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THE MARRIAGE MOVEMENT AND THE BLACK CHURCH

PANEL TWO

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[TRANSCRIPT PREPARED FROM A TAPE RECORDING.]

PANEL TWO

Introduction:

RON HASKINS
Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution

Moderator:

RALPH SMITH
Senior Vice President, Annie E. Casey Foundation

Panelists:

DIANN DAWSON
Director, Office of Regional Operators, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

RONALD MINCY
Professor of Social Work Policy and Practice, Columbia University

W. BRADFORD WILCOX
Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Virginia, Charlottesville

ROBERT WOODSON
Founder and President, National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise

Question & Answer Session

P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. HASKINS: All right. Thank you. We're going to start the second panel. People talking in the aisle should move to the back of the room, please. Notice how quickly they respond.

[Laughter.]

MR. HASKINS: The idea of the second panel is to invite people with not necessarily just a church perspective, but have a broader perspective on the issue of marriage in the black community: people who are sociologists, historians, community activists, people who can reflect both on the question that the first panel reflected on, as well as the things that were said by the members of the first panel from a somewhat broader perspective. So we're very fortunate to have Ralph Smith, Vice President of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, to head this panel. For many years, Ralph was a law professor at the University of Pennsylvania and has been adviser to many political figures primarily on the left--

MR. SMITH: Primarily.

MR. HASKINS: Although he occasionally hires people that are not on the left. So that's good.

So, Ralph Smith, thank you very much for coming.

[Applause.]

MR. SMITH: Good morning. You can imagine my trepidation at accepting Ron Haskins' invitation to come here this morning. I knew that I would be asked to offer abbreviated comments. And I'm a law professor, and in the tradition of good Baptist ministers, I speak for about 45 minutes and consider that a sound bite.

[Laughter.]

MR. SMITH: I knew that I would be in the company of a distinguished audience. But you can sympathize with me having to be the first voice you hear after that last panel. It was a remarkable conversation, and I know that many of us just wish we had the time to continue it.

I have the good fortune this morning to have the opportunity to moderate a panel of distinguished folks who are being asked to build out on the issues, to frame some of the problems and challenges within the larger social, historical, political context, and to eliminate these challenges, and problems, and paradoxes, in many respects. And I must say that, within the context of so many clergy, you feel the urge to confess.

[Laughter.]

MR. SMITH: And among the things I will confess is that, if truth be told, the person who should be standing here is my colleague, Carol Thompson, who leads this work at the Casey Foundation. We could have asked Bob Franklin to continue because he has been Carol's soul mate in building out this work for the Casey Foundation. But my own checkered history requires me to confess that I began life as a corporate and securities law professor, and I'm a relative newbie to the social policy issues. This is my second career.

And as I made the transition, I found myself developing a question that propelled my own inquiry and my own work, and the question is this: How could we know as much as we do, spend as much as we do, care as much as we say we do and accomplish so little, for so many children, over so long a period of time as permanently to compromise their chances to grow up to be productive adults, effective parents and good citizens?

And I came to the conclusion that we don't know as much as we say we do, as much as we think we do, and we often lack the personal courage and political will to act on what we do know. We don't spend as much as we do, but until we do substantially better with what we have, we're not going to make the case for what we need, and we don't care as much as we say we do because some children and families matter more than others and some matter not at all.

Well, if we want children to matter, we've got to engage the powerful data that Ron Haskins used to start this session. And if we want children to matter, if we want to pretend as if they matter, we've got to say that work matters, that full-time job statistic, work matters. And we've also got to say that marriage matters.

And so our panel today will seek to build out this conversation and seek to explore this paradox: If we agree that marriage matters, why is it that those data look the way they do?

I'm joined today on the panel by a distinguished group. Diann Dawson, who is Director of the Office of Regional Operators of ACF in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Brad Wilcox, who is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Virginia; Ron Mincy, who is a Professor of Social Work and Social Policy at Columbia University; and Bob--Robert--Woodson, the legendary founder and President of the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise.

Diann?

MS. DAWSON: Well, it's still morning. Good morning to everyone. I'm Diann Dawson. As Ralph said, I am Director for Regional Operations at the Administration for Children and Families. But I also am serving as the lead for the African-American Healthy Marriage Initiative. And I just want to say that I am just

delighted to see this conversation, and I want to thank the Brookings Institution for hosting it and for the participation of this great panel and the panel before us.

These conversations are occurring among African Americans across this country, and I believe that the dialogue about healthy marriages and the role of the black church is essential to helping us think through the kinds of intervention strategies that we must have to improve the well-being of African-American children in this country.

I know there's been a lot of talk today about whether there is a marriage movement or not a marriage movement, but I am here to say that there is definitely something going on because we're sitting here having this discussion on a national level. And I must also say there's something going on because, even if it's in the embryonic stages, there seems to be a critical period here where people are engaging in the discussion about how do we think about marriage and what it means for the well-being of our children.

And I would say that from my standpoint, the marriage movement in America will never be realized fully until we have the full participation and the commitment of the black church.

Let me tell you, people have been talking about the administration's marriage initiative. Well, I'd like to tell you what it is. This is what my boss says it is, and this is how we have been working.

The administration's marriage initiative is about helping couples, who choose marriage for themselves, to develop the skills and the knowledge necessary to form and sustain healthy marriages. The African-American Healthy Marriage Initiative is a component of the overall Healthy Marriage Initiative, and it was conceived out of a

perception that the overall initiative was not addressing the unique experiences of our population.

I think it's very evident, and it's clear from the conversation here, that the clear linkage between the social science research about healthy marriage and child well-being and also what we know is going on in our community as it relates to nonmarital births, and divorce, and low marriage rates, that it is conclusive, at least in the public dialogue, that the African-American community values the institution of marriage.

The most critical issue underway that I think, at least from my perspective, it seems to me is that we need to be focusing on how best to develop an infrastructure and a service delivery system that will be adaptable, that will be accessible, that will be acceptable to the various segments of the African-American population. There is a great need to develop and improve the capacity within our community to provide for healthy marriage programming and services.

The government cannot do this alone, nor should it. This work should not be done in isolation, and it's important that the institutions of the community play a pivotal role in taking the leadership, in designing curriculum, communicating the message about the benefits of marriage, providing the necessary supports to couples preparing for marriage, couples who may be facing marital conflict, but equally important, preparing young people and singles to make healthy lifestyle choices leading to marriage if they choose.

I think the black church is the strongest institution in our community, and the African-American Healthy Marriage Initiative realized the importance of partnering with the church, black church, to successfully reach the black population about the message of the benefits of healthy marriage.

I would like to just share with you some of the things that we have been doing under the auspices of the AAHMI. In partnership with the Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America, the Center for New Black Leadership and the Alpha Phi Apha fraternity, the AAHMI has convened a series of forums to elicit the views and enroll various black institutions and organizations in a conversation about why marriage matters in the African-American community.

Health marriages produce healthy families, communities and ultimately a healthy nation, and we know that it is going to be critical to engage the large segment of the population in this country that's African American about the benefits of healthy marriage.

Our Chicago forum, which we held just in May, a few weeks ago, specifically focused on the faith community and community-based organizations. This forum we found was particularly instructive because of the diverse group of pastors and church leaders participating. We created a venue where this group could talk among their peers about their commitment and their resolve to strengthen marriages and their own needs to get the job done effectively.

In response to the question, what can the clergy do to strengthen marriage, most of the clergy in that group--and I'm kind of reporting out to you some of the things that they said--most of them said the clergy should lead by example. There was an acknowledgment that, for some, that was difficult because the black church needed to address infidelity in the pulpit. Several mentioned that the black church needed to overcome a tendency to work in isolation. Egotistical individualism, as one minister phrased it, is causing the black church to degenerate in isolation rather than networking their resources together in support of strengthening black marriages.

Larger churches should collaborate with smaller churches by cosponsoring workshops and other events, as well as develop resources which support marriages. Others expressed that the church must designate specific targeted resources, such as time and financial support to this effort. They could do this by assigning staff, empowering ministerial teams, and volunteers in the church to strengthen marriages.

Others said they could observe and promote the Annual National Black Marriage Day, clergy should align themselves with experts in the field, partner with those who have done this successfully, and several discussed the need to reach out to the youth before they marry.

In response to a question about what does the clergy need to get started, the pastors and leaders said that, first and foremost, the clergy needed a burden, they needed a passion, and they needed a purpose. They must see the need to talk about marriage from the pulpit, use the pulpit to get the message across for healthy marriages and against adultery, and infidelity, and domestic violence. The clergy also need access to information so that they can provide the resources and information to their congregations, and many of them said that they did not know how they could access this information to get started.

In addition to the dialogues that we've had to really engage the various institutions about the benefits of healthy marriage, we've also designed some of our forums around reaching our youth. In Atlanta, last November, we focused on the youth, the Healthy Lifestyles, Healthy Choices, and we're going to hold another forum in L.A. I think the dates are September 24th and 25th that is going to focus on the hip-hop generation. And it's instructive about what many of these teams have had to say about marriage.

MR. SMITH: I'm going to have to interrupt you.

MS. DAWSON: Time?

MR. SMITH: Ron is giving me the evil eye here, and we promised that there's a black belt down here--

MS. DAWSON: I'm sorry.

MR. SMITH: --who is going to take me out first.

[Laughter.]

MS. DAWSON: Okay. Let me just say this. I had no idea. I thought I had at least three minutes more to give to Ron Mincy. But let me just say this, in conclusion, because I am very cognizant of the stop sign, I just believe that this work is so important, that it's so important to the well-being of our children and that this is an idea whose time has come, and I just want to say to everyone let's get on board and let's make this marriage initiative one that can be embraced and that can be a value to our children and families.

Thank you.

[Applause.]

MR. SMITH: As you can see, we have got four people up there. Each person could speak for 45 minutes, and then there's mine. So we really want your encouragement during this conspiracy to help us keep this to the six minutes, and then we'll take some questions.

Ron, you're on.

MR. MINCY: I feel forewarned. So I will dispense with long thank yous for the conveners and try to get to the point.

First of all, as someone who has been a Christian and a policy wonk for 20-some-odd years, I'm a little dizzy at the opportunity to see faith-based leaders now engaging public policy on this question of the black family.

I think where we are today, with something like 60 percent of African-American children in the homes without their biological fathers, 70 percent of African-American children who are born out of wedlock, I think we got there, and the important thing to understand, in terms of looking at the role of the black church in promoting marriage is my view is that we arrived at this point as a consequence of a series of shocks. And I think Eleanor Holmes Norton spoke to those shocks.

Slavery, sharecropping, migration and the disruption that that implied to black families, discrimination in labor markets, especially as experienced by African-American men, the theoretical platform of Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the economic declines in central cities in the 1970s, the partial adjustment and the like, I think those helped put us in--and the adaptations that African Americans, the creative adaptations to these external circumstances place us where we are today with respect to the low rates of marriage in the African-American community, on the one hand, and the adaptations, the acceptance, as it were, of those statistics, on the other hand.

And I think the African-American church has been part and parcel of those adaptations if, for no other reason, by its silence on the decline in African-American marriage, on the one hand, and the increase in the number of children who are born to unwed parents on the other.

But this paradox, to which one of our speakers spoke, about black women not having the opportunity and black men not having the opportunity to control who was siring children, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the sanctity of life, which is also

part and parcel of the culture of the African-American community, then places us in this paradox, where we have embraced all of our children irrespective of their origin. Those things have to be understood in order to figure out what is the strong suit of the African-American church, then, in promoting marriage in the African-American community?

So what I'd like to speak to then is what, how I'd like to think about the strong suit of the African-American church, because I don't think there's a question about whether or not the African-American church should be involved, the question is how can it be involved most effectively?

I think this question of--one of the issues has to be with respect to evangelical role of the African-American church with respect to black men because the church may well have its greatest influence over the people who attend church. And as a consequence, the low rate of church attendance among African-American men, constrains in some way how the African-American church is going to be most effective on this issue. It would help me if you'd tell me how much time I've got left. Okay?

[Laughter.]

MR. MINCY: So one of the questions is the church may be most effective, to the extent that it has a more effective outreach to African-American men so that they are there to hear the pulpit speak out on these set of issues and to frame their own thinking about the role of men and family, et cetera, et cetera.

I think, on this other question, though, I've been trying to get the African-American church involved in family issues for about 20 years now--now that I've kind of figured it out. And I think it's wonderful that they are now engaged in a dialogue about their role on this issue. However, what I seem to hear is that, well, what I remember, from those earlier attempts around fatherhood, that there's a real question about the

theology of the African-American church around family issues on the one hand, and then defining a role for themselves on this issue on the other.

And so I heard a long-winded question that sounded to me like, will the African-American church be really clear that bearing children out of wedlock is sin? That helps define, getting that piece of the theology straight, and there are variances of opinion on the clarity, the unequivocal sense of that message, that has to be really, really clear in order for the African-American church to figure out what is its role going to be with respect to the Healthy Marriage Initiative.

And then I think there are a couple of other questions that are important here. One is whether or not it is true that marriage rates are--the probability of marriage is higher among educated African Americans than among less-well-educated African Americans. That is true. On the other hand, it is also clear that highly educated African Americans are less likely to marry than highly educated people of other race and ethnicities.

So one question I think is a really important question in defining the appropriate role is to say: Where is the African-American church going to specialize? Is it going to specialize among more highly educated African Americans, where the economic issues may be less relevant?

So I think it's a distraction to keep pointing to this issue of the low rates of employment among African-American men. Those are not--all African-American men do not have high unemployment rates. That is to say there are some African-American men who are employed, who are college educated, who have good jobs and who make good wages. Marriage rates are low among them as well and, as a

consequence, what the African-American church has to figure out, in terms of defining its most effective role, is where are you going to specialize?

In my view, it would be a valuable contribution if the African-American church chose to focus higher in the educational distribution and simply took the role of increasing marriage rates among highly educated African Americans. That's not the whole problem, but it would be a significant contribution to the challenge that we have.

Finally, I would say that I think it is a real distraction to keep again referring to this notion that the African-American church has to solve all the problems that constrain the African-American community in order to deliver on this question of its role with respect to marriage. Some of it is saying where we can be most effective, we will choose to do so.

And then my absolute final point is, you know, it's really curious to me the sense that I heard that the church is concerned that this issue will be something that will distract them from the fundamental role of the church--about the gospel, about evangelism and so forth. I think that's an important question, but I wonder about it.

We saw, fairly early on in our history, that civil rights was critical to the African-American community. It was not a distraction. It was clear that African-American people had to be free, they could not be lynched, and the African-American church was real clear that this is a role, this is an external, societal problem on which we, as a church, has a fundamental role.

The question then is are we equally clear on this score? Is marriage, and the state of the African-American family, such a threat to the African-American community that the role of the church is clear?

MR. SMITH: That's the final point.

[Applause.]

MR. WILCOX: I'm pleased to be here this morning, especially because I can thank Ralph Smith and Carol Thompson in person, and I can also thank Ron Haskins for encouraging me to set a new land speed record in academic presentations.

The last four decades have witnessed a dramatic retreat from marriage in the U.S. The poor, the working class and minorities have been particularly hard hit by our nation's retreat from marriage.

Slide 2 indicates that 70 percent of black mothers in our nation's cities now give birth to children outside marriage. To put this another way, we are now seeing enormous fragility in one of the most central social institutions in the lives of African Americans.

But the black church remains an important source of social order and meaning among African Americans. As Slide 3 indicates, 62 percent of married black mothers of infants and 39 percent of unmarried black mothers of infants attend church several times a month or more, and clearly church attendance rates are higher among African-American mothers than among mothers in other racial and ethnic groups. So, in spite of the fragility of the black family, the black church continues to play a central role in urban communities.

But what about the nexus of church and family? Typically, in the United States, marriage and religion go hand-in-hand. When it comes to the black church, the story is a little bit more complicated, as we'll see in a moment.

Most of my data comes from the Fragile Families Study. This slide is different. It's from the National Congregations Study, which was led by Mark Chavez at Arizona. And what he did is he surveyed congregations from around the United States

to sort of see what they're up to. What this survey found is that only 3 percent of black churches have formal ministries dedicated to marriage and parenting--so things like parenting classes, marriage enrichment programs and the like. So there is clearly some difference between what's going on in black churches and what's going on in other churches in the U.S.

Now, it's important to note that this study did not look at things like sermons, the informal norms in a congregation, the social support that one might find in a congregation for marriage, et cetera. These are not measured in this study. And as the next few slides will illustrate, there is actually evidence that the black church is playing a role in fostering marriage in the U.S.

So, looking first at married mothers, black married mothers--and, once again, these are all mothers who had a child between 1998 and 2000 in large American cities across the U.S.

So compared to African-American mothers who attend church infrequently, churchgoing African-American women are 73-percent more likely to be married at the birth of their child. Likewise, church-going African-American married mothers are 31-percent more likely to report that they have excellent relationships with their husbands compared to married African-American mothers who are not regular churchgoers.

Churchgoing is also linked to marriage and better relationships among unmarried African-American mothers. Slide 6, here, indicates that churchgoing African-American unmarried moms are 148-percent more likely to marry after a nonmarital birth. So marriage is associated with an increased likelihood in the transition to marriage after a nonmarital birth.

Likewise, looking just at unmarried African-American moms, they are 62-percent more likely to rate their relationships with the fathers of their kids as very good or excellent. So there's something about churchgoing that's associated with the transition to marriage and to better relationships, both for unmarried and married African-American mothers.

So how do we explain these religious effects? There are three things that we've come across thus far in our research that help to explain the link between attendance, and marriage, and better relationships:

One is that churchgoing African-American women are more likely to be in a relationship, not surprisingly, with churchgoing men, and these men are more affectionate, and they're more understanding of their partners.

Secondly, couples, where the mother is attending church, and especially where the dad is attending church with her, are less likely to have conflict over sexual infidelity, which is a big issue in many urban communities.

Third, churchgoing African-American mothers are more likely to report, number one, they think that marriage is the ideal setting for the rearing of children and, number two, that marriage is better normatively than cohabitation compared to mothers who do not attend church regularly.

So these are three things that we found.

Looking more broadly at the literature on African-American religion, I would also hazard a guess that church attendance and faith are linked to a strong sense of social support from one's fellow church members and a strong sense of God's presence in one's lives, and both of these things buffer against the stresses of poverty, racism and

community distress which African Americans face and which, of course, can have a negative impact on relationships.

And then, finally, African Americans who are involved in their churches are much more likely, obviously, as Sociologist Elijah Anderson makes clear, to reject what he calls the "Code of the Street," a code which focuses on things like aggression, sexual context being involved in the underground economy, et cetera, and more likely to embrace what he calls a "Code of Decency," which encompasses things like hard work, delayed gratification, charity and the like, things of course which are all associated with good relationships and also with marriage.

So the black church remains, in important ways, a bulwark of marriage, even though there's not necessarily a lot going on in the way of formal programs in the context of the average congregation.

Nonetheless, Slide 8 indicates here that a majority of African Americans are interested in relationship programs, particularly ones offered by religious institutions. About 70 percent of African-American mothers of infants in urban America indicate that they would attend a program on marriage or relationships offered by a church or a faith-based organization. And it's clear also here that the interest in religious programs is higher among African Americans than it is among mothers of other racial and ethnic groups.

So this research suggests that the black church is a moral and social bulwark of marriage and communities where the institution of marriage faces serious challenges. The black church fosters virtues and values and offers the social and spiritual support that's sustained countless good marriages in African-American communities, and these marriages are often lost in our focus on urban problems.

But this research also suggests that more is to be done. A majority of married and unmarried African-American mothers are interested in relationship programs, especially ones offered in the context of a faith-based organization. Now, my hope is that the black church, with help from a range of private and public sources, can meet this interest in marriage with the range of creative programs. Such programs will not be a silver bullet, given the array of economic and cultural challenges African Americans face.

But given the central role the black churches play in the collective life of African Americans, the church could play a key role in stemming, and perhaps reversing, the retreat from marriage that has devastated all too many urban communities.

[Applause.]

MR. WOODSON: I, too, would like to thank Ralph and Ron for inviting me. I have to amend my own resume to say I spend most of my time not at policy forums, but working in urban communities trying to help young black men from killing themselves, like in Southeast Washington, and Benning Terrace, where we had 58 murders in a five-square-block area for two years, seven years ago. That has now declined to zero.

We are taking the same energies of these converted predators--

[Applause.]

MR. WOODSON: --and putting them in our schools. So we are now in the Woodson High School and another, and we haven't had violence in those schools since our young men--

The point is there are a lot of strengths that exist within these communities. We've got a lot of--

[Tape change.]

MR. WOODSON: It seems to me that I have to challenge my colleague, and some of the others, about somehow relating the decline in black marriage to external circumstances like the economy, manufacturing decline, racism. The evidence says otherwise.

Even during slavery, according to Herbert Aptheker, looking at the Freedman Bureau's data, black marriages thrived among slaves where the plantations were paternalistic. And right after slavery, marriage soared as people sought out in marriage.

So, between 1865 and 1965, despite the fact that we endured slavery, discrimination, Jim Crow, 10 years of the Depression, where we had a 25-percent unemployment rate, negative GNP, black marriages flourished, even in the presence of these. Even when we were being lynched every day, we had no representation in government or the police, we were more afraid of the police than the clan, marriages flourished.

Up until 1965, 82 percent of all black men and women were in households raising children. So don't tell me that somehow these external circumstances were responsible for altering those. I agree with someone else, that self-criticism, as Dr. King said, is the highest form of maturity, and we really need to be self-critical.

And as far as the church is concerned, at one time it was a beacon of moral consistency. Mother Bethel Church, in 1783, if you applied for welfare, you had to be, you couldn't be poor because you were slothful or immoral, and so it was the moral consistency of the black church that was beacon, a lighthouse that beckoned those to responsibility. And as the brother said, that church has, today, to be counterculture.

And don't get confused. And in doing so, I think the church has to do several things. At this, I risk being the skunk at the garden party.

[Laughter.]

MR. WOODSON: I think that the church has to cease allowing its pulpits to be used by partisan politicians who come in only when they're running for office and pander to--you don't see them in the white Presbyterian churches, you don't see them in the pulpits of the Catholic Church, but somehow we have forfeited the moral authority to partisan politics.

The second thing we need to do is our children are watching us. Our young gang members that we deal with are watching. When they see heads of a major black church engaged in infidelity, take money that was designed to rebuild burned-out black churches to support his mistress, and black preachers can stand up and say they're divided about him, and when a prominent civil rights leader can acknowledge a preacher having a baby out of wedlock and then two weeks later be standing in the pulpit, that's the kind of moral inconsistency that renders the church impotent to speak to any issue.

[Applause.]

MR. WOODSON: So, therefore, I think we need to adjust that.

And another point, social scientists, and others, and the churches, we need to really look to the real experts on the issue of marriage. I want to see scholars and others go into those low-income black neighborhoods and interview the 30 percent of the people who are raising children who are not dropping out of school, in jail or on drugs and find out what is it that they are doing that distinguishes their outcomes from those 70 percent who are not engaging in this.

In Lawrence County, Alabama, where we are working now, one of the poorest rural counties, some people still living with dirt floors, with no septic systems, 47 percent of the people in that county are married. The question is why are they married? What is it that they're doing? What is happening among those people that distinguishes what they're doing from someone else?

And so I really think that we need to, in this whole marriage discussion, do what the brother was saying, we must be like a lighthouse, be morally consistent. Yes, there are rights and wrongs. We say to these young gang members who are now marrying the mothers of their children, with our encouragement because we believe that evidence always trumps an argument. Kids don't want to hear any more sermons. They want to see a sermon. They want to see what you believe and so that we are morally consistent with them, they see us with our wives and our children, and we bring them into our homes, and we encourage them to do so.

And, finally, there's an interesting phenomena occurring among a lot of these ex-gang members that I haven't really explained, and that is they are adopting children. Even as single dads, they are adopting babies who are being neglected or abandoned by going into court, getting the parents to sign over custody, and they are raising their children, and I don't understand why, but these are strengths that we must pursue.

And my final, I encourage the black pastors to join me, as you may read about in Sunday's paper, in a 1-year moratorium in whining and complaining about white folks.

[Laughter.]

MR. WOODSON: We need to come together, as we did in '85, and come together as a people and ask ourselves, what is it that we are doing that is right, that has worked historically, that works contemporarily? What is that, what strengths do we have, as our forbearers did, what is it that we can do if white folks refuse to do anything? If we have 150 black organizations spending $4 billion in hotels having conferences, if five of them came together in clusters of three or five, you could buy a Hyatt Conference Center, and you don't have to worry about what their EEO plan is. You can develop your own.

So let me just say that I really think self-examination in the church should lead these and be the first the convene people, but first it has to be morally consistent itself and speak out in righteous indignation when people violate the rules the way you do in [Al Campanas] or Jimmy the Greek, say something insensitive on the race issue, oh, everybody's up in arms demanding that they resign, but when someone does what Henry Lyons did, then everybody is suddenly divided.

And our low-income brothers and sisters are looking at you and saying celebrity status should not exempt you from personal responsibility. They want to see moral consistency, and the only way we can hold them morally consistent, if you are morally consistent in what you do.

Thank you.

[Applause.]

MR. SMITH: In some places you say, "Well--"

[Laughter.]

MR. SMITH: You've been kind and generous with your time and patient, so I'm going to go directly to your questions, with the normal observation that we've had

two panels, and we're really hoping not to have a third panel. We're hoping to have questions. So, if you've got a comment, make it really short and have it lead to a question, please.

The gentleman in front.

QUESTIONER: I would like to have the question of the link between the economics of the situation and the family formation aspect. Since Representative Holmes Norton spoke, there has been this "chicken and egg" conversation going on here, and I'd like to have that addressed by some of the panelists. How important is the economics to forming families, and how important are families to keeping good economics?

MR. SMITH: Ron, do you want to start?

MR. MINCY: The research is pretty clear that low rates of employment among African-American men can explain, at most, 20 percent of the differential between marriage rates among whites and marriage rates among blacks. So 20 percent is not 80 percent. There's a lot left to be explained, even after you account for low rates of employment--high rates of unemployment.

The other piece of the puzzle is that, again, marriage rates are lower among highly educated African-American men, as compared with highly educated men of other race and ethnicities. So, again, even if you reduce unemployment rates, increase education, you still have a marriage deficit in the African-American community, and that has to be addressed.

Some of it has to do with the fact that there are more, you know, when my sons graduated from college, I began to get a lens on the low sex ratio of men on college campuses and how that challenges male-female relationships.

So there is a cultural thing that is over and above the economic thing, and that's my point in asking the church, Where are you going to play this game? Even if you stayed for the moment, ignored low-income men and women and focused on highly educated men and women, it is clear that a critical contribution could be made right there.

MR. WOODSON: Just very briefly, we did, some years ago, what we called a black [inaudible]. We had researchers go into the homes of 1,000 black households and ask them questions about family life because we were trying to talk about promoting adoption, to find out which groups were interested in adopting children and taking them in.

Conventional wisdom was they were targeting urban upper-income people to adopt children, but the research revealed that lower-income rural families had three times more interest in and experience in taking in and raising nonrelatives than anyone else.

So we have certain assumptions about class in this country when it comes to family life, that the higher income, the better educated somehow they are wiser, smarter, more moral, and therefore we target resources at that group, as opposed to looking more honestly at people regardless of their income.

MR. SMITH: Second question?

NISA MUHAMMAD: Mine is more of a comment, and I'll lead it to a question.

I just want to add to what Diann Dawson was saying about something going on in the black community. There is a very small marriage movement going on, and I can say that because--my name is Nisa Muhammad. I'm the founder of Black

Marriage Day. And when it first started last year, there were 20 cities that got involved in Black Marriage Day. This year, there were over 70 cities around the country that did something to celebrate black marriage day.

Our community wants to do something. Our community wants marriage. They know marriage matters. They're looking for guidance and direction to get something done.

MR. SMITH: Before you get to the question, let me ask you when is Black Marriage Day?

MS. MUHAMMAD: Black Marriage Day is the fourth Sunday in March.

MR. SMITH: If you're going to make a promo, you've got to give it.

[Laughter.]

MS. MUHAMMAD: I wasn't trying to make a commercial. Thank you.

MR. SMITH: When is Black Marriage Day?

MS. MUHAMMAD: Right. Right. Black Marriage Day is the fourth Sunday in March. It kicks off this November with Thank God for my Marriage. People are going to have events around the country starting in November, Thank God for My Marriage, leading up to Black Marriage Day, which is the fourth Sunday in March.

And I just want to just encourage the panelists to look at our community as an entity that wants to do something about marriage, that people are dissatisfied with what is going on, they just don't know how to solve the problems, and I would just like the panel to perhaps address different things that don't cost money. You don't need a government grant for it. You don't need permission for, you don't need the Bush administration to do it, but it can get done very easily. So people could address different things that communities could do to help solve the problem.

MR. SMITH: Well, let me use that as really a way to wrap up, and I'll ask each of the panelists to take about 30 seconds and really, one, what can we all do, in terms of the larger community, and then end, you know, we generally hear from church leaders, but it's not always we get a chance to give them advice.

So the second half of the question, knowing that there's no one thing that will solve the whole problem, what's the one thing you would put at the top of your list for the black church to do as the church engages even more extensively in promoting healthy marriages, and durable relationships, and homes for children?

MS. DAWSON: Well, I would just say one of the things that we have experienced in our forums, that we have actually had couples talking about marriage; couples who have been married 40, 60 years, up until those who have just gotten married. It's very powerful.

A church could take the members within their congregation who have had successful marriages and just hold them up in whatever way you can do that. The children, the young people, are looking for successful examples of marriage, and they are right there in our community. We just haven't held them up, and I think that's one thing we could do very powerfully that doesn't cost money. It just costs sharing.

MR. SMITH: Bradford?

MR. WILCOX: Well, I'd just say two quick things. One is I think men's ministries are key to this effort, as Ron's comment suggests. I think we also need to do some more studying. I don't mean this disingenuously. There's been some research on marriage in the military, and what it finds is that the racial gap in the military is nonexistent in marriage rates, and we don't really know enough about why that is, but I

think we need to find out and apply those lessons both in the church community at large and in the broader society.

MR. SMITH: Ron?

MR. MINCY: My view is that the black church needs to view itself as part of the entry point; that is to say, part of the agenda is around marriage, part of the agenda is around connecting men who are unmarried to their children. And the black church needs to position itself to be a screening mechanism for both of those kinds of families--meeting them, for example, in the birthing clinics, meeting them in employment and training programs, meeting them in child support and linking with other institutions within your community that are working on these sets of family issues.

In the present moment, there's a plethora of resources to promote marriage and engage that opportunity, but there will continue to be opportunities to engage unmarried parents, both mothers and fathers, around the issue of connecting fathers to their kids, and I think you need to become a part of the ongoing efforts in your community that are doing that work as well.

MR. WOODSON: I think you've got to really go into what appears to be the social anomalies that exist in those low-income communities, people like Pastor Shirley Halliday [ph], right here, who has a drug and alcohol treatment program in one of the most rundown neighborhoods in D.C., and she's brought people together whose hearts have been transformed through God's grace, from drug addicts, and there are now 21 marriages she's had this past year among people she serves.

And these married couples provide leadership to others because their character has changed, but not their characteristics. So they are well-known and respected in the community for what they used to do. And now that their character has

changed, they have a profound influence over people because they say that if Joe Bell can marry and be responsible, then there's hope for me because, after all, he was in prison with me, and his wife used to hook on the corner next to my sister. And if she can marry him, then maybe there's something in marriage.

And so I think you've got to really go into these. But the qualities that make them effective also render them invisible. They're not chasing grants or looking to come to a conference, but they are busy doing what they do. You have to find them. They won't find you.

MR. SMITH: Ron noted earlier in his introduction that I've spent a great deal of time working with folks mostly on the left, and I sort of wear that as a badge of honor, and I wear it proudly because, in many respects, people on the left have been willing, more often than not, to talk about a commitment to children.

But what is becoming increasingly clear as we do a better job of listening, as we reach out, reach back, reach around to each other, about what is happening to a large and growing number of children in this country is that the conversation is no longer about "right and left." It is no longer a conversation about ideology or even a conversation about politics. It's a conversation about caring, about compassion. It's a conversation about the future of our communities, our neighborhoods and, in many respects, our nation and the world.

And because that is the conversation, we find ourselves, if we are not in the movement, we are certainly in an incipient movement, and we find ourselves inside a fairly big tent. And I think that today's conversation is part of what ought to happen within that big tent.

And, Ron, I am grateful to you and this institution for the role you are playing in providing a forum, and a venue and an opportunity for us to come, and talk, and think and carry on this important work.

Let me use that to say thank you to Ron, thank you to Brookings, thank you to you all.

[Applause.]

[Whereupon, the proceedings were adjourned.]