

OUR DREAMS WON'T BE DEFERRED: Reclaiming Progress for Black Men and Boys in an Age of Retreat

FATHERHOOD



Black fathers play a powerful and enduring role in the lives of their children and communities.

Their care, protection, and guidance serve as anchors of strength and healing, grounding their children in cultural knowledge, pride, and identity in a society that too often places their very presence under scrutiny.

To truly support Black boys and young men meaningfully, institutions must move beyond narrow definitions of fatherhood. Black fathers are not only providers but also nurturers, protectors, and culture-bearers. Their presence strengthens families and shapes generational outcomes, particularly in communities facing the compounded effects of racial injustice, economic exclusion, and systemic surveillance.



Areas of Progress

Black fathers, both co-residential and non-residential, **report high levels of daily caregiving**, including meals, hygiene, and homework support.

In 2020, nearly **half a million Black men were raising children as single fathers**, yet their roles remain largely invisible in public discourse and policy.

Social fathers and extended kin — such as uncles, grandfathers, mentors, and others — **play consistent and emotionally vpresent caregiving roles**, grounded in Black cultural traditions.

Queer, trans, and gender-expansive Black fathers are increasingly visible, expanding public understanding of fatherhood and building affirming family structures despite systemic erasure.

Areas of Concern

Federal housing policies often exclude fathers from subsidized units unless listed on the lease, while Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) rules incentivize maternal gatekeeping and castigate paternal involvement.

Black fathers are more likely to have **child support orders based on imputed, rather than actual income**, leading to unpayable debts and legal consequences that strain families.

Black fathers are **frequently excluded from child welfare and education systems** due to informal caregiving roles, racial bias, and rigid norms of masculinity and parenting.

Despite their caregiving contributions, **Black fathers are overrepresented in low-wage, unstable work** and face immense pressure to perform financially, often without institutional support.

A CALL TO ACTION

The barriers Black men encounter when they try to build and sustain their families are often deep, systemic, and not of their own making. To support Black fatherhood, we must change and enact policies that strengthen rather than criminalize Black fathers. Reforms are needed in several areas, including but not limited to:

- **Reform Child Support and Welfare Policy** such as mandating 100% pass-through in all states, ensuring families receive full child support payments and ending imputed income practices that result in unpayable orders, especially for unemployed or reentering fathers
- **Reform Housing Policy** to support fathers, co-parenting arrangements, and multi-adult households
- **Custody and Family Court** to fund legal assistance and father advocacy in dependency court proceedings
- **Inclusive Education and Childcare Policy** such as requiring school districts and early learning programs to include fathers in all family engagement plans
- **Reentry and Sentencing** to expand sentencing alternatives for parents (e.g., community-based parenting programs) and ensure all reentry plans include child reunification and parenting goals

Black Custodial Fathers in Context

Black Father-Only Households

2008: 476,181 (9% of Black families with children)

2020: 491,085 (4.5% of Black families with children)

U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS)

Total Black Families with Children

2008: 5.28 million

2020: 10.91 million

U.S. Census Bureau, ACS

Black Single-Parent Families

2008: 3.35 million (63%)

2020: 5.54 million (50.8%)

U.S. Census Bureau, ACS

Children Living with Father Only (2020)

Black children: ~5%

White, non-Hispanic children: ~5%

Hispanic children: ~4%

Asian children: ~2%

U.S. Census Bureau, 2021

Children Living with No Parent Present (2020)

Black children: 8%

Hispanic children: 4%

White, non-Hispanic children: 3%

Asian children: 1%

U.S. Census Bureau, 2021

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This summary has been shortened for brevity. Full citations and expanded analysis are available in the complete report.