

Absence of black fathers decried

Big push urged to help families

By Cheryl Weitzstein
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The "silence" about the absence of fathers in black homes has been broken, say black and white scholars who released a statement yesterday about what should be done about this "great social tragedy."

"What we're saying is that children need their fathers and marriage matters," said Obie Clayton Jr., director of the Morehouse Research Institute, a research center at Morehouse College in Atlanta.

Mr. Clayton and others told a news conference yesterday that a national effort to reconnect fathers to their children should be undertaken for at least 10 years.

They said this effort should:

- Create jobs and economic stability for black men, especially those who live in inner-city ghettos and "poverty pockets."
- Help black men resolve their historical bitterness about slavery, which prevented them from caring for their women and children for generations.
- Intensify discussions about the importance of marriage to adults, children and society.
- Heal the rifts between men and women.

Countless women have been deeply hurt by men, but women should "keep [their] eyes squarely on the children," said Enola Aird,

BRINGING BACK FATHERS

Fifty scholars, authors, clergymen and community leaders yesterday released 10 recommendations to reverse the trend of fathers being absent, especially in black families.

- Fathers and mothers should recognize their obligations to each other and build better parenting partnerships for the sake of their children.
- The church should focus on gender and family healing.
- Communities should support alternative schools that teach values.
- Civil rights and black professional groups should make reuniting fathers and children a top priority for at least 10 years.
- Media, especially black media, should promote positive images of men and fatherhood.
- Congress should authorize at least \$2 billion over the next five years to support community-based fatherhood programs aimed at reversing father absence in families.
- Child-support enforcement programs should be reformed.
- Anti-marriage housing and tax policies should be repealed.
- The criminal-justice system should help reconnect fathers and children.
- Government and community programs should help encourage marriage through education and marriage mentoring.

Source: "Turning the Corner on Father Absence in Black America," Morehouse Research Institute and the Institute for American Values.

The Washington Times

a scholar with the Institute for American Values, a New York City-based group that co-sponsored the report on absent fathers with the Morehouse institute.

"These are the fathers of our children and when we assassinate them, we assassinate part of our children," said Ms. Aird, adding that efforts must be made, particularly by religious leaders, to help "repair the breach between men and women."

Data show that fatherlessness is rampant in black families — about 70 percent of black children are born to single mothers — and is growing the fastest in white families. About 40 percent of all children live without their fathers, mostly because of divorce or unwed childbearing.

Children who grow up without their fathers are at heightened risk for problems in their physical and mental health, educational achievement, social behavior, careers and future family formation, studies show.

"This trend of father absence is the great social tragedy of our generation," said David Blankenhorn,

president of the Institute for American Values and author of "Fatherless America."

Mr. Blankenhorn was one of 50 scholars, community leaders, clergymen and writers — including a dozen women — who discussed the absence of fathers at a conference in November at Morehouse College.

Their resulting statement of beliefs marks a turning point because "for a generation, this issue of father absence in black America has been surrounded by silence, by denial, by a fair amount of excuse-making, by a sense that nothing can be done and by a lot of political and racial polarization," said Mr. Blankenhorn.

"I believe that this document points to and signifies an end to that period of stalemate and division and inaction," he said.

It calls for at least \$2 billion in funding for community-based programs that would promote responsible fatherhood. It also urges an end to anti-marriage policies in housing, tax, child-support and welfare programs.

The Washington Times

THURSDAY, JUNE 17, 1999

Crossing racial lines, coalition reaches to fathers

Report confronts black families' crisis of absence

By Karen S. Peterson
USA TODAY

As Father's Day approaches, a major initiative from black and white leaders calls for the nation's dads — especially black dads — to put responsible fatherhood at the head of their agendas.

The authors of the initiative exhort "all African-American leaders to bring to this movement the same energy and dedication, the same passion and fearlessness, and the same creativity and courage that was summoned to wage the struggle for basic civil rights."

The Morehouse Research Institute and the Institute for American Values joined Wednesday to present a report called a "cultural watershed": *Turning the Corner on Father Absence in Black America*.

It deplores "the political, economic, social and cultural forces that are separating fathers from their children."

The Morehouse Research Institute, affiliated with Morehouse College in Atlanta, is a clearinghouse for information about black American males; the Institute for American Values is a private think tank promoting the family.

The group that endorses the report is as significant as the document itself: blacks and whites, conservatives and liberals, men and women, scholars and activists coming together to support responsible fatherhood within healthy marriages, particularly within the black community.

The coalition represents a broadening of the fatherhood movement, a loose combination of child advocates trying to reduce the number of children who live in homes without dads.

Initially, that movement was seen to be backed largely by conservatives, says Obie Clayton Jr., director of the Morehouse Research Institute. "But in the last year or two, we have gotten conservatives and liberals together to address a problem."

That problem is the disappearance of fathers from the homes of their children.

It is "an American problem that crosses racial, ethnic and class lines," the report says.

"Driven by growing rates of out-of-wedlock births, separation and divorce, this trend is robbing millions of our nation's children of the spiritual, emotional, and material support of their fathers."

"Tonight, about four of every 10 children in the USA will go to sleep



Clayton: Uniting liberals, conservatives



Blankenhorn: Disarming a minefield

The report put together by such a broad-based group "helps take the whole subject out of the minefield of racial politics."

— David Blankenhorn,
Institute for
American Values

in homes where their fathers do not live."

The fallout can be significant.

Research shows that compared with children with both parents at home, children who live apart from their fathers are five times as likely to be poor, more likely to do poorly in school and twice as likely to drop out of school.

The children apart from their fathers also are at greater risk for men-

tal and physical health problems.

Although the proportion of children with absent fathers is growing most rapidly among whites, it is a crisis for American blacks, the report says.

About 70% of black children are born to unmarried mothers, and at least 80% of black children can expect to spend a significant part of their childhood years living apart from their fathers.

Talking about father absence in the black community — and who or what policies are responsible — has been difficult, says David Blankenhorn, founder of the Institute for American Values.

The report put together by such a broad-based group "helps take the whole subject out of the minefield of racial politics," Blankenhorn says.

The report makes many recommendations. Among them:

- Fathers and mothers should work to build stronger parenting partnerships.

- Black churches should help build a movement aimed at family healing.

- Congress should pass legislation to support community-based fatherhood programs that increase the attachment of dads to their children.

- The public and private sectors should develop employment opportunities in urban areas, as well as provide job skills training for work in the suburbs and transportation to those suburbs from cities.

- Programs that deal with unwed parents should connect them with faith-based marriage education and marriage mentoring programs.

Coalition Pushes Initiatives for Black Fathers

By MICHAEL A. FLETCHER
Washington Post Staff Writer

When Daniel Patrick Moynihan called black fatherlessness "the fundamental weakness of the Negro community" in a report 34 years ago, he was excoriated by many black leaders, who felt the issue only distracted attention from the more pressing problems of racism and the lack of opportunity for blacks.

Times have changed. Yesterday, a diverse coalition of policymakers joined forces behind a policy statement calling for a range of new initiatives aimed at reconnecting estranged African American fathers to their children, providing fresh evidence of a growing consensus around an issue that once fostered only division. It is just one of a number of recent proposals from across the political spectrum to address an issue once deemed too sensitive for public debate.

The statement, which grew out of a conference late last year at Morehouse College, urges Congress to provide \$2 billion to support the wide range of grass-roots fatherhood programs proliferating around the country. It also calls on African American leaders to "recognize the high priority of restoring the black family" and called on civil rights organizations to move the issue to the top of their agendas.

At the time of the Moynihan report, a third of black children lived in single-parent homes. Now, 70 percent of African American children are born to unmarried

mothers and 80 percent will spend substantial time without a father present. Regardless of race, some 40 percent of all American children live in homes without their biological fathers, the Morehouse report says.

Such statistics have long been a source of fractious debate. Conservatives tended to blame the problem on cultural and moral failures, while liberals have typically argued that the situation is more complex and largely attributable to shrinking economic opportunities in poor neighborhoods.

But the gap between these views appears to be narrowing, as activists of varying political views focus on pragmatic solutions. "You can be about fathers without signing on to a whole conservative agenda," said Ronald Mincy, a Ford Foundation vice president, who oversees the foundation's funding of fatherhood programs and is a supporter of the Morehouse statement.

See FATHERS, A7, Col. 1

The role of fathers, particularly among the poor, began taking on new importance after Congress rewrote the federal welfare laws in 1996. Since then, fatherhood programs have developed into a crucial component of the nation's social policy, with hundreds of programs aimed at fathers springing up across the country.

"We catalogued maybe 200 fatherhood programs around the country about five years ago. Now

easily there are 2,000," said Wade F. Horn, president of the National Fatherhood Initiative.

The issue of single-parent households is also one that top policymakers and civil rights leaders are becoming more comfortable addressing.

In a speech to formally kick off his presidential campaign yesterday, Vice President Gore said, "The crisis in the American family today knows no boundary of class or race."

NAACP President Kweisi Mfume said his group is aggressive about "promoting the value of values," noting that the group's branches across the country sponsor parenting, mentoring and father-and-son programs. Rep. Nancy L. Johnson (R-Conn.) is working to build bipartisan support for a bill to be introduced in coming weeks that would address many of the issues raised in the Morehouse report. The legislation would fund grass-roots fatherhood programs, pay for a public relations campaign to promote the virtues of fatherhood and support job training for poor,

unskilled fathers.

Those efforts are being buttressed by new research indicating that poor, single fathers often are more intimately involved in the lives of their children than is commonly assumed.

Preliminary findings from a study being done by Princeton University's Center for Research on Child Well-Being, found that four of five single fathers are "romantically involved" with their partners at the time of childbirth. Half of the couples actually live together, and 85 percent of the men provide financial support during

pregnancy and say they plan to continue supporting their children. Moreover, the study is finding that most single parents are at least contemplating marriage.

"The problem is when you look at many of these guys five, six years down the road, they aren't there, they aren't involved, they aren't married," said Horn.

One reason is that often they cannot afford families. And while states have stepped up measures to make deadbeat fathers pay child support, there is no clear strategy for

dealing with what the Morehouse report calls "dead-broke" fathers, who simply can not afford to pay.

Efforts to improve what the statement's authors call the "marriageability" of poor, single men are likely to prove difficult. Last year, a study found that the nation's most ambitious effort to help the fathers of children on welfare, called Parents Fair Share, failed to increase the men's employment or earnings and, as a result, had only modest success at getting them to make child support payments.



Bruce N. Reed
02/23/99 11:58:12 AM

Record Type: Record

To: Paul J. Weinstein Jr./OPD/EOP, Cynthia A. Rice/OPD/EOP, Andrea Kane/OPD/EOP

CC:

Subject: Re: President's feedback on Edley's Workplan Outline

Here is what I sent Maria: we should tell Chris what we've already proposed, and work with Gene on something new if need be, since obviously something "BIG" would involve MONEY.

----- Forwarded by Bruce N. Reed/OPD/EOP on 02/23/99 11:59 AM -----



Bruce N. Reed
02/17/99 12:41:04 PM

Record Type: Record

To: Maria Echaveste/WHO/EOP

cc: See the distribution list at the bottom of this message

Subject: Re: President's feedback on Edley's Workplan Outline 

First we should put in one place the proposals we're already pushing to help jobless young men. For example, 20% of our welfare-to-work proposal is dedicated to helping fathers (most of them in this age group) get jobs. We also have a DOJ proposal we pushed at the President's request to expand work/training for federal prisoners. Gene has more proposals in the budget as well, and if there's a desire to come up with still more ideas, NEC would be the right one to host a process.

Message Copied

To:

Gene B. Sperling/OPD/EOP
Elena Kagan/OPD/EOP
Sarah Rosen/OPD/EOP
Sally Katzen/OPD/EOP
Clara J. Shin/WHO/EOP



Elena Kagan
02/23/99 12:24:49 PM

Record Type: Record

To: Paul J. Weinstein Jr./OPD/EOP

cc: Bruce N. Reed/OPD/EOP

Subject: Re: Help!! 

Paul --we should talk about this. I don't think this is quite the process
bruce and gene had in mind.



Elena Kagan
02/23/99 12:28:38 PM

Record Type: Record

To: Paul J. Weinstein Jr./OPD/EOP

cc:

Subject: Re: President's feedback on Edley's Workplan Outline 

no, you can. but you should talk with whoever in gene's office would have an interest first.