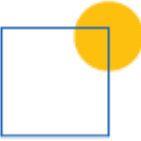




# THE BLUEPRINT

## Virtual Town Hall



## What Does Poverty Look Like Me?

The Blueprint Virtual Town Hall

September 29, 2020

Transcript

### Speaker: Dr. Matisa Wilbon

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([00:11](#)):

Hi, I'm Dr. Matisa Wilbon. And I'm excited to talk to you today about The Blueprint, Re-imagining the Black Father. 2020 marks the 55th anniversary of the 1965 Moynihan Report. This report was written by sociologists Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who at that time served as Assistant Secretary of Labor under President Lyndon B. Johnson. Now this report was controversial. It argued that to combat poverty, it required strengthening families in the US. What made it controversial was not its focus on families specifically. There've been folks who had written about that before.

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([00:53](#)):

But what was so important about Moynihan's work and so controversial was the fact that Moynihan basically suggested that family structure was the primary cause of racial inequality in the United States, but failed. Failed to identify factors that related to systemic issues. Those believing Moynihan's assertions then would point to black people as the cause of issues and therefore the only necessary solution to their own problems.

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([01:26](#)):

The Blueprint argues, however, as many critics since its 1965 publication, that Moynihan ignored the overarching ramifications of systemic inequalities like racism, like the impact of mass incarceration, like the damaging consequences of the heroin and crack epidemics, like disparities in the healthcare system. He would not have foreseen the effects of Vietnam War on black soldiers among other things. All of which we know would impact black fathers and subsequently black families.

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([02:03](#)):

Now, it's been over five decades since the release of the Moynihan report, and research suggests that there is still little to no progress made on the key issues impacting the black family. The reality is in 2020, many of the concerns for black families highlighted by that report and subsequent research are now worse, and are prevalent among all families, not just black families. Still, the issues among racially marginalized communities



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are stark. And an overarching question asked by those residing in those communities is this. Why does poverty look like me? Enter The Blueprint.

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([02:52](#)):

What's the purpose of The Blueprint? What does it mean to re-imagine the black father? Well, the purpose of The Blueprint is to address those questions implicit in the report so that the conversation can be elevated to include the overarching and intersecting factors. Let me highlight again. Intersecting factors that impact the black community. Additionally, The Blueprint argues that to understand the black family, one has to unpack the narrow and often stereotypical images and stories bestowed on black fathers, by understanding how they fit in a context of systemic inequality.

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([03:36](#)):

In other words, The Blueprint attempts to understand the plight of black fathers in light of structural and institutional barriers. And to demonstrate that the lives and trajectories of black fathers and their families can be positively changed. Therefore, there are eight areas identified in The Blueprint that if addressed, would radically change the trajectory of the black father and would thereby positively impact black families.

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([04:10](#)):

Re-imagining the black father is to promote fatherhood, to highlight it, to elevate it. It's to improve and eliminate negative stereotypes of black fathers, especially those that are low income. And it is to address eight key areas that I would like to highlight at this time.

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([04:31](#)):

Number one. We must address economic opportunities and entrepreneurship for black men. Research suggests that blacks have lower rates of upward mobility and higher rates of downward mobility than do whites, leading to large income disparities that persist across generations. So for thinking about equity, we absolutely need to make sure that we're looking at economic opportunities. These findings are especially substantial for men. Understanding racial wealth disparities as an intergenerational issue is paramount. It's paramount to understanding how to sustainably reduce this gap.

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([05:18](#)):

Today, think of this. The typical white family has 10 times the wealth of the typical black family and seven times the wealth of the typical Latinx family. The impact of this is far reaching. Think about COVID-19. This pandemic that folks are dealing with right now. When examining the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many black families found themselves vulnerable and unable to maintain their household with little to no liquid assets.



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Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([05:53](#)):

What's one way to positively impact these disparities? Entrepreneurship. This is an area in which policy makers and researchers should focus in the black community. Entrepreneurship among black communities in the 21st century remains a viable means by which African-Americans advance. In 2018, there were nearly 2.6 million black owned businesses in the US. This is a possible game changer. Carving out the space for African-Americans to get ahead despite systemic barriers, despite denial of loans, despite occupational segregation and outright discrimination and creating platforms and networks that support black entrepreneurship, is imperative to potentially lifting black fathers and a black families out of poverty.

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([06:48](#)):

The second area to be addressed to re-imagined black fathers is education. Education has long been touted as important in terms of... And a powerful pathway in terms of closing this racial wealth gap. Re-imagining the black father requires re-imagining the black student. We must address 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. We must create policies and plans that will increase third grade proficiency in math and reading, thereby disrupting the school to prison pathway. Black fathers have to be educated to help their children in school. We must increase their parenting capacity.

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([07:46](#)):

Increasing this capacity among black fathers provides them with access to the resources and social capital needed to handle the rigors of parenting their children through school. When it comes to college, we have to close the completion gap, which is huge for black males. Males of color who attend credible four year universities must, must overcome challenges like adaptability to college culture, like being adequately remediated to do well in college courses, like receiving necessary supports from college staff. Those are all hindrances to college completion for black students. Black and Hispanic students are three times, three times more likely to attend a for-profit college than are white students.

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([08:36](#)):

Students who attend for-profit colleges report lower satisfaction in their experience in college. They report more college debt and they also report a higher likelihood of defaulting on school loans upon graduation. Educational policies should include providing male students of color academic enrichment programs, cultural supports, training development, and mentorship. All of these things will assist them in graduating, obtaining a good paying job and ultimately helping their families get out of poverty.

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([09:13](#)):

The third area to be addressed is family structure. Yes, family structure is important, but not in the way



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Moynihan posed this particular challenge. We need to re-exam policies that drive fathers out of the home and create a system where females heading household are not only dependent on government benefits, but are discouraged from marrying their partners. For example, welfare, child support policies, having persisted over time, discourage father presence, and often become the impetus for marital disillusion. Benefits become more substantial and were contingent upon fathers not being in the home. Specifically marrying a working man could result in decreasing of benefits.

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([10:07](#)):

Welfare expansion then becomes the major contributor to the decline in marriage among black communities. Especially when we know there was a time when black marriages were strong. Rather than pushing policies like the success sequence that conveniently frames structural inequalities like high unemployment, like lack of education or racial discrimination as matters of individual choice. Barriers to structural equality should be removed for the success of black families. Re-imagining the black father is understanding that physical separation is not synonymous with lack of father involvement or what we commonly call fatherlessness. Co-residents creates opportunities for engagement, we know that. But it's true that men can live in the home and still be disengaged. While those who live outside of the home can be very involved.

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([11:08](#)):

Fatherlessness then is not defined by living arrangement, but true father absence. Policy makers, researchers, and practitioners, re-imagining 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 despite marital status. Finally, these policies should de-stigmatize single motherhood and remove those policies that incentivize father's absence in the household.

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([11:54](#)):

The fourth area that we absolutely have to address is in the labor market. Black workers face systematically higher unemployment rates, fewer jobs opportunities, lower pay, poor benefits and greater job instability, not to mention discriminatory practices and systemic barriers. And they often find themselves trapped in jobs that are likely to pay lower wages. Policymakers must delve into the complexity of black male workers in the labor market and their ability to gain assets. Narrowing the race wealth gap will be the result of a couple of different levels of change.

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([12:38](#)):

Black workers at the micro level should be encouraged to train and obtain degrees that will yield good paying jobs in the primary sector. But at the macro level, policies have to be created that address the systemic discriminatory practices that keep black male workers in dead end low paying jobs. This is not a one-stop shop



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solution, but we've got to cover all angles to make sure that black workers, particularly male workers, have the same opportunities as do others.

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([13:17](#)):

Health is the fifth of eight areas that absolutely need to be addressed. One factor that we don't address very much or as significantly, are health disparities as I mentioned. Specifically, as it relates to financial wellbeing of males and therefore their families, right? There absolutely are health disparities that impact both physical and mental health that have to be addressed. What we do know is poor health is symptomatic of poverty. What we also know is that health in turn impacts sustained poverty so that there is this mutually reciprocal relationship where one impacts the other, which in turn impacts the other.

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([14:03](#)):

Research is clear that black men experience more negative health outcomes than any other group. Statistics highlight that the leading causes of death among black men include things like heart disease, like cancer, like unintentional injuries, kidney disease, even homicide. But this is what's important to note. Illnesses often result in a rise in healthcare costs and medical bills. So if we look at the 2020 pandemic, the Coronavirus pandemic as an example, what it did was it exposed healthcare inequities in America experienced by black families. According to the CDC, black people constitute about 13% of the population, but made up about 23% of all COVID-19 deaths as a result of pre-existing conditions and also inadequate access to healthcare. We've got to address these things.

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([15:08](#)):

Understanding mental health is important when re-imagining black fathers. Researchers have absolutely noted a correlation between ACEs, Adverse Childhood Experiences and things like anxiety, depression, and substance abuse in adulthood. And those things in turn increase the risk of negative parenting or no involvement at all when it comes to fathers in the lives of their children. So when we identify and address signs of mental health challenges early, that can result in strengthening the bond between fathers and children. Policymakers then need to create policies that will provide the necessary networks and supports for affordable mental health care for black fathers.

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([15:58](#)):

The sixth area that really needs to be focused upon is technology. What we know is that African-Americans consume technology more so than any other group, right? But have not largely been able to reap the same benefits. According to the State of America 2018 Report, despite their roles as consumers, African-Americans don't have the same access to jobs in the tech industry and STEM fields, despite the fact that they are most likely to utilize various social media platforms. So re-imagining black fathers mean that policymakers must focus on specific industries like the tech industries as vehicles by which low-income black fathers and their families can



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be lifted out of poverty.

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([16:53](#)):

Number seven, the seventh area that needs to be addressed widely is the media. We know that the media plays a large role in how blacks are viewed in society. According to sociologist, Patricia Hill Collins, these are what's called controlling images that shape people's thinking about certain groups after being exposed to negative representations repeatedly. For example, what we know is that blacks are overrepresented as perpetrators of violent crime and news coverages as compared with arrest rate. So those two things don't match. These myths are pervasive within society's thinking. And if we leave these things unchecked, policymakers and lawmakers will be unsympathetic to the plight of black dads.

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([17:46](#)):

What we also know similarly in the US, is that black families represent 59% of the poor in the media, but makeup just 27% of the poor of the general population. So when we continually frame black families as poor and black fathers as overly aggressive and violent, that contributes to a societal response showcasing black families as unsympathetic and unforgiving. Conversely, if we showcase families as thriving, and loving, and caring about the success of children, it could impact the way society sees black fathers, as well as black families.

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([18:36](#)):

The last thing that I want to address very briefly is something that we don't talk about often enough. And that is this idea of hope. That's the eighth area that needs to be addressed as we think about black fathers and black families in society. This final factor will help us truly re-imagine black fathers and put all of these conversations into context. Hope, optimism, and resilience are all things that we think about from the perspective of youth. We try to instill them with hope and resilience and optimism that there is a better way. But it's imperative that researchers and policymakers consider the importance of hope and response to stressors experienced by black men.

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([19:33](#)):

Racism, as we know, has an impact, a negative impact on the mental, emotional, and physical health of people of color. Hope, as a coping mechanism can mitigate the impact of stressors related to everyday life, thereby reducing the impact of stress. Policymakers should focus on creating opportunities for black men to be strengthened rather, by increasing their hope and encouraging those who are connected to a faith community to continue participating in faith building activities.

Dr. Matisa Wilbon ([20:11](#)):

In conclusion, re-imagining the black father is more important than ever. The world is demanding positive



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change and black fathers need to be at the helm. If black fathers are lifted, black families are lifted. But this necessary change will not happen if, like Moynihan, society simply places blame on them. Rather, rather it must mean that as America looks inwardly at how she can be better as a nation, that we use this blueprint to take into consideration what changes need to be made in society related to economic opportunity and entrepreneurship, related to education and family structure, related to the labor market, health technology, related to media. And yes, even hope at the same time that we work to build the character and resolve of black men. It means that we must affirm black fathers, that we must affirm black lives. And when we do this, we will truly lift black families.

