



MOYNIHAN INSTITUTE for Fatherhood Research and Policy

Project Synopsis

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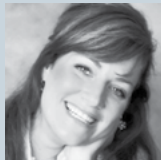
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MOYNIHAN REPORT, 1965

"In essence, the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which ... imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male and, in consequence, on a great many Negro women as well. The impact of unemployment on the Negro family, and particularly on the Negro male, is the least understood of all the developments that have contributed to the present crisis. There is little analysis because there has been almost no inquiry."

In order to impact poverty in the Black Community, policy changes should focus on STRENGTHENING FAMILIES, especially Black men and fathers.

In 2015, Fathers Incorporated, in collaboration with the Urban Institute and the Open Society Foundations' Campaign for Black Male Achievement, revisited the 1965 U.S. Department of Labor report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, more commonly known as the "Moynihan Report."

The often cited yet controversial report argued that in order to impact poverty in the Black Community policy changes should focus on strengthening families, especially Black men and fathers. More specifically, the report highlighted issues of poverty, marriage, nonmarital births, female headed households, and Black male unemployment as issues that needed to be addressed by coordinated federal policies that enhanced the stability and resources of Black families.

It should be noted, however, no specific policies were recommended. Subsequent lectures and interviews revealed that Moynihan suggested policies that might directly impact the Black family, such as a minimum family income (Hausman, 1973). Thomas Meehan's (1966) interview shed light on Moynihan's support of increased Black male teachers in Black elementary schools, providing a financial incentive for Black fathers to remain in the home, and increasing funding for schools with high Black enrollment.

Many of the issues identified for Black families have gotten progressively worse and additional challenges have emerged.....

FAMILY STABILITY, EDUCATION, HEALTH AND WELLNESS, AND MEDIA REPRESENTATION.

Moynihan had a decidedly patriarchal view of families and did not address structural factors (e.g., residential and occupational segregation) or foresee the impact of mass incarceration, child support policies, and the damaging consequences of the heroin and crack epidemics on the Black family. He certainly could not have predicted the impact of COVID-19. Also not addressed in the report are the issues of health disparities between Blacks and other communities, along with how fathers in Black families are portrayed in media.

Still, more than five and a half decades after the release of the Moynihan Report, national data indicate that **little progress has been made on the key issues Moynihan identified** with few federal policies instituted to address them. Further, many of the issues identified for Black families have gotten progressively worse and are now prevalent among other racial and ethnic communities, particularly in the areas of family stability, education, health and wellness, and media representation.

Since the Moynihan Report, there remains multiple indicators that suggest family structure and instability, along with economic insecurity and low educational achievement remain issues facing the Black community and Black men. Although these focal points of needed research and policy changes were highlighted by Moynihan but rejected by many leaders and scholars in the Black community, the issues remain relevant. There is still a disproportionate number of African American¹ children born to unwed parents.

The Moynihan report suggests that in the 1960's only about 20 percent of Black children were born to unwed parents, while today we see that there are 69.4 percent of children born to unwed parents (Child Trends, 2016). This has enormous implications for father involvement, as fathers are more likely to be engaged with their child when married to the child's mother. Non-resident fathers face a host of barriers to consistent, positive involvement with their children (Cheadle et al., 2010).

1960's

20% of Black children were born to unwed parents

Today

69.4% of Black children are born to unwed parents

¹ In this report, Black and African American are used interchangeably.



The increase in nonmarital births coincides with the decline in Black marriage rates. Although education is not addressed specifically by Moynihan, the report does address employment, Jim Crow laws, slavery and reconstruction, which all point to the issue of inequity in education. Today this issue is more likely to be framed as the black-white test score gap (Berends, Lucas, & Peñaloza, 2008), affirmative action in college admissions (Bodoh-Creed & Hickman, 2017), underperforming school systems (Wright, Maylor & Becker, 2016) and even the support of school vouchers and school of choice (Billingham, M. & Hunt, M. 2016). The issues of

educational equality remain as relevant today as they did during the writing of the 1965 report. Moynihan also failed to address issues of health disparity; however, the historical experiences of the African American family may aid in understanding why this community suffers from higher incidences of health problems when compared to whites. Generational issues of poverty, stress, and historical roadblocks to health care all contribute to health disparities (Assari, 2018) and ultimately contribute to family stability and functioning.

Moynihan did not address how black fathers are portrayed in America, but with increases in media and social media, this issue deserves additional research and focus. Sestir and Green (2010) suggest that one's self concept can be formed and greatly influenced through these mediums; it is imperative that this issue be studied in-depth. These core areas of research and policy, most of which are directly addressed in the report or indirectly addressed, will be the focus of the Moynihan Institute for Fatherhood Research... and Policy (MIFRP), as...

We move past the Moynihan report's mere identification of the issues facing the Black family to the research and policy implications of the role of fathers in ameliorating these issues in Black families.



The Moynihan Institute for Fatherhood Research and Policy will provide descriptive and explanatory research and policy positions on issues that impact Black families from the perspective of fathers. Although the Institute does not agree with all that is proffered in the Moynihan Report,

we recognize the document as a critical reference point to the issues that impact Black families. Our sole purpose is to empower Black families and communities through research and policy that focuses on fathers.

HEALTH & WELLNESS

The importance of fathers does not diminish as children grow older or become adults. The father in the Black family remains an important figure to family stability and functioning. [The Blueprint](#) identifies that Black men experience more negative health outcomes than other men. The life expectancy of Black men in the US is lower than some men in developing countries. Additionally, Black men and thus Black fathers suffer from a disproportionate number of heart related issues (Williams, 2020), diabetes (Bancks, et al. 2017), and prostate cancer (Woods, Montgomery, Belliard, Ramirez-Johnson, & Wilson, 2004; Odedina, Akinremi, & Chinegwundoh, 2009). In addition to their own health, Black fathers can be a resource to address the health issues facing children and mothers. Research shows that African American children suffer from higher levels of obesity (Coleman, Oneil, Caldwell & Ferris, 2019) and there remains a difference in birth outcomes for Black and white women in many areas of the US (Hessol, Fuentes-Afflick, & Bachetti, 1998). In addition to physical health, mental health is an increasing concern. We recognize an increase of risk of suicide in young Black males and the issues of stress, depression, and anxiety among Black males and fathers. These mental health issues also impact families and family functioning. These issues can put African American children and families at risk of having a father who cannot be optimally functioning, present, and available. Although not identified by the Moynihan report, these issues impact Black families and children.

The Moynihan Institute will explore how health and mental health disparities impact African American fathers and families. We will provide descriptive studies that address Black fathers' need for mental health services. We will also explore how fathers can be a resource for children's health by providing resources for communities that can be used to target African American fathers.

MEDIA REPRESENTATION

An additional area that plagues Black fathers is the perception of Black males as entertainers and athletes on one hand and as hyper-sexual, criminals, and uninvolved fathers on the other hand. Consequently, these representations influence society's views of Black fathers. Most importantly, this influences how young Black boys view themselves and distorts how young Black women view Black men and their behavior. With the high percentage of Black children growing up without a father in the home and many without a consistent and active father in the picture, media portrayals of Black fathers are much more influential. Without a positive father-child relationship and involved males in their extended family, peers and media are the largest influence on how men learn to father (Murray & Hwang, 2020). Positive media representations may also promote a positive development of self-concept in young Black boys (Ellithorpe & Bleakley, 2016).

The Moynihan Institute will conduct descriptive research on how Black fathers are portrayed in the media in addition to providing impact studies on how media images affect fathering activities and behaviors.



FAMILY STABILITY

Children, on average, have the best developmental outcomes when they are raised in two biological or adoptive parent families, so increasing the share of two-income parent households with stable, healthy, and economically self-sufficient relationships is always a worthy goal. When that isn't possible, it is still essential to put supports in place that will help parents co-parent successfully.

To this end, the Moynihan Institute will research and promote best practices for cooperative co-parenting and keeping non-residential fathers connected to their children and part of the family equation.



EDUCATION

There has long been a black/white test score gap and it remains (Mathematics Achievements, 2020). Only 18 percent of African American fourth graders are proficient in reading, while only 19 percent are proficient in math, which are staples to educational success in the American educational system (The Nation's Report Card). Shears, Portwood & Abrams (2008) conducted a trend study examining proficiency scores of third graders in reading. The results suggest that third graders who were not proficient in reading are highly unlikely to register for a college prep course in high school. This is important given that college prep courses are paramount to being accepted to post-secondary education. Numerous research studies suggest that positive father involvement can positively influence childhood development and educational outcomes in children (Bradley, Shears, & Roggman, L., & Tamis-LeMonda, 2006; Vogel, Bradley, Raikes, Boller, & Shears, 2006; Shears, 2007).

The Moynihan Institute will explore direct and indirect indicators of fathers' impact on children's education and provide community resources to assist schools and agencies in improving fathers' impact on children's educational outcomes.

VISION

The Moynihan Institute for Fatherhood Research and Policy (MIFRP) will utilize the historical work of Moynihan as a base to research and introduce policy that will positively impact Black families, with the father as the focal point within the family. Our society has more difficulty defining and supporting fatherhood—particularly for noncustodial fathers—making it critical for fatherhood research and policy to find ways to keep children engaged with both parents. It is important to note that our focus on fatherhood does not contradict the value we place on the welfare of children, mothers, and families. In fact, it is in each of these specific interests that we find the importance of father involvement for children, families, and communities. MIFRP will devote specific attention to addressing **Health and Wellness, Popular Media Representations, Family Stability, and the Educational Involvement** of Black fathers. Our basic assumption is that there is no fatherless child as all children have a biological father just as they have a biological mother. Fathers and father-figures have the potential to be resources to their children, the mother of their children, and their communities at-large.

If Black fathers are lifted up, Black families will be stronger!

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