JACK, JOSEPH AND MORTON MANDEL SCHOOL OF APPLIED SOCIAL SCIENCES
CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

National Initiative on
Mixed-Income Communities

# Untapped Assets: Developing a Strategy to Empower Black Fathers in Mixed-Income Communities[1]

Clinton Boyd, Jr., Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity at Duke University
Deirdre Oakley, Georgia State University

*"Throughout history, the powers of single black men flash here and there like falling stars, and die sometimes before the world has rightly gauged their brightness." W.E.B. Du Bois*

These words culled from the pages of W.E.B. Du Bois's riveting text, *The Souls of Black Folks*,[2] merit careful contemplation in relation to mixed-income communities. While the promise and perils of mixed-income public-housing transformation are well-documented,[3] Black[4] men have received limited scholarly attention on the subject. Generally, if Black men are referenced in the mixed-income literature, it occurs in a "color-blind" fashion, whereby authors eschew direct racial references when describing them. The result can be an insidious deficit narrative. When value-laden descriptors such as "alcoholics," "drug addicts," "drug dealers," and "gang bangers" are used, they operate as implicit racial codes, thereby further vilifying Black men. In this essay, we consider Black men, particularly fathers, in a positive, aspirational light.

Our essay describes how Black fathers can potentially serve as assets to their children, families, and neighborhoods in mixed-income community settings. We focus on Black fathers in this essay given their persistent exclusion from government housing programs, their limited visibility in place-based, anti-poverty initiatives, and the recent evidence documenting Black fathers' far-reaching positive influence on Black boys in their communities. Moreover, since policies and programs often overlook the unique needs of young parents, this essay prioritizes Black fathers ages 18 to 24. To provide a solution that addresses these omissions, we describe

---

[1] This essay appears in Mark L. Joseph and Amy T. Khare, eds., *What Works to Promote Inclusive, Equitable Mixed-Income Communities*, please visit the volume website for access to more essays.
[2] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publications, 1903).
[3] Robert J. Chaskin and Mark L. Joseph, *Integrating the Inner City: The Promise and Perils of Mixed-Income Public Housing Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).
[4] Editors' Note: We have recommended that essay authors use the term "African American" when referring specifically to descendants of enslaved people in the United States and the more inclusive term "Black" when referring broadly to members of the African diaspora, including African Americans, Caribbean Americans, and Africans. In this way, we seek to acknowledge the unique history and experience of descendants of enslaved people in the United States and also the diversity of backgrounds within the larger Black community. Though both are labels for socially-constructed racial categories, we join organizations like Race Forward and the Center for the Study of Social Policy in recognizing Black as a culture to be respected with capitalization and White and Whiteness as a social privilege to be called out. After considerable deliberation, we have also recommended the capitalization of Black and White. All references in this essay to Black/African-American, White, or Asian populations refer to non-Hispanic/Latinx individuals unless otherwise noted.

the basic tenets of a father-focused, family-centered program for young Black fathers. We first review how systemic racism in the area of housing policy has historically constrained opportunities for Black fathers.

### *How Did We Get Here?*

Systemic racism is the structure by which governmental policies, bureaucratic procedures, and cultural dynamics converge to deliberately advantage Whites and chronically disadvantage people of color, particularly Blacks.[5] Black descendants of American slaves have been subjected to unique forms of racialized oppression across generations, leading to long-standing calls for reparations to acknowledge, redress, and bring closure to their grievances.[6] Far from static, systemic racism has taken various forms since the founding of the American Republic. Whether it be American slavery, state-sanctioned apartheid in the form of Jim Crow segregation, or the more covert racism that emerged in the post-Civil Rights era, the overarching objective of these racial regimes were to oppress Blacks. The cumulative effects of systemic racism have also resulted in Black households having considerably less wealth than their White counterparts, even after accounting for educational attainment and employment status.[7] Housing discrimination on account of race is a particular form of systemic racism, one that has long ruptured the social fabric of Black families and created distinct obstacles for Black fathers.

**Exclusionary Housing Policies and Black Fathers.** Once Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) was established under Title IV of the Social Security Act of 1935, "suitable home" policies denied housing assistance to unmarried mothers if a man resided in the household. State governments admonished unmarried mothers for not raising their children in marital households, which was the cultural ideal until the mid-twentieth century.[8] Black mothers were disproportionately affected by these "man-in-the-house" rules, as a larger share of them bore children out-of-wedlock and married less frequently than White women. In her seminal book, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S.*

---

[5] Joe R. Feagin, *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
[6] William A. Darity and A. Kirsten Mullen, *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020).
[7] Darrick Hamilton, William Darity, Jr., Anne E. Price, Vishnu Sridharan, and Rebecca Tippett, *Umbrellas Don't Make It Rain: Why Studying and Working Hard Isn't Enough for Black Americans*. (Oakland, CA: Insight Center for Community Economic Development, 2015), http://www.insightcced.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Umbrellas_Dont_Make_It_Rain_Final.pdf.
[8] Andrew J. Cherlin, *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today*, 1 edition (New York: Vintage, 2010).

*History*, Alice O'Connor further notes that, in some instances, Black fathers moved out-of-state so their families could secure public assistance and subsidized housing.[9]

The welfare programs of the Great Society also failed to incorporate Black fathers in its efforts to eliminate poverty. Not even the alarmist report on the "negro family" by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the former Assistant Secretary of Labor, could persuade the Johnson Administration that "fathers should be supported by public policy."[10] Keeping with tradition, instead, the federal government continued to channel its antipoverty supports directly through Black women and children. Thus, excluding Black fathers yet again.

The trend in exclusionary public housing policies entered a new phase in the 1980s and 1990s during the "War on Drugs." Under the guise of reducing drug-related criminal activity in public housing, several federal housing policies were enacted that legally prohibited individuals with criminal records from residing in public housing.[11] Low-income Black men arrested or convicted of nonviolent drug offenses bear the brunt of this distinct form of legal housing discrimination. The families of formerly incarcerated Black men pay a hefty price as well. For example, families receiving housing subsidies can be evicted from public housing for allowing returning citizens to reside in their households. Opportunities for Black fathers to successfully reunite with their children are thwarted as a result of these "one strike and you're out" laws.

The collateral consequences of restrictive public housing policies also have implications for Black fathers seeking housing in mixed-income communities, primarily those who are less educated, economically disadvantaged, and returning citizens. For example, local housing authority administrative procedures often require that relocated public housing residents pass a rigid eligibility screening before securing housing in mixed-income communities.[12] In particular, criminal background and employment verification checks are administered to determine housing eligibility for former public housing residents and other low-income individuals. Since Black men have some of the highest imprisonment and unemployment rates in the country,[13] these screenings will have a profound impact on Black fathers trying to acquire housing in mixed-income communities.

Additionally, motivated mainly by concerns related to safety, security, and "ghetto" behavior, housing managers have codified stringent rules into rental leases to regulate the

---

[9] Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
[10] Ta-Nehisi Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* (New York: One World, 2017), 225.
[11] Lahny R Silva, "Collateral Damage: A Public Housing Consequence of the 'War on Drugs,'" *UC Irvine Law Review* 5 (2015): 783–812.
[12] Naomi J. McCormick, Mark L. Joseph, and Robert J. Chaskin, "The New Stigma of Relocated Public Housing Residents: Challenges to Social Identity in Mixed-Income Developments," *City & Community* 11, no. 3 (September 2012): 285–308, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6040.2012.01411.x.
[13] William M. Rodgers, "Race in the Labor Market: The Role of Equal Employment Opportunity and Other Policies," *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 5, no. 5 (December 2019): 198–220, https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF.2019.5.5.10.

behaviors of relocated public housing residents and other low-income renters.[14] For example, leaseholders (typically women) can be evicted from their housing unit for failing to report a change in household composition. This "zero-tolerance" policy becomes a challenge for leaseholders considering whether to jeopardize their housing security to maintain a relationship with their formerly incarcerated relative or intimate partner if they allow him to move into their residence. As leaseholders know all too well, if it is discovered that someone living in the housing unit is not listed on the household roster, their odds of being evicted skyrocket immediately. Former public housing residents and other low-income renters believe that such regulatory rules were explicitly instituted to monitor the foot traffic in and out of their homes, mainly because they are perceived as "problem households."[15] As another point of emphasis, the federal HOPE VI and Choice Neighborhoods mixed-income housing initiatives primarily target social service supports to minority women and their children.[16] Since Black men are characterized as the "undeserving poor," it is extremely rare for Black fathers to receive support services.

### *Empowering Black Fathers in Mixed-Income Communities*

The time has come for a radical reconceptualization of how we engage Black fathers in U.S. housing policy initiatives. Despite being depicted as uncommitted parents by the media,[17] Black fathers are integral components of their families and communities. Chetty, Hendren, Jones, and Porter's study, *Race and Economic Opportunity in the United States*,[18] is particularly instructive on the asset potential of Black fathers. Using data on 20 million children and their parents, the report provides compelling evidence that the presence of black fathers can help reduce income and incarceration disparities between Black and White boys.

According to the report, upon reaching adulthood, Black boys earn less money than White boys of similar initial economic status. This income gap even holds among Black boys raised in the most affluent neighborhoods and born into the wealthiest families. The racial disparities in income even cut across neighborhoods and regions. Moreover, the report highlights the pervasiveness of downward mobility in the Black community. For example, compared to

---

[14] Robert J. Chaskin and Mark L. Joseph, "Contested Space: Design Principles and Regulatory Regimes in Mixed-Income Communities in Chicago," eds. Barrett A. Lee et al., *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 660, no. 1 (July 2015): 136–54, https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716215576113.
[15] McCormick, Joseph, and Chaskin, "The New Stigma of Relocated Public Housing Residents."
[16] Kirk Harris, "Fathers from the Family to The Fringe: Practice, Policy, and Public Housing," in *Public Housing and the Legacy of Segregation*, eds. Margery Austin Turner, Susan J. Popkin, and Lynette A. Rawlings (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 203–19.
[17] Travis Dixon, "A Dangerous Distortion of Our Families" (Oakland, California: Color of Change, December 2017).
[18] Raj Chetty, et al., "Race and Economic Opportunity in the United States: An Intergenerational Perspective" (NBER Working Paper No. 24441, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA, 2018).

White boys, Black boys born into higher-income families are more likely to become poor once they become men. The opposite is true for White boys, as those born into low-income households move up the income ladder at higher rates than Black boys.

Additionally, the probability that Black men whose parents were millionaires (top 1 percent of the income distribution) would be incarcerated was equivalent to that of White men raised in households netting roughly $36,000. The report also indicates that on an average day, approximately 21 percent of all Black men born to the most impoverished families are incarcerated.

The report's authors underscored three factors that facilitate higher rates of upward mobility for Black boys, all of which have implications for Black boys growing up in mixed-income communities. First, the racial disparities in outcomes between Black and White boys are relatively smaller in low-poverty neighborhoods. Second, Black boys fare better in low-poverty neighborhoods where Whites exhibit lower levels of racial bias. Third, Black boys earn more and are incarcerated less, as adults, if Black fathers are a defining characteristic of their childhood communities, implying that the presence of Black fathers has a neighborhood-level influence that transcends family relations.[19]

Chetty and his colleagues also note that racial disparities in incarceration rates and individual earnings are relatively low between Black women and White women. However, the authors underscore that due to Black men's lower earnings, higher imprisonment rates, and lower marriage rates than White men, the *household* incomes of Black women pale in comparison to White women. As a result, Black girls are less likely to be raised in higher-income households than White girls. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that Black fathers' positive influence on Black boys will also help to improve the household financial standing of Black girls and women.

To promote greater racial equity and inclusion in mixed-income communities, we propose that a father-focused, family-centered program should be strategically embedded into mixed-income community strategies. We contend that the place-based program ought to target Black boys, a sub-population highly vulnerable to the effects of systemic racism.[20] We recognize that Black girls would also benefit from strategies designed specifically to meet their needs and opportunities. However, while this essay focuses on the needs of Black boys, as stated above, we expect that the benefits of greater engagement from more stable, well-prepared fathers would benefit their daughters as well as their sons. The mixed-income community context gives Black boys, whose families can secure housing in these developments, access to a low-poverty community with high-quality amenities. Building on this, Black fathers should be proactively engaged and supported as critical agents in the effort to create more equitable communities.

---

[19] Chetty et al., "Race and Economic Opportunity"

[20] Candice L. Odgers, Sachiko Donley, Avshalom Caspi, Christopher J. Bates, and Terrie E. Moffit, "Living alongside more affluent neighbors predicts greater involvement in antisocial behavior among low-income boys," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 56, no. 10 (2015): 1055-64.

**Focus on Young Black Fathers.** Young parents between the ages of 18 to 24 have been largely neglected by researchers, policymakers, and practitioners.[21] Young parents face obstacles such as inadequate access to childcare, low levels of social support, economic insecurity, housing instability, and limited access to educational services and career development opportunities.[22] While these challenges affect all subcategories of young parents, empirical evidence suggests that young Black fathers confront obstacles unlike those experienced by other young parents.

Systemic inequities in education, employment, and the criminal justice system illustrate the previous point. Due to their negative educational experiences from preschool to 12th grade,[23] many young Black fathers can easily find themselves disconnected from the very academic institutions viewed as conduits to future prosperity. As it pertains to employment, labor market discrimination has contributed to young Black males being unemployed, underemployed, and jobless at rates that far exceed their White male peers.[24] Because of racial disparities in their educational and employment outcomes, over 30 percent of Black males between 20 to 24 years of age are out-of-school and out-of-work. In cities like Chicago, the figure is nearly 50 percent.[25]

Concerning the criminal justice system, it is a well-known fact that Black men are incarcerated far more than any other U.S. demographic group.[26] Racially discriminatory policies and policing practices are often cited as causes for Black males overrepresentation in the criminal justice system.[27] What is less well-known, however, is the fact that 20 percent of Black men, incarcerated for a minimum of 10 years, enter prison between the ages of 18 to 24.[28] For the 40 percent of Black fathers in state and federal prisons,[29] many of whom are young parents, a criminal record can constrain their employment prospects, prevent them from securing stable housing, and preclude them from participating in public assistance programs. Moreover, nearly 74,000 Black fathers re-entering society every year lose $600 million or more in collective

---

[21] Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Opening Doors for Young Parents*. (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2018), https://www.aecf.org/resources/opening-doors-for-young-parents/.

[22] Nathan Sick, Shayne Spaulding, and Yuju Park, *Understanding Young-Parent Families* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2018).

[23] Rhonda Tsoi-A-Fatt, *We Dream A World: The 2025 Vision for Black Men and Boys*. (New York, NY: Open Society Foundations, 2010), https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/uploads/f0b30746-a906-40e8-b527-05363775685a/we-dream-a-world-20110104.pdf.

[24] Ronald B. Mincy, *Black Males Left Behind* (Washington, DC: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006).

[25] Teresa L. Córdova and Matthew D. Wilson, *Lost: The Crisis Of Jobless and Out Of School Teens and Young Adults In Chicago, Illinois and the U.S.* (Chicago, IL: Great Cities Institute, 2016), https://greatcities.uic.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/ASN-Report-v5.2.pdf.

[26] Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012).

[27] Bruce Western, *Punishment and Inequality in America* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006).

[28] Leigh Courtney, Sarah Eppler-Epstein, Elizabeth Pelletier, Ryan King, and Serena Lei, *A Matter of Time: The Causes and Consequences of Rising Time Served in America's Prisons*. (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2017), https://apps.urban.org/features/long-prison-terms/a_matter_of_time_print_version.pdf.

[29] Lauren E. Glaze and Laura M. Maruschak, *Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children*. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2010), https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/pptmc.pdf.

annual earnings.[30] For Black fathers in economic straits, many feel that the mothers of their children purposely deny them access to their offspring due to their financial shortcomings.[31]

All of these challenges have additional implications for young fathers who have open child support orders and are required to contribute financially to their children's upbringing. The interrelationship between poverty, incarceration, and child support warrants consideration. An Urban Institute study of child support administrative data in nine states determined that 70 percent of child support debt was owed by noncustodial parents making less than $10,000 annually,[32] many of whom are young Black fathers with limited education.[33] These men are also willing but financially unable to provide for their children.[34] To compensate for their inability to support their children monetarily, many low-income Black fathers provide the mothers of their offspring with informal and in-kind support instead.[35]

Child support enforcement utilizes several punitive tactics whenever fathers fall behind on their court-ordered payments. The penalties for child support noncompliance range from license revocation to financial penalties to incarceration, all of which negatively affect the employment outcomes and economic stability of nonresident fathers.[36] Estimates suggest that 14 percent of child support debtors are incarcerated by the time their children reach the age of nine.[37] Noncustodial parents are still responsible for their child support payments while incarcerated, despite being unable to meet their financial obligations. Their child support debt mounts uncontrollably as a consequence. Typically, fathers enter prison with $10,000 in child support debt and exit with $20,000 in arrears.

Despite their unfortunate circumstances, parenthood can serve as a positive, motivating force in the lives of young Black fathers. When young Black fathers properly embrace their parental responsibilities, they may be motivated to offer their children a life they never had.

---

[30] Mark L. Joseph, "Understanding the Economic Costs of Incarceration for African American Males," in *Social Work with African American Males: Health, Mental Health, and Social Policy*, ed. Waldo E. Johnson, Jr. (Oxford University Press, 2010), 311–24.

[31] Kathryn Edin and Timothy J. Nelson, *Doing the Best I Can: Fatherhood in the Inner City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

[32] Elaine Sorensen, Liliana Sousa, and Simone G Schaner, *Assessing Child Support Arrears in Nine Large States and the Nation*. (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 2007), https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/29736/1001242-Assessing-Child-Support-Arrears-in-Nine-Large-States-and-the-Nation.PDF.

[33] Elaine Sorensen, *Obligating Dads: Helping Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers Do More for Their Children*. (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 1999), http://webarchive.urban.org/UploadedPDF/sf_2.pdf.

[34] Ronald B. Mincy and Elaine J. Sorensen, "Deadbeats and Turnips in Child Support Reform," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 17, no. 1 (1998): 44-51.

[35] Jennifer B. Kane, Timothy J. Nelson, and Kathryn Edin, "How Much In-Kind Support Do Low-Income Nonresident Fathers Provide? A Mixed-Method Analysis," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 77, no. 3 (June 2015): 591–611, https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12188.

[36] Mincy, *Black Males Left Behind*.

[37] Elizabeth Cozzolino, "Public Assistance, Relationship Context, and Jail for Child Support Debt," *Socius* 4 (January 1, 2018): 2378023118757124, https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023118757124.

### *Program Components*

Given the shortage of structured supports and activities for youth and young adults in mixed-income communities,[38] our proposed fatherhood program aims to promote more reliable social connections between young Black fathers, their children, their families, and other community members. Our ultimate objective is to create a well-organized community context whereby supportive activities and resources are available to young fathers and their offspring.

**Inclusion Criteria.** Young Black fathers between the ages of 18 to 24 are the target population for our proposed program. Additionally, since there is a tendency in social science research to gloss over the internal diversity of Black fathers,[39] our program model focuses on three types of young Black fathers: 1) resident fathers, 2) non-resident fathers, and 3) "social fathers," father figures with a social, rather than biological, relationship to the children under their supervision. Given the empirical evidence cited earlier about the importance of non-resident and non-familial Black fathers in the lives of Black boys, our program will allow us to simultaneously engage these distinct groups of young fathers.

**Core Operations.** Enrolling a broad range of young fathers in our program would be a top priority. Therefore, an array of outreach and recruitment efforts would be deployed to accomplish this aim. We would conduct targeted street outreach within mixed-income communities and recruit young fathers from venues that they frequent. Since much has been written about the extent to which young adults "loiter" within mixed-income communities,[40] sustained and purposeful outreach efforts will be made to recruit young fathers "hanging out" on their own "turf." Young fathers also will be recruited through community organizations, local service providers, and other community anchor institutions operating in or near mixed-income communities. Once young fathers have been identified and have expressed interest in the program, they will be asked to attend an orientation session to learn about the program from a Fatherhood Ambassador, a staff member who will support and mentor the young fathers. Program enrollees will also be incentivized to recruit other young fathers into the program. Program graduates will also be called upon to promote the program within their networks.

Fathers would participate in a cohort-based, peer support group. Family policy researchers have identified this particular service delivery format as an effective strategy for engaging fathers in parenting programs.[41] The cohort-based, peer support groups would provide

---

[38] Robert J. Chaskin, Florian Sichling, and Mark L. Joseph, "Youth in Mixed-Income Communities Replacing Public Housing Complexes: Context, Dynamics and Response," *Cities* 35 (December 2013): 423–31, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2013.03.009.

[39] Maria S. Johnson and Alford A. Young, Jr., "Diversity and Meaning In the Study of Black Fatherhood," *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 13, no. 01 (2016): 5–23, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X16000047.

[40] Mary Pattillo, *Black on the Block: The Politics of Race and Class in the City*, Reprint edition (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Chaskin, Sichling, and Joseph, "Youth in Mixed-Income Communities"

[41] Robin Dion et al., *Parents and Children Together: The Complex Needs of Low-Income Men and How Responsible Fatherhood Programs Address Them*. (Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, 2018),

"safe spaces" for Black fathers to be emotionally vulnerable.[42] The cohort-based, peer support groups would be offered daily during traditional and non-traditional work hours. Intensive, case management supports would also be offered to enrolled fathers. Case managers would aim to help address any support needs of young fathers and also identify their personal and parental strengths, which could be leveraged to promote them as assets to other young fathers and community members. Case managers would continue to work with the young fathers for at least a year following cohort completion. The program would recruit staff who are well-positioned to build strong relationships with the young fathers, in particular those who have overcome life challenges like those encountered by program participants.

In the spirit of promoting family togetherness, monthly father-son events would be organized to create opportunities for young fathers to bond with their sons. These events would range from community beautification projects to educational activities to game nights to sports outings. Bi-monthly events for the whole family would be organized to ensure the daughters, co-parents/partners, and extended family members of young fathers also benefit from the program.

**Content Areas.** The curriculum of the father-focused, family-centered program would consist of three primary content areas: 1) personal development, 2) career acceleration, and 3) system disruption.

The personal development aspect of the curriculum would help young fathers learn how to: respond to discrimination, strengthen problem-solving skills, set goals, remain optimistic, manage stress, improve their overall health, enhance the quality of their co-parenting relationships, and learn developmentally appropriate parenting skills.

Supplemental father-centered home visiting services will also be offered to program enrollees. Home visiting programs have traditionally helped to support maternal health and early child development, mainly among children age five and under. Recent empirical evidence also documents that fathers benefit from home visiting programs.[43] Therefore, it is also our hope that young fathers enrolled in our program will also derive value from the home visiting services they receive.

Expectant and young fathers with children under the age of one will especially benefit from participating in home visiting services. Given America's alarming Black-White infant

---

https://www.mathematica.org/our-publications-and-findings/publications/parents-and-children-together-the-complex-needs-of-low-income-men-and-how-responsible-fatherhood.

[42] Alford Young Jr., "Safe Space for Vulnerability: New Perspectives on African Americans Who Struggle To Be Good Fathers," in *Boys and Men in African American Families*, eds. Linda M. Burton, et al. (Springer, 2017), 173–83.

[43] Sandra McGinnis et al., "Engaging At-Risk Fathers in Home Visiting Services: Effects on Program Retention and Father Involvement," *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* 36, no. 2 (April 1, 2019): 189–200.; Shannon Self-Brown et al., "The Impact of SafeCare® Dads to Kids Program on Father Maltreatment Risk and Involvement: Outcomes and Lessons Learned from an Efficacy Trial," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 83 (September 2018): 31–41, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2018.06.014.

mortality gap,[44] Black fathers can play a critical role in not only reducing infant mortality but also improving maternal health.[45] The content offered to young fathers through our home visiting model will ensure that they can insightfully engage with child health care providers at prenatal care visits and well-baby clinic visits. This portion of our home visiting model will also educate young fathers on how to best support the mothers of their children in improving their own health outcomes during these medical visits. Ultimately, it is our hope that we will empower young fathers to become advocates for their children's health, as well as the health of the mothers of their children.

Identifying the developmental stages of infant and toddler age children can be a challenge for young fathers, given that they also find themselves at a developmental crossroads. For young Black fathers specifically, "a lack of knowledge about child development" often causes them "to doubt their ability to provide paternal caregiving for their young children."[46] Since the average young father has children under the age of five,[47] evidence-based home visiting programs can be utilized to promote the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development of their young children. Therefore, the other aspect of our home visiting program will ensure young fathers understand the developmental milestones of their young children.

Career acceleration services—such as access to job training, job placement, career coaching, and business development—would be offered to young fathers while they are participating in cohort-based, peer support groups. These services will help young fathers to increase their earning potential and accumulate wealth.

To reach the goals associated with this objective, we plan to forge strategic partnerships with broader community and governmental agencies to assist young fathers in improving their educational and employment outcomes. Case managers will be responsible for establishing such partnerships. Working with existing community-based providers, a parallel set of program strategies would be developed to provide support to the sons of the fathers in the program.

The systemic disruption component of the curriculum will introduce young fathers to a robust learning environment geared towards analyzing each tier of America's governmental apparatus. This facet of the curriculum would also help young fathers to strategically engage in the political process, at all levels of government. Ideally, these group sessions would equip young fathers with the tools, information, and resources they need to advocate for structural changes in the institutions and systems that shape opportunity in their communities. The goal is

---

[44] Keisha L. Bentley-Edwards et al., "How Does It Feel to Be a Problem? The Missing Kerner Commission Report," *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 4, no. 6 (2018): 20, https://doi.org/10.7758/rsf.2018.4.6.02.

[45] Michael C. Lu et al., "Closing the Black-White Gap in Birth Outcomes: A Life-Course Approach," *Ethnicity & Disease* 20, no. 1 0 2 (2010): S2-62–76.

[46] Waldo E. Johnson, Jr., "Social Work Strategies for Sustaining Paternal Involvement among Unwed Fathers: Insights from Field Research," *Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education* 5, no. 1 (2002): 77.

[47] Sick, Spaulding, and Park, "Understanding Young-Parent Families."

to help young fathers confront the macrostructural forces that perpetuate race-, gender-, and class-based inequality within mixed-income communities.

### *Conclusions*

Black fathers typically do not benefit from the types of supportive services routinely offered to women and children in mixed-income communities. This has a great deal to do with systemic racism in exclusionary U.S. housing policy. Nonetheless, research indicates that Black fathers play a vital role in their families and communities. Therefore, we conclude that empowering Black fathers is a compelling way to leverage them as assets in mixed-income communities.

### *Implications for Action*

#### Implications for Policy.

Several policy initiatives could have an outsized effect in removing barriers to opportunity for Black fathers in mixed-income communities.

- *Several federal housing policies should be amended.* Specifically, key aspects of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, the Cranston-Gonzalez National Affordable Housing Act of 1990, the Housing Opportunity Program Extension Act of 1996, and the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998 should be revised. These laws prevent returning citizens (disproportionately Black men) from residing in government-assisted housing; permits the eviction of families receiving housing subsidies if a member of their household was once incarcerated; and disqualifies evicted leaseholders from receiving housing subsidies for three years.[48] These heavy-handed policies undermine housing stability for reentering Black fathers and place them on the path of homelessness.[49] The punitive nature of these policies also undercuts the prospect of family reunification for those tenants receiving federal housing subsidies in mixed-income communities.
- *The Federal Child Support System should be revamped.* First, the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement should create a national database that collects race, gender, and socioeconomic information on who has unpaid child support debt.

[48] Silva, "Collateral Damage.'"
[49] Earl S. Johnson III and Waldo E. Johnson, Jr., "The African-American Male: The Social Policy Challenge of the Twenty-First Century," in *Social Work With African-American Males: Health, Mental Health, and Social Policy*, ed. Waldo E. Johnson, Jr. (Oxford University Press, 2010), 327–41.

Currently, the federal government does not collect such demographic data.[50] Having this information will help to definitively determine whether Black fathers disproportionately face stiffer penalties for child support noncompliance compared to fathers of different races and ethnicities. Second, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 should be amended. At the present time, PRWORA does not guarantee that noncustodial parents (disproportionately Black fathers) will have lawfully enforceable access to their children if they have an open child support order. This policy change will improve the chances of never-married, nonresident fathers having unrestricted access to their children in instances where mothers are denying them visitation access. Third, child support enforcement practices for noncompliance - such as license revocation, financial penalties, and incarceration - should be reconsidered. The overarching objective of the official child support system is allegedly to promote child well-being. However, the current structure of the federal child support system perpetuates racial inequality,[51] undermines family cohesion,[52] and has been flawed since its inception.[53]

- *The Marijuana Opportunity Reinvestment and Expungement (MORE) Act should become a federal law.* In addition to the bill's other key provisions, the MORE Act prohibits individuals convicted of marijuana-related offenses from being denied all forms of public assistance. The MORE Act also establishes expungement and resentencing processes for individuals with marijuana-related convictions. The race-conscious element of the proposed bill will disproportionately benefit Black men, as they have been disproportionately affected by the botched "War on Drugs." Another significant provision of the MORE Act is the creation of the "Community Reinvestment Grant Program," which offers job training, reentry services, legal aid for civil and criminal cases, and substance treatment services to those individuals most harshly affected by mass incarceration. Fatherhood organizations serving Black men would largely benefit from the "Community Reinvestment Grant Program," as they would have access to additional funding to support their programs.
- *The Federal Jobs Guarantee Development Act should become a federal law.* The proposed bill seeks to end unemployment, underemployment, and chronic joblessness

[50] David J. Pate, Jr., "The Color of Debt: An Examination of Social Networks, Sanctions, and Child Support Enforcement Policy," *Race and Social Problems* 8, no. 1 (March 2016): 116–35, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12552-016-9167-8.
[51] Tonya L. Brito, David J. Jr. Pate, and Jia-Hui Stafanie Wong, "I Do for My Kids: Negotiating Race and Racial Inequality in Family Court Symposium: Critical Race Theory and Empirical Methods Conference," *Fordham Law Review* 83, no. 6 (2015): 3027–52.
[52] Kathryn Edin et al., "Taking Care of Mine: Can Child Support Become a Family-Building Institution?," *Journal of Family Theory & Review* 11, no. 1 (2019): 79–91, https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12324.
[53] Earl Johnson, Ann Levine, and Fred Doolittle, *Fathers' Fair Share: Helping Poor Men Manage Child Support and Fatherhood*, 1 edition (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999).

by ensuring all working-age citizens have access to jobs that provide non-poverty wages, on-site job training, and fringe benefits.[54] If enacted, the federal jobs program would be piloted in 15 high-unemployment communities and regions to assess its impact. While the proposed bill will help people of all races and genders, it will be especially impactful for young Black fathers facing limited job prospects, higher than average unemployment and underemployment, and various forms of labor market discrimination.

- *The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECH) program should be expanded to more intentionally focus on fathers.* In the United States and abroad, home visiting programs are used as tactical tools to provide family-focused supports to families with young children. However, mothers and children have traditionally benefited from these services, while fathers are rarely integrated into home visiting programs. Consequently, children may be deprived of opportunities to establish meaningful relationships with their fathers during early childhood, which is considered the most developmentally important stage in the life course.

**Implications for Research and Evaluation.**

Too few fatherhood programs have been rigorously evaluated to gauge their effectiveness, especially those for which racial or ethnic minorities are the target population. Additionally, when evaluations are carried out, researchers may not select the appropriate measurement items when assessing program outcomes, nor may they properly account for how contextual factors may affect fathers' experiences in the program. Evaluation periods also tend to be short and they rarely track child outcomes alongside fathers. To fill these gaps:

- Our father-focused, family-centered program would be piloted and would undergo a process and outcome evaluation.
- Our evaluation would use a mixed methods approach. The qualitative component would allow fathers to detail their experiences in the research trial in ways not possible if we solely rely on close-ended measurement instruments.
- Acknowledging the internal diversity among fathers, our measurement items will be sensitive to the unique ways residential, non-residential, non-biological young Black fathers engage with their children.

[54] Mark Paul et al., "A Path to Ending Poverty by Way of Ending Unemployment: A Federal Job Guarantee," *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 4, no. 3 (2018): 44, https://doi.org/10.7758/rsf.2018.4.3.03.

**Implications for Development and Investment.**

- Community benefit agreements (CBAs) should be established between mixed-income community residents and real estate developers to incorporate features that would promote quality-of-life improvements that would benefit Black fathers. CBAs could commit to include well-designed and state-of-the-art community centers and wellness centers, for example. Black fathers could utilize these spaces for a wide variety of constructive, family-centered activities. There should also be a commitment to provide family-sustaining jobs to residents who are chronically jobless, unemployed, and underemployed. Black fathers would disproportionately benefit from this particular CBA, as Black men are overrepresented in low-wage occupations, underrepresented in high-wage jobs, and are outside the labor market more than their peers because of labor market discrimination.[55] Financial resources should also be committed to community-based advocacy organizations working to advance social change.

**Implications for Residents and Community Members.**

- Fathers should form their own peer affinity groups to support each other and to organize themselves to effectively influence formal local resident councils and neighborhood associations in their mixed-income communities.
- Fathers should work together to create a positive action and marketing campaign to help debunk the myth of the "deadbeat" Black father.[56] These campaigns should also emphasize how Black fathers are contributing to the healthy development of their children.

[55] Darrick Hamilton, Algernon Austin, and William Darity Jr., *Whiter Jobs, Higher Wages: Occupational Segregation and the Lower Wages of Black Men.* )Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 2011), https://www.epi.org/files/page/-/BriefingPaper288.pdf.

[56] Roberta Coles and Charles Green, eds., *The Myth of the Missing Black Father* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

## About the Volume

This essay is published as part of a volume titled, *What Works to Promote Inclusive, Equitable Mixed-Income Communities*, edited by Dr. Mark L. Joseph and Dr. Amy T. Khare, with developmental editing support provided by Leila Fiester. Production is led by the National Initiative on Mixed-Income Communities (NIMC) at the Jack, Joseph, and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University, with lead funding provided by The Kresge Foundation. The volume aims to equip a broad audience of policymakers, funders, practitioners, community activists, and researchers with the latest thinking and tools needed to achieve more inclusive and equitable mixed-income communities. This is the fifth volume in the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco's What Works series, which has sought to analyze a variety of key themes in urban development.

The views expressed in the essays reflect the authors' perspectives and do not necessarily represent the views of The Kresge Foundation, the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco or of the Federal Reserve System.

Readers can view this essay, the framing paper for the volume, and all currently posted essays on NIMC's website where new pieces are being uploaded every month. Essays will be compiled and released in a final print volume, with an anticipated release in 2020.

You can also sign up to receive email updates and notice of other content releases by signing up for newsletter updates here.

## References


Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press, 2012.

Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Opening Doors for Young Parents*. Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2018.

Bentley-Edwards, Keisha L., Malik Chaka Edwards, Cynthia Neal Spence, William A. Darity, Jr., Darrick Hamilton, and Jasson Perez. "How Does It Feel to Be a Problem? The Missing Kerner Commission Report." RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences 4, no. 6 (2018): 20-40.

Brito, Tonya L., David J. Pate, Jr., and Jia-Hui Stafanie Wong. "I Do for My Kids: Negotiating Race and Racial Inequality in Family Court Symposium: Critical Race Theory and Empirical Methods Conference." *Fordham Law Review* 83, no. 6 (2015): 3027–52.

Chaskin, Robert J., and Mark L. Joseph. "Contested Space: Design Principles and Regulatory Regimes in Mixed-Income Communities in Chicago." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 660, no. 1 (July 2015): 136–54.

Chaskin, Robert J., and Mark L. Joseph. *Integrating the Inner City: The Promise and Perils of Mixed-Income Public Housing Transformation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015.

Chaskin, Robert J., Florian Sichling, and Mark L. Joseph. "Youth in Mixed-Income Communities Replacing Public Housing Complexes: Context, Dynamics and Response." *Cities* 35 (December 2013): 423–31.

Cherlin, Andrew J. *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today*. New York: Vintage, 2010.

Chetty, Raj, Nathaniel Hendren, Maggie R Jones, and Sonya R Porter. "Race and Economic Opportunity in the United States: An Intergenerational Perspective." NBER Working Paper No. 24441, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA, March 2018.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. New York: One World, 2017.

Coles, Roberta, and Charles Green, eds. *The Myth of the Missing Black Father*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

Córdova, Teresa L., and Matthew D. Wilson, *Lost: The Crisis Of Jobless and Out Of School Teens and Young Adults In Chicago, Illinois and the U.S.* Chicago, IL: Great Cities Institute, 2016.

Courtney, Leigh, Sarah Eppler-Epstein, Elizabeth Pelletier, Ryan King, and Serena Lei, *A Matter*

*of Time: The Causes and Consequences of Rising Time Served in America's Prisons.* Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2017.

Cozzolino, Elizabeth. "Public Assistance, Relationship Context, and Jail for Child Support Debt." *Socius* 4 (January 1, 2018): 1-25.

Darity, William A., and A. Kirsten Mullen. *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020.

Dion, Robin, Pamela Holcomb, Heather Zaveri, Angela Valdovinos D'Angelo, Elizabeth Clary, Daniel Friend, and Scott Baumgartner, *Parents and Children Together: The Complex Needs of Low-Income Men and How Responsible Fatherhood Programs Address Them.* Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, 2018.

Dixon, Travis, *A Dangerous Distortion of Our Families.* Oakland, CA: Color of Change, December 2017.

Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk.* New York: Dover Publications, 1903.

Edin, Kathryn, and Timothy J. Nelson. *Doing the Best I Can: Fatherhood in the Inner City.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013.

Edin, Kathryn, Timothy J. Nelson, Rachel Butler, and Robert Francis. "Taking Care of Mine: Can Child Support Become a Family-Building Institution?" *Journal of Family Theory & Review* 11, no. 1 (2019): 79–91.

Feagin, Joe R. *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression.* New York: Routledge, 2006.

Glaze, Lauren E., and Laura M. Maruschak, *Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2010.

Hamilton, Darrick, Algernon Austin, and William Darity Jr., *Whiter Jobs, Higher Wages: Occupational Segregation and the Lower Wages of Black Men.* Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 2011.

Hamilton, Darrick, William Darity, Jr., Anne E. Price, Vishnu Sridharan, and Rebecca Tippett, *Umbrellas Don't Make It Rain: Why Studying and Working Hard Isn't Enough for Black Americans.* Oakland, CA: Insight Center for Community Economic Development, 2015.

Harris, Kirk E. "Fathers from the Family To The Fringe: Practice, Policy, and Public Housing." In *Public Housing and the Legacy of Segregation,* edited by Margery Austin Turner, Susan J. Popkin, and Lynette A. Rawlings, 203–19. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 2009.

Johnson, Earl, Ann Levine, and Fred Doolittle. *Fathers' Fair Share: Helping Poor Men Manage Child Support and Fatherhood.* New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999.

Johnson, Earl S., III, and Waldo E. Johnson Jr. "The African-American Male: The Social Policy Challenge of the Twenty-First Century." In *Social Work With African-American Males: Health, Mental Health, and Social Policy*, edited by Waldo E. Johnson Jr., 327–41. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Johnson, Jr., Waldo E. "Social Work Strategies for Sustaining Paternal Involvement among Unwed Fathers: Insights from Field Research." *Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education* 5, no. 1 (2002): 70–83.

Johnson, Maria S., and Alford A. Young Jr. "Diversity and Meaning In the Study of Black Fatherhood." *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 13, no. 1 (2016): 5–23.

Joseph, Mark L. "Understanding the Economic Costs of Incarceration for African American Males." In *Social Work With African American Males: Health, Mental Health, and Social Policy*, edited by Waldo E. Johnson Jr., 311–24. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Kane, Jennifer B., Timothy J. Nelson, and Kathryn Edin. "How Much In-Kind Support Do Low-Income Nonresident Fathers Provide? A Mixed-Method Analysis." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 77, no. 3 (June 2015): 591–611.

Lu, Michael C., Milton Kotelchuck, Vijaya Hogan, Loretta Jones, Kynna Wright, and Neal Halfon. "Closing the Black-White Gap in Birth Outcomes: A Life-Course Approach." *Ethnicity & Disease* 20, (2010): 62–76.

Paul, Mark, William Darity Jr., Darrick Hamilton, and Khaing Zaw. "A Path to Ending Poverty by Way of Ending Unemployment: A Federal Job Guarantee." *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 4, no. 3 (2018): 44.

McCormick, Naomi J., Mark L. Joseph, and Robert J. Chaskin. "The New Stigma of Relocated Public Housing Residents: Challenges to Social Identity in Mixed-Income Developments." *City & Community* 11, no. 3 (September 2012): 285–308.

McGinnis, Sandra, Eunju Lee, Kristen Kirkland, Carolyn Smith, Claudia Miranda-Julian, and Rose Greene. "Engaging At-Risk Fathers in Home Visiting Services: Effects on Program Retention and Father Involvement." *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* 36, no. 2 (April 1, 2019): 189–200.

Mincy, Ronald B. *Black Males Left Behind*. Washington, DC: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006.

Mincy, Ronald B., and Elaine J. Sorensen. "Deadbeats and Turnips in Child Support Reform." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 17, no. 1 (1998): 44-51.

O'Connor, Alice. *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Odgers, Candice L., Sachiko Donley, Avshalom Caspi, Christopher J. Bates, and Terrie E. Moffit. "Living alongside more affluent neighbors predicts greater involvement in antisocial behavior among low-income boys." *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 56, no. 10 (2015): 1055-64.

Pate, David J., Jr. "The Color of Debt: An Examination of Social Networks, Sanctions, and Child Support Enforcement Policy." *Race and Social Problems* 8, no. 1 (March 2016): 116–35.

Pattillo, Mary. *Black on the Block: The Politics of Race and Class in the City.* Rev. ed. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2007.

Rodgers, William M. "Race in the Labor Market: The Role of Equal Employment Opportunity and Other Policies." *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 5, no. 5 (December 2019): 198–220.

Self-Brown, Shannon, Melissa C. Osborne, Clinton Boyd Jr., Natasha DeVeausse Brown, Whitney Rostad, Alexandria Patterson, Evander Baker, et al. "The Impact of SafeCare® Dads to Kids Program on Father Maltreatment Risk and Involvement: Outcomes and Lessons Learned from an Efficacy Trial." *Child Abuse & Neglect* 83 (September 2018): 31–41.

Sick, Nathan, Shayne Spaulding, and Yuju Park, *Understanding Young-Parent Families.* Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2018.

Silva, Lahny R. "Collateral Damage: A Public Housing Consequence of the 'War on Drugs.'" *UC Irvine Law Review* 5 (2015): 783–812.

Sorensen, Elaine, *Obligating Dads: Helping Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers Do More for Their Children.* Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 1999.

Sorensen, Elaine, Liliana Sousa, and Simone G Schaner, *Assessing Child Support Arrears in Nine Large States and the Nation.* Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 2007.

Tsoi-A-Fatt, Rhonda, *We Dream A World: The 2025 Vision for Black Men and Boys.* New York, NY: Open Society Foundations, 2010.

Western, Bruce. *Punishment and Inequality in America*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006.

Young, Alford, Jr. "Safe Space for Vulnerability: New Perspectives on African Americans Who Struggle To Be Good Fathers." In *Boys and Men in African American Families*, edited by Linda M. Burton, Dorian Burton, Susan M. McHale, Valarie King, and Jennifer Van Hook, 173–83. Springer, 2017.