engagement in the lives of children. FI believes that the presence or absence of fathers shapes the way children view the world and interact with people and that fathers are an essential element in successful families and thriving, stable, healthy communities.

Since 2004, our non-profit organization has served as a leader in the promotion of responsible fatherhood. We do this through the

use of innovative marketing and multimedia platforms, product development, training, and advocacy. Additionally, Fathers Incorporated has served as the contract manager for the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse (NRFC) since 2011. Through these contract activities, we have developed and participated in national outreach to fatherhood practitioners and dads and have served as a trusted “Fatherhood Ambassador” in promoting and supporting responsible fatherhood across the country.

Our values, integrity, and the priority we place on relationships and collaboration within our team and with the field undergirds stability and fosters trust and cooperation among fathers and fatherhood program operators across the country. People know us; people like us; and people want to work with us.

Research shows that supporting responsible fatherhood is critically connected to lifting Black men and their current and/or future children out of poverty while laying a firm foundation for their success in life. We recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with innovative strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth.

From employment and incarceration issues, to child support and domestic violence, FI addresses long-standing problems to achieve long-term results for children, their families, the communities, and nation in which they live.

Help us be the change we want to see.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kenneth Braswell".

Kenneth Braswell
Chief Executive Officer
Fathers Incorporated

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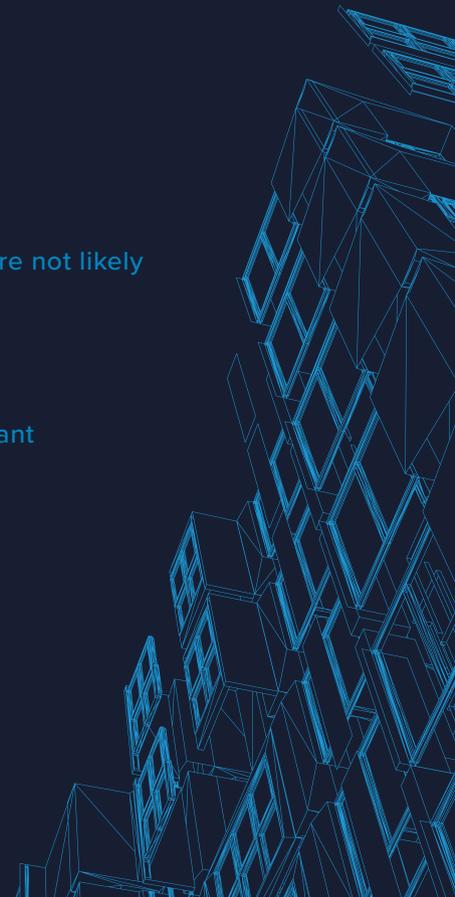
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The Blueprint: Re-imagining the Black Father

2020 marks the 55th Anniversary of the 1965 Moynihan Report. The controversial report argued that combating poverty required strengthening families in the United States—particularly through positively impacting Black¹ men. Five decades after the release of the Moynihan Report, research suggests that little progress has been made on the key issues Moynihan identified (i.e. the changing state of the Black family and, particularly, the rise in female-headed households) due largely to the fact that Moynihan did not address structural factors (i.e. residential and occupational segregation, the welfare system, differential access to technology, etc.) that would have significant and detrimental effects on Black fathers and, as a consequence, Black families. It is also worth noting that Moynihan could not have foreseen or predicted the ramifications of racism, the impact of mass incarceration, the damaging consequences of the heroin and crack epidemics, and the effect of the

Vietnam War on Black soldiers. He certainly could not have predicted the impact of COVID-19. Failing to take these important factors into account today, does not give one an accurate and full picture of the plight of Black families. Presently, many of the concerns for Black families highlighted by the Moynihan report are now worse and are prevalent among other groups as the aforementioned structural disparities have impacted a larger percentage of society. Still, Black families are disproportionately impacted by these disparities. 2018 Kids Count data show that 32% of African American youth live in poverty, 26% of Hispanic youth live in poverty and 11% of white youth live in poverty.² This report will explore and attempt to answer the overarching question that is posed within Black communities,

“Why does **poverty** look like **ME?**”

¹The author uses “Black” and “African American” interchangeably throughout. The author chooses to capitalize “Black” in order to reflect the discussion a group of people and to be consistent with the capitalization of “African American.”

²Kids Count Report. 2018.

The goal of *The Blueprint* is to promote responsible fatherhood and eliminate negative stereotypes of Black fathers (particularly low-income fathers), by addressing the following:



Economic Opportunity & Entrepreneurship



Education



Family Structure



Legacy & Wealth



Health



Technology



Media



Hope

/// We can reimagine the Black father by unpacking the narrow and often stereotypical images and stories bestowed on him and perpetuated by society at large while understanding the plight of Black fathers in light of structural and institutional barriers. ///

The purpose of *The Blueprint: Reimagining the Black Father* is to address the key issues affecting Black families in general and implied by Moynihan's report by examining Black fatherhood in the 21st century. The *Blueprint* argues that we can reimagine the Black father by unpacking the narrow and often stereotypical images and stories bestowed on him and perpetuated by society at large while understanding the plight of Black fathers in light of structural and institutional barriers.

Further, it seeks to demonstrate, if these issues are addressed, that the lives and trajectories of Black fathers and their families can be positively changed. Research shows that supporting responsible fatherhood is critically connected to lifting Black men and their current and/or future children out of poverty, while laying a firm foundation for their success in life.³

This paper identifies eight areas that, if addressed, would positively impact the trajectory of the Black father, and thereby, positively impact Black families. Therefore, the goal of *The Blueprint* is to promote responsible fatherhood and improve/eliminate negative stereotypes of Black fathers (particularly low-income fathers), by addressing the following: 1) economic opportunity and entrepreneurship, 2) education, 3) family structure, 4) legacy and wealth, 5) health, 6) technology, 7) the media, and 8) hope. We end this paper recommending three areas in which changes can be made in these realms: personal recommendations, structural recommendations, and policy-oriented changes.

³ Bernard, S.N., & Knitzer, J. (1999). *Map and Track: State Initiatives to Encourage Responsible Fatherhood* (Report). New York, NY: Columbia University, National Center for Children in Poverty.

Economic Opportunity and Entrepreneurship

Recent research suggests that Blacks have lower rates of upward mobility and higher rates of downward mobility than whites, leading to large income disparities that persist across generations. Though these findings are not as stark for women, they are substantial for men.⁴ As noted by Chetty et al., previous research explained such disparities as the result of factors like residential segregation⁵, discrimination⁶ and differences in family structure.⁷

disenfranchisement guaranteed that Black wealth would lag far below that of whites. Today, “the typical white family has 10 times the wealth of the typical Black family and seven times the wealth of the typical Latino family.”⁹ The inability of Black families to transfer wealth and assets from one generation to another has far-reaching effects. When examining the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, many Black families found themselves vulnerable and unable to maintain their households with little to no liquid assets.¹⁰



Though important, these explanations only capture points in time. Understanding racial wealth disparities as an intergenerational issue is paramount to understanding how to sustainably reduce this gap. There has been a long history of wealth-making policies that directly benefited Whites while negatively impacting Blacks. From the early days of slavery, policies like the Land Act of 1785, made land acquisition possible only to white men.⁸ This pattern continued so that Jim Crow policies like redlining and

“The typical white family has **10 times the wealth** of the typical Black family and **7 times the wealth** of the typical Latino family.”

⁴ Chetty, RJ, Hendren, N., Jones, M., Porter, Sonya. 2018. “Race and Opportunity in the United States: An Intergenerational Perspective.”

⁵ Massey, D. S., & Denton, N. A. (1993). *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

⁶ Bertrand, Marianne, and Sendhil Mullainathan. (2004). “Are Emily and Greg More Employable Than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination.” *American Economic Review*, 94 (4): 991-1013.

⁷ Lundberg, Shelly, RA Pollak and J Stearns. (2016). “Family Inequality: Diverging Patterns in Marriage, Cohabitation, and Childbearing.” *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*. Vol. 30 (2): 79-102.

⁸ Frymer, Paul. (2014). “A Rush and a Push and the Land Is Ours”: Territorial Expansion, Land Policy, and U.S. State Formation. *Perspectives on Politics*. Vol. 12 (No. 1). Pp. 119-144.

⁹ Hamilton, Darrick and Danyelle Solomon. 2020. *The Coronavirus Pandemic and the Racial Wealth Gap*. Kirwan Institute. The Ohio State University.

¹⁰ Ibid

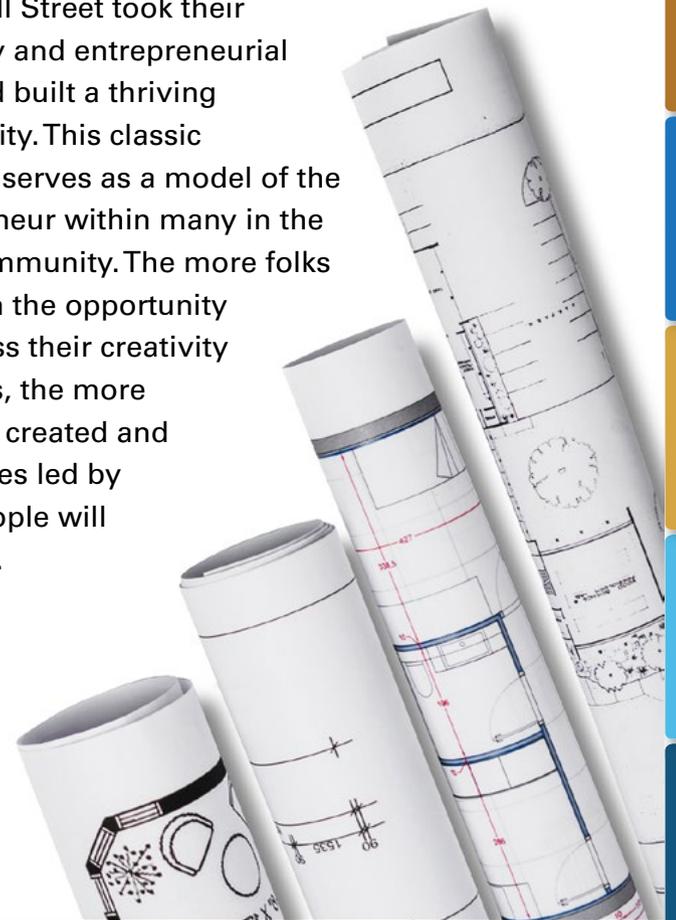
Rather than focusing on policies that will only impact one aspect of inequality, reducing racial disparities requires policies that reduce black-white gaps in youth outcomes that are impacted by parental income. Research suggests that parental income is connected to changes in “human capital attainment and/or childhood environment.”¹¹ This focus will have a far and wide-reaching impact on reducing the inequality gap, thereby, potentially lifting Black fathers and Black families out of poverty.

Likewise, unemployment directly impacts the financial wherewithal for Black fathers and their families. The latest United States Department of Labor unemployment statistics show that 14.7% of all Americans are out of work, an increase of 10.3 percentage points for April, alone. 14.2% of whites are unemployed while Black and Hispanic unemployment is 16.7% and 18.9%, respectively.¹² Prior to COVID-19, Black unemployment was at least twice as high as white unemployment rates nationally as well as across 12 states and D.C.¹³

Traditionally, communities of color have experienced little to no macroeconomic investments in the form of jobs where they could secure gainful employment. Policies that deliberately segregated Black and white communities have resulted in divestment that has differentially impacted Black and white families and created an “opportunity gap.”¹⁴ Black families, as a result, have had a more difficult time securing positions that would uplift and sustain their families. Policymakers, then, should create opportunities for economic

investment in Black communities that translates into jobs that Black Americans can obtain.

An area in which policymakers and researchers should focus in the African American community is capturing the entrepreneurial spirit that has consistently been evidenced among Black Americans. One important example of this spirit is the dynamic and bustling community in Tulsa, Oklahoma, otherwise known as Black Wall Street. In the 1920’s this community was rich in both culture and wealth. According to reports, residents of Greenwood (Black Wall Street) had banks, hotels, cafés, movie theaters, and contemporary homes with indoor plumbing (a luxury at the time).¹⁵ Residents of Black Wall Street took their ingenuity and entrepreneurial spirit and built a thriving community. This classic example serves as a model of the entrepreneur within many in the Black community. The more folks are given the opportunity to harness their creativity and skills, the more products created and businesses led by Black people will manifest.



¹¹ Stephen V. Cameron and James J. Heckman. 2001. “The Dynamics of Educational Attainment for Black, Hispanic, and White Males.” *Journal of Political Economy*. Vol. 109, No. 3, pp. 455-499.

¹² U.S. Department of Labor Statistics. April. 2020.

¹³ Jones, J. (2018). Economic Policy Institute.

¹⁴ Quick, Kimberly and Richard Kahlenberg. 2019. The Century Foundation. “Attacking the Black-White Opportunity Gap That Comes from Residential Segregation.”

¹⁵ Pickens, Josie. 2013. “Black Wall Street and the Destruction of an Institution.” *Ebony.com*.



Entrepreneurship among Black communities in the 21st remains a viable means by which African Americans advance. In 2018, there were nearly 2.6 million African American-owned businesses in the U.S.¹⁶ This is a possible game changer — carving out a space for African Americans to get ahead despite systematic barriers such as denial of loans, occupational segregation, and discrimination.¹⁷ Kezia Williams, founder of the company The Black Startup, suggests “The penalizing effects of racism robs black employees of fair and equal

earned income simply because they are black. Therefore, entrepreneurship is not only necessary for black employees seeking to fully capitalize from their labor but also for black returning citizens who attempt legitimate employment despite policies that restrict their economic mobility and subsequent earning potential.”¹⁸ In essence, creating platforms and networks that support African American entrepreneurship is important to potentially lifting Black fathers and Black families out of poverty.

¹⁶ Thomas, Jaia. 2018. “2018 Is Shaping Up as a Pivotal Year for African-American Entrepreneurship.” Entrepreneur.com.

¹⁷ Well, Christian. 2019. “African Americans Face Systematic Obstacles to Getting Good Jobs.” The Center for American Progress.

¹⁸ Ibid.



Education

Education has long been touted as an important and powerful pathway for closing the racial wealth gap. Reimagining the Black father in some instances requires reimagining the Black student. It means addressing those issues that will bolster his ability to obtain a degree that will yield a good paying job so he can accumulate and pass on intergenerational wealth. That often means beginning with Black youth in elementary school. Research suggests that 3rd grade proficiency is a significant indicator not just of future success but of possible future offending — the infamous “prison pipeline.” Continued focus has to remain on African American success in elementary school. According to a U.S. News report, in 2015, for example, only 18 percent of African American fourth graders were proficient in reading and only 19 percent scored as proficient in math. Putting the tools in place early to capture Black youth who are not doing well in school and assisting them in becoming successful will make a significant difference in what they do as adults.

Educating Black fathers is imperative as it increases their parenting capacity.

Parents also play a role in ensuring the academic success of their children. Educating Black fathers is imperative as it increases their parenting capacity. Increasing parenting capacity among Black fathers provides them with access to the economic and social capital needed to handle the rigors of parenting their children through school.¹⁹

¹⁹ Perry, Armon. 2011. “Man Up: Integrating Fatherhood and Community Engagement.” *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*.

Parents also can become educated on the importance of school choice. Theoretically, school choice provides students and families with a broad range of options—including charter schools, private schools, and traditional public schools. Families can choose the option that best suits them. Though school choice is somewhat complicated and at times controversial, what is important is parents' responsibility in understanding the education system in order to be informed consumers within it. The more parents understand the system, the better chance they have of placing their children in a school that will give them the best academic opportunities. Students attending schools that best fit their learning styles and abilities will help them fare much better academically and will positively impact them in the long run.

Parental involvement in school choice can happen across family structure (single vs. two parent households). Co-parenting outside of traditional marriage and households can create an opportunity for both parents to work together for the good of the children. Fathers' involvement in their students' education, for example, may be a catalyst for open and consistent conversations with the family as a whole. Further, focusing on education in a co-parenting dynamic can foster fathers' engagement in the school system which could have lasting impacts on the students' academic career and success.

While there has been an increase in rates of four-year college completion among Black Americans, especially for women, more attention needs to be paid to the college completion of Black men.



Black & Hispanic students

are

3X more likely

to attend a

FOR-PROFIT COLLEGE
than Whites

Males, overall, have a huge post-secondary and high school completion gap across all races, and this gap is growing across all groups. This is especially true for males of color. Career aspirations and college attendance of young men of color are no different than that of their white peers. However, significant barriers to college completion are present for Black males. Pre-college greatly benefits Black males who are often ill-equipped due, in part, to attending low-performing schools where a large proportion of students are low income. Quality of high school education can be a major barrier for those who want to go on and attend college.

Many of those young men of color who do attend college still face obstacles that may impede their college completion and, thereby, impact their ability to attain wealth later in life. Research suggests that students of color graduate from for-profit colleges more often than their white counterparts. In fact, Black and Hispanic students are three times more likely to attend a for-profit college than white students.²⁰ Students who attend for-profit colleges report lower satisfaction of their college experience, more college debt, and a higher likelihood of defaulting on school loans upon graduation. Students of color are recruited and heavily courted to matriculate at for-profit colleges through an educational system that will not only yield them lower paying jobs but will, in fact, result in more significant amounts of debt.²¹



²⁰ Body, Dvonne. (2019). *Worse Off Than When They Enrolled: The Consequence of For-Profit Colleges for People of Color*. The Aspen Institute.

²¹ Libassi, CJ. (2018). "The Neglected College Race Gap: Racial Disparities Among College Completers."

Males of color who do attend credible four-year universities must overcome challenges that threaten their ultimate graduation. According to a 2010 report from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, among those who attend college, African Americans (38%) lag behind Latinos (45.8%) and behind Whites (62%) in obtaining a four-year degree.²²

What are the factors that contribute to low graduation rates among this population? Adaptability to college culture, being adequately remediated to do well in college courses, and receiving necessary supports from college staff are all hindrances to college completion for Black students. Another factor that can influence the academic success of Black college students is the racial makeup of college faculty. According to a 2019 Association of American Colleges and Universities report, “while the racial and ethnic makeup of students in higher education has become more diverse, college faculty, staff and administrators remain predominantly white” with nearly 73.2% of full time faculty being white.²³ Black students who do not see themselves reflected among their faculty on a college campus often “struggle with underrepresentation, social isolation, academic hurdles and racial stereotyping from both their peers and their professors.”²⁴ All of these factors contribute to lower graduation rates for Black students, in general, but particularly for Black males.

Policymakers and researchers should focus attention on the entire experience of Black youth. Policies should include providing male students of color academic enrichment programs, cultural supports, training/development, and mentorship

that will assist them in graduating, obtaining a good paying job and, ultimately, helping their families get out of poverty. Policymakers should examine and heighten the importance of offering options for post-high school graduation that do not include traditional college. Students who do not fit best as college students should be encouraged to pursue trades and professions that require vocational school or certification. Finally, administrators within the educational system should provide a pathway for students to attain good, 21st century jobs that do not require a college degree, which could benefit Black students and their families significantly.



²² Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Huie, F., Wakhungu, P., Yuan, X., Nathan, A & Hwang, Y., A. (2017). “Completing College: A National View of Student Attainment Rates by Race and Ethnicity” – Fall 2010 Cohort (Signature Report No. 12b). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

²³ 2019. “College Students Are More Diverse Than Ever. Faculty and Administrators Are Not.” The Association of American Colleges and University News.

²⁴ New, Jake. 2016. “Responding to Racist Stereotypes.” Inside Higher Ed.

Family Structure

Fatherhood has largely been defined in terms of a father's physical proximity to his children. If the father in question is in the household, he is considered present. Research suggests that fathers who are present in the household have a positive impact on children's academic success and prosocial development while decreasing delinquency and substance abuse.²⁵ There has traditionally been much discussion around family structure in the Black community.

Currently, 66% of Black youth are born into unmarried households.

As this percentage has grown over the years, researchers have focused attention on whether and how Black father's lack of presence in the household contributes to negative behavior among Black youth. In short, researchers have examined the potentially damaging impact of Black "fatherlessness" for Black youth.²⁶

What researchers need to spend more time on, however, is highlighting policies that drive fathers out of the home and create a system where female headed households are not only dependent on government benefits but are also likely to become ineligible for public assistance if they marry and pool resources with their partners. Moreover, welfare and child support policies have persisted over time that discourage father presence.²⁷ This has been especially true for Black families. For example, despite having higher marriage rates than white women between 1890 and 1950 and a low percentage of children living without a father

(9% being the highest during this time), marriage rates began to decline among Black families in response to changes in social policy. Black marriages were strong and comparable to whites during the 1960's, but by the 1980's things changed. Researchers suggest that such changes were the direct result of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. Welfare was expanded to positively



²⁵ Mosher, Jones. (2013). "Fathers' Involvement with Their Children: United States, 2006–2010." National Health Statistics Report.

²⁶ McLanahan, Sara. Laura Tach and Daniel Schneider. 2013. "The Causal Effects of Father Absence." Annual Review of Sociology. July. (39) Pp. 399-427.

²⁷ Krumholtz, Willis. 2019. "Family Breakdown and America's Welfare System." Institute for Family Studies.



impact the poor but would become the impetus for marital dissolution. Benefits became more substantial and were contingent upon father's not being in the home. Specifically, marriage to a working man would result in decreases in benefits. Welfare expansion, then, would become a major contributor to the decline in marriage among Black communities where marriages were once strong.²⁸

Similarly, child support policies negatively impact marriageability in the Black community. Data from the Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study has consistently shown that "strong child support enforcement appears to increase formal and decrease informal support from fathers, reduce marriage among parents, and have a weak positive effect on father involvement."²⁹ Understanding this history and the impact welfare and child support policies have made on "fatherlessness" is important to creating policies that actually incentivize strong Black marriages.

There has been a push in society to create policies that encourage marriage among families as a way to reduce poverty, particularly Black families. Popular among conservatives, the success sequence,

suggests that people are most likely to avoid poverty and be successful if they finish their education, obtain full time employment, marry and then have children – in that order. The idea itself seems intuitive and likely is a good one. After all, it suggests that this ordering would create more stable and successful Black families. Critics, however, point out that this concept disregards the impediments individual effort cannot always overcome. In short, it "conveniently frames structural inequalities (i.e. high unemployment, lack of education, racial discrimination, etc.) as matters of individual choice."³⁰ Therefore, removing barriers to upward mobility is important to the success of families – especially Black families.

Researchers, recently, have come to examine fatherhood as more than physical presence. Moreover, current models of fatherhood suggest that being present is not limited to physical locale. Research suggests that so-called Black fatherlessness can be more accurately described as a lack of co-residence or lack of presence in the home as a function of declining marriage rates--perhaps indicating distance in the couple relationship rather than the father-child relationship.

Decreasing marriage rates or the increase of divorce among Black couples may have little to do with the disunity of Black men and women but the results of policies that disincentives marriage and create a dependence on public assistance and child support.

Dependence on public assistance has resulted in a predominant family structure in the Black community where most families are headed by single mothers and fathers living in separate locations.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Nepomnyaschy, Lenna and Irwin Garfinkel. (2007). "Child Support, Fatherhood, and Marriage: Findings from the First 5 Years of the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study." *Asian Social Work and Policy Review*. Volume 1. Issue 1. (pgs. 1-20).

³⁰ Alexander, Brian. (2018). "What Is the 'Success Sequence' and Why Do So Many Conservatives Like It?" Atlantic.



Physical separation, however, is not synonymous with lack of father involvement or “fatherlessness.” Therefore, “fatherlessness” must be redefined. Dr. Waldo Johnson (2018), an expert in fatherhood work, says “you cannot assume that a father’s absence means non-involvement. Simply because a father does not live in the household does not necessarily mean that he does not have any involvement.” Co-residence creates opportunities for engagement, but men can live in the home and still be disengaged while those who live outside of the home can be very involved. Fatherlessness, then, is not defined by living arrangement but true father absence.³¹

Understanding fatherhood with this in mind provides a paradigm shift. Perhaps Black fathers are involved in their children’s lives more than is reported. Josh Lev, in a 2017 Huffington Post article, suggests that contrary to popular opinion, research shows that most Black kids are not fatherless. Fathers either live in the household (2.5 million do while 1.7 million do not) or they are present and involved in other ways. Black dads who do live with their children are actually the most involved fathers of all, on average.³² If

Black fathers are largely involved in the lives of their children, what are some structural barriers that may impede their involvement, particularly fathers in poor families? Dr. Armon Perry suggests that “challenges with measurement represents a major limitation to the field of fatherhood research. Researchers have always struggled to account for the ways in which fathers are involved. This leads people to either default to measures of resident status (which is why people believe that in the home means involved) or they rely on mothers’ report of fathers’ involvement which brings its own set of limitations and potential biases.”³³

Policymakers, researchers, and practitioners reimagining Black fathers should create policies that incentivize positive relationships between mothers and fathers. Systems of welfare and child support should not create disengagement but, rather, opportunity for parents’ significant and sustained parental success rather, despite marital status. Finally, these policies should destigmatize single motherhood and remove policies that incentivize fathers’ absence in the household.

³¹ Richardson, Saeed. 2019. “Breaking Myths about Black Fatherhood.” The Chicago Reporter.

³² Jones, Jo and William D. Moster. 2013. “Fathers’ Involvement with Their Children: United States, 2006–2010.” Division of Vital Statistics.

³³ Perry, Armon. 2017. *Fatherhood in America: Social Work Perspectives on a Changing Society*. Charles C Thomas Pub Ltd.

Legacy and Wealth

Upon assessing the U.S. labor market, one might conclude that people of color are faring better now than ever in history. However, upon closer examination it is painfully clear though the U.S. labor market has seen uninterrupted job growth and the overall unemployment rate has fallen to its lowest level in 50 years,³⁴ African American workers still face more hurdles to get good jobs as compared to their white counterparts. African American workers “continue to face systematically higher unemployment rates, fewer job opportunities, lower pay, poorer benefits, and greater job instability.”³⁵

In addition to the impact of discriminatory practices and systemic barriers, workers of color often find themselves trapped in jobs that are likely to pay lower wages. Grounded in sociological theory, this idea suggests that all jobs are not created equal.³⁶ African American workers (particularly males) may have jobs, but the occupational sector within which they find themselves may limit their wages and their social mobility. Occupations, then, are themselves hierarchical. Simply suggesting that Black males “get a job” is not a solution that adequately fits the problem. Black males must be educated (in some cases), trained, mentored, and developed to obtain occupations that will help them accumulate wealth in today’s job market.



³⁴ Weller, Christian. 2019. Center for American Progress. <https://www.npr.org/assets/img/2017/10/23/discriminationpoll-african-americans.pdf>.

³⁵ NPR, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. 2017. “Discrimination in America: Experiences and Views of African-Americans” Washington; Princeton, NJ; and Boston.

³⁶ Lesley Williams Reid and Beth A. Rubin, “Integrating Economic Dualism and Labor Market Segmentation: The Effects of Race, Gender, and Structural Location on Earnings, 1974–2000,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 44 (3) (2005): 405–432.

Accumulated wealth is what is needed to close the wealth gap between Black families and others.

WEALTH, not income, is the foundation for access:

Access to EDUCATION

Access to better NEIGHBORHOODS

Access to MOBILITY

When Black males can use their wealth to move their families to communities with better opportunities and better schools, they increase the likelihood of the success of their children.

Stability and access then provide children with the necessary supports, networks, and tools to climb the ladder of mobility, creating intergenerational wealth.

Policymakers must delve into the complexity of Black male workers in the labor market and their ability to gain assets. Research suggests that while college attainment helps all workers get more access to better-paying, stable jobs with better benefits, Black workers, no matter their level of education, still face employment discrimination, occupational segregation, and unequal pay. Narrowing the race/wealth gap will be the result of both micro and macro-level changes. Black workers, at the micro-level, should be encouraged and trained to obtain degrees that

will yield good paying jobs in the private sector. Additionally, policies must be created that address the systemic discriminatory practices that keep Black male workers in dead-end, low-paying jobs.

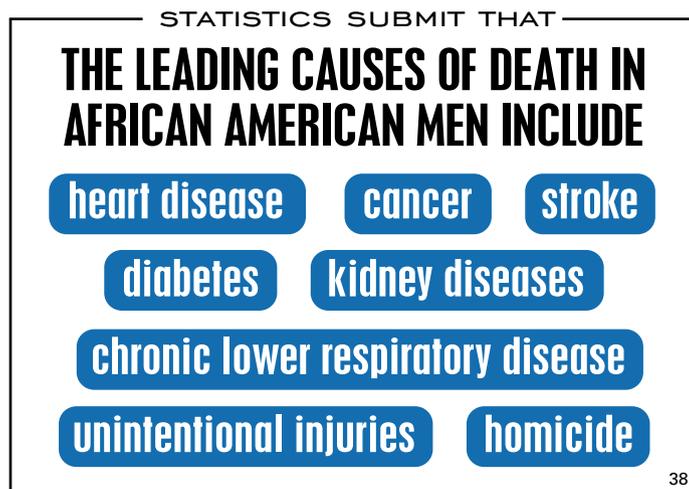
One final factor that may impact wealth accumulation for fathers and families of color is understanding birth cohorts (i.e. Generation X, Millennials, Generation Z, etc.). The relationship between birth cohort and generational wealth is one that can provide insight into asset building for families. Opportunities and access have changed dramatically when comparing the lives of Baby Boomer fathers and those fathers who are Centennials (approximately 16-22-year-olds) — despite societal barriers. Everything from use of technology to awareness and education around wealth accumulation has progressed, considerably. What do young centennial fathers know about wealth accumulation that their fathers past did not? How do they view and utilize technology and its use to attain such wealth? How are fathers situated in this new context different than fathers raising children in previous generations? Understanding and exploring birth cohorts may provide insight into how policymakers can shape policies that assist Black fathers today in generational wealth accumulation.



Health

One factor needs more attention as significant to the financial well-being of males (and therefore, families) of color is health disparities — physical and mental. Poor health is often symptomatic of poverty. Health, in turn, has an impact on sustained poverty. This cyclical relationship must be unpacked when identifying why poverty is predominantly the plight of certain marginalized communities.

Research is clear that African American men experience more negative health outcomes than other groups. The life expectancy of Black men has consistently lagged behind that of whites and most other racial and ethnic groups of men (living some five years less than their counterparts).³⁷



Why is it important to understand the determinants of deleterious health challenges for African American males? Illnesses often result in a rise in health care costs and medical bills. Low-income families already feeling the impact of a wealth gap may find themselves in even worse financial situations when strapped with astronomical medical debt. The 2020 coronavirus pandemic, for example, exposed healthcare inequities in America experienced by Black families. According to the CDC, Black people

constitute about 13% of the population but make up 23% of all Covid-19 deaths as the result of preexisting conditions.³⁹ Epidemiologists point to preexisting conditions as part of the reason for these disparities in COVID-19 related deaths by race.⁴⁰

Unfortunately, explanations for why Black men continue to experience poorer health outcomes are limited.⁴¹ Research, then, is needed that focuses solely on identifying and examining the unique pathways and mechanisms, physical environment, economic circumstances, social norms, and cultural practices that may be responsible for the consistently poor health of African American men.⁴² Additionally, policymakers need to help identify cultural strengths that could be the foundation of interventions to improve the health of those in the Black community.

Understanding mental health is important when reimagining Black fathers. Black fathers are often negatively stereotyped but understanding them through this lens can be beneficial to understanding how to better support them. Researchers have noted a correlation between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and anxiety, depression, and substance abuse in adulthood which, in turn, increases the risk of negative parenting or no involvement by fathers at all in the lives of their children.⁴³ Identifying and addressing signs of mental health challenges early can strengthen the bond between fathers and their children and act as protective factors, bolstering resilience within fathers. Utilizing an assets-based approach, researchers should seek to identify the inherent strengths of Black fathers, highlighting those characteristics that may buffer. Likewise, policymakers should seek to create policies that would provide necessary networks and supports for affordable mental health care needed for Black fathers.

³⁷ Jones, Ayana. 2019. The Tribune.

³⁸ National Center for Health Statistics, & Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2013). National Health Interview Survey [Data set]. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/asthma/nhis/2013/table1-1.htm>.

³⁹ National Center for Health Statistics, & Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). National Health Interview Survey [Data set]. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid_weekly/index.htm#Race_Hispanic.

⁴⁰ Bibbins-Domingo, Kirsten. (2020). "This Time Must Be Different: Disparities during the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Annals of Internal Medicine*. 172(12).

⁴¹ L. Jack, Jr., T. Toston, N.H. Jack and M. Sims. (2010). A Gender-Centered Ecological Framework Targeting Black Men Living With Diabetes: Integrating A "Masculinity" Perspective In Diabetes Management And Education Research. *Am J Mens Health*. 4(1):7-15.

⁴² Leonard, Jack Jr., Derek M. Griffith. (2013). The Health of African American Men: Implications for Research and Practice. *American Journal of Men's Health*. 7(4 Suppl):5S-7S.

⁴³ De Venter M, K Demyttenaere and R. Bruffaerts. "The Relationship between Adverse Childhood Experiences and Mental Health in Adulthood. A Systematic Literature Review." *Psychology Today*.

Media

The media plays a large role in how Blacks are viewed in society. There are many media myths that should be addressed and dispelled related to Blacks in general and Black dads, in particular. According to sociologist, Patricia Hill Collins, these “controlling images” shape people’s thinking about certain groups after being exposed to negative representations repeatedly.⁴⁴ For example,

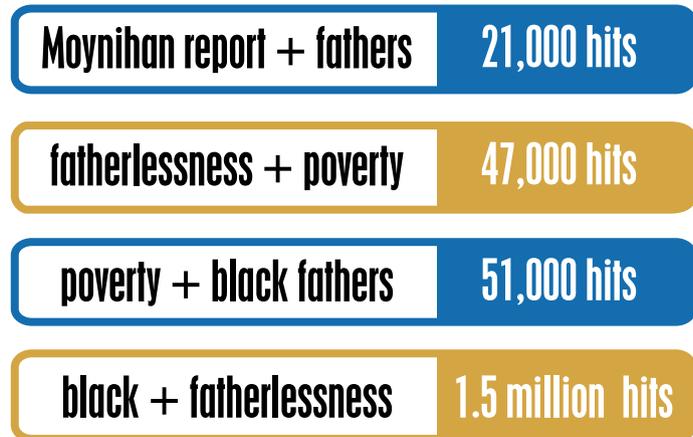
Blacks are overrepresented as perpetrators of violent crime in news coverage as compared with arrest rates [but are underrepresented in the more sympathetic roles of victim, law enforcer].⁴⁵

These myths are pervasive within societal thinking. Left unchecked, they can make policy- and lawmakers unsympathetic to the plight of Black dads.

Another example of a myth commonly projected in society: “In the U.S., black families represent 59% of the poor in the media but make up just 27% of the poor of the general population. White families, on the other hand, represent 17% of the poor in media, but make up 66% of the poor across the country.”⁴⁶ Why does this matter for reimagining Black dads? Continually framing Black families as poor and Black fathers as overly aggressive and violent contributes to a societal response that is unsympathetic and unforgiving. Conversely, showcasing Black families as thriving with mothers and fathers who care about the well-being and success of their children,

creates an entirely different (and positive) narrative that could ultimately lead to more positive policies and outcomes.

If you only do a cursory term search on Google for words related to Black fathers, you’ll find the following:



There is a narrative in the media that creates the lens through which we understand, discuss and create policy around Black fathers. Reimagining the black father is reframing the way we see them through the eyes of the media.



⁴⁴ Hill Collins, Patricia. 2002. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Routledge.

⁴⁵ Entman, Robert M. & Kimberly A. Gross. (2008). “Race to Judgment: Stereotyping Media and Criminal Defendants.” *Law and Contemporary Problems*. Vol. 71(4): 98, citing Travis L. Dixon & Daniel Linz, 2000

⁴⁶ Dixon, Travis. 2017. “A Dangerous Distortion of Our Families.” *Color of Change Report*.

Technology

African Americans frequently consume technology having helped build social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram. However, they have not largely been able to reap the same economic benefits of the technology industry as their white counterparts. Despite their role as consumers, African Americans are not likely to work in Silicon Valley. Similarly, the [State of Black America 2018](#) report, a report published annually by the National Urban League, suggests that Black Americans do not have the same access to jobs in the tech industry and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields despite the fact that they are most likely to use smartphones and utilize social media platforms. According to the report, “in the vast majority of [social media and tech] companies, less than five percent of the workforce is African American. By contrast, at least half of the workforce in these companies is white.”⁴⁷ The fact that whites have greater access to high-paying tech jobs that increase their incomes, widens the already significant wealth gap.

How is technology impacting Americans differently by race? Here is an example: A 2017 study by the McKinsey Global Institute estimates that half of today’s work activities could be automated by 2055. Although that may be good for economic growth, Black fathers working in the automotive industry could be fearful of losing jobs.⁴⁸ Reimagining Black fathers means that policymakers must focus on specific industries like the tech industry as vehicles by which low-income Black fathers (and their families) lift their families out of poverty. It can no longer be acceptable that Black Americans (i.e. fathers) grow the industry in terms of consumerism but never be allowed to access the work in Silicon Valley. They need to be encouraged to be educated and mentored in STEM fields that will translate into jobs in the tech industry. Black fathers and families should be given access to opportunities that will help them become tech innovators and entrepreneurs. Access to tech industry jobs has the potential to radically shift intergenerational wealth for families of color.

Reimagining Black fathers means that policymakers must focus on specific industries like the tech industry as vehicles by which low-income Black fathers (and their families) lift their families out of poverty.



⁴⁷ Broady, Kristen. (2018). The State of Black America Report. 2018.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Hope

The final factor to be considered in shaping The Blueprint to reimagining the Black Father is hope. Hope, optimism, and resilience are largely regarded as important for adolescents. However, in this reimagining, it is imperative that researchers and policymakers consider the importance of hope in response to stressors experienced by African American men. Racism, for example, has long been held as a stressor that has a negative impact on the mental, emotional, and physical health of people of color.⁴⁹ Hope, as a coping mechanism, can mitigate the impact of stressors related to everyday life, thereby reducing the impact of stress.

Faith has long been a cultural foundation for families of color. Religiosity has been found to mitigate mental health challenges, increase optimism and hope, and act as an organizing and social force within the Black community. Religious involvement among fathers has also been found to increase father involvement and higher quality relationships with their children — particularly when fathers connect their faith with their parental responsibilities.⁵⁰

Policymakers reimagining Black fathers should focus on creating opportunities for Black men to be strengthened by increasing their hope and encouraging those who are connected to a faith community to continue participating in faith building activities. Connecting to positive role models and mentors, developing positive peer social networks, creating positive pathways for success, and collaborating with social support systems to foster hope will all potentially reduce the negative impact of everyday micro-aggressions and racial stressors.



It is **imperative** that researchers and policymakers consider the **importance of hope** in response to stressors experienced by **African American men.**

⁴⁹ Williams, David. (2018). "Stress and the Mental Health of Populations of Color: Advancing Our Understanding of Race-related Stressors." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*. 59(4).

⁵⁰ King, Valerie. (2003). "The Influence of Religion on Fathers' Relationships with Their Children." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 65(2): 382-395.



Recommendations

Reimagining the Black father is both complex and exciting. Society has long projected a negative image of Black fathers that has been pervasive and consequential. It is time to dispel myths, highlight assets, and address challenges that might impede them. Changing society's thinking will be challenging but understanding the complexities and nuances to those changes will be equally challenging. To that end, we recommend three areas in which changes can be made: personal recommendations, structural and policy-oriented recommendations.

Personal Recommendations

We recommend the following personal recommendations:

- Fathers should **seek economic and educational opportunities** that will both prepare and propel their families out of poverty. Assets are built and passed down from generation to generation. Black fathers should seek to participate in the labor market so as to **accumulate wealth and build assets**.
- Black fathers should **continue being involved in the lives of their children** regardless of marital status. Living in a residence does not have the most significant impact on children. Quality and stable relationships do. **Fathers should show up** for their children early and often to ensure positive outcomes.
- Fathers who have a natural interest in technology should **enroll in courses or programs that will equip them to work in the tech industry** so they can participate as workers rather than simply consumers.
- Finally, fathers should **participate in community and religious-based groups that build up their faith and foster hope**. Research suggests that social networks are important for social mobility and building social capital. Networks are the place within which information is passed from person to person. Having a positive and nurturing network can foster hope and resilience among its members. Moreover, being part of a community that is uplifting and life affirming will give fathers the resilience and fortitude needed to deal with life's challenges while creating positive relationships with families and – particularly – children.

Structural/Policy Recommendations

We make the following policy recommendations:

- Create policies that **address racial discrimination**.
- Create **more base-level job opportunities in the tech industry for Black men**. The industry will only grow over time. Ensuring fathers have the opportunity to work in this area will be monumental for reducing poverty among Black families.
- Create a system to **incentivize tech companies to hire Black males**.
- Design programs that **teach coding and app design to Black males**.
- Policies should be created that **increase full-time employment among Black males**.
- Create policy around the **creation of more entrepreneurial opportunities for Black men/fathers**.
- Create opportunities to **combine college preparatory academics with technical training and workplace experience**.
- Create **affordable education for Black fathers** that include “not for profit” colleges and includes vocational and certification programs.
- Provide **free mental health services** in community organizations (i.e. the Black church, barbershops, recreation centers, etc.) that focuses on cultural touchstones like faith and resilience while also utilizing psychological techniques.
- Create family policies that **remove disincentives for marriage in the Black community**.
- Create child support and visitation policies that **incentivize positive co-parenting relationships between mothers and fathers**.
- Develop **community and faith-based programs that target Black fathers**.
- Design **community and faith-based programs that will serve as educational cornerstones around asset building**.

PROMOTE RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD and improve or eliminate Negative Stereotypes of BLACK FATHERS to positively impact the trajectory of the Black father and their FAMILIES





WEBSITE

www.fathersincorporated.com

EMAIL

info@fathersincorporated.com

TELEPHONE

770.804.9800

ADDRESS

2394 MT. Vernon Road, Suite 210
Dunwoody, GA 30338

The Blueprint was created in part by a generous grant from the Walton Family Foundation.

Written by Dr. Matisa Wilbon with assistance from Dr. Stacey Bouchet and Armon R. Perry, Ph.D., MSW.

The recommendations offered herein is in no way meant to be exhaustive, but rather a primer or starting point in addressing issues related to Black Fathers.