



COMPREHENSIVE ADVOCACY

for Low-Income
African American Men
and Their Communities

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CENTER FOR FAMILY POLICY AND PRACTICE

MAY 2010



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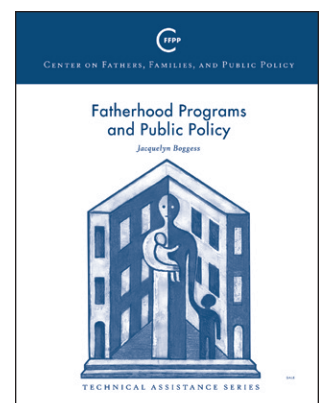
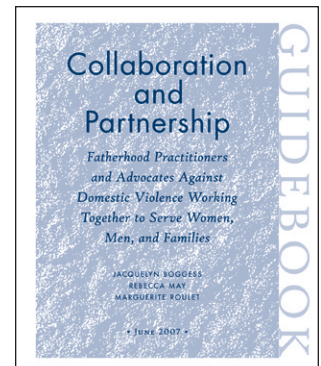
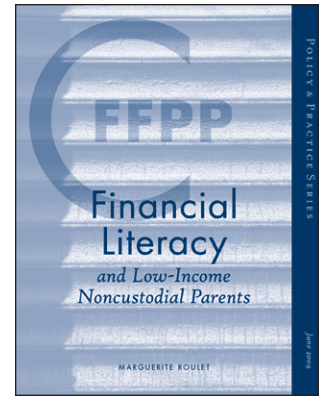
This paper presents the Center for Family Policy and Practice's rationale for supporting a comprehensive advocacy approach to addressing the needs of low-income African American men. Citing the effects of the Great Recession, hiring practices, and men's inability to access social welfare services, we call for the provision of holistic services, the dismantling of structural barriers, and the assurance that African American men and women be afforded their full economic and social rights so that they can make their contributions to their families and communities.

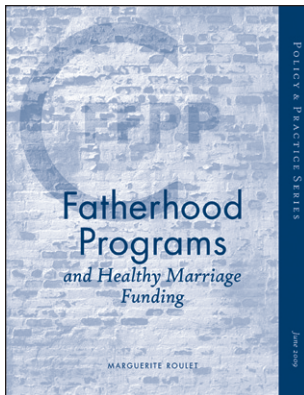
▶ INTRODUCTION

THE CENTER FOR FAMILY POLICY AND PRACTICE

Founded in 1995 as the policy arm of the *Strengthening Fragile Families Initiative*, the Center for Family Policy and Practice (CFFPP or the Center) examines the impact of national and state welfare, fatherhood, and child support policy on low-income parents and their children. The Center is a progressive policy think tank that uses technical assistance, policy research and analysis, and public education and outreach to advocate on behalf of low-income families and develop public awareness of their needs. Because of limited advocacy and policy analysis from the perspective of very low-income and unemployed men of color, the Center focuses on their perspective with regard to these issues. In particular, we concentrate on noncustodial parents who are in financial positions equivalent to custodial parents who qualify for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and other public assistance programs. These parents typically have very low earnings and have unstable and intermittent, if any, employment. While this scope may seem narrow, it includes large numbers of people, many of whom are African American and Latino men who are frequently the subject of economic and family policy in the US. In addition, these men make up the bulk of parents who are struggling with child support. In fact, a 2007 study of child support arrears commissioned by the US Department of Health and Human Services calculated that “70 percent of arrears were owed by obligors who had either no reported income or reported income of \$10,000 a year or less” (Sorensen et al. 2007, p. 3).

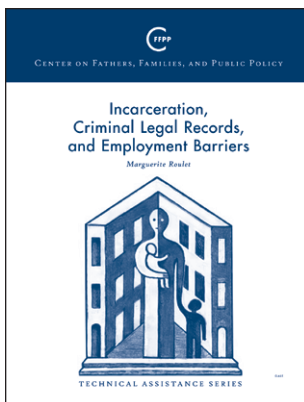
CFFPP enhances national advocacy efforts by providing policy analysis not only from the perspective of very low-income men of color, but by simultaneously foregrounding the interests and welfare of women and children. We provide education and information to a broad audience on the need for comprehensive social services that address the complex issues low-income





families face—issues such as poverty, violence, employment insecurity, and discrimination. Furthermore, while a popular approach to advocating for low-income adults promotes personal responsibility, the Center’s focus is on eliminating the structural barriers that impede men from making their contribution to their families and communities.

As one element of our work, the Center distributes near-monthly (i.e. ten times per year) National Policy Briefings, which summarize current research, policy developments, and practice in the fields of economic support, criminal justice, child support, and child welfare, along with other issues affecting low-income families. The emailed Briefs reach an audience of more than 2,000 individuals and have been generously supported in the past year by the Open Society Institute’s (OSI) Campaign for Black Male Achievement. OSI further funded the Center under this campaign to explore developing a comprehensive advocacy platform for no- and low-income black men. This project culminated in a meeting of select experts from across the country to discuss the potential substantive and methodological parameters of undertaking such an advocacy campaign. To that end, this paper served as a basis for conversation.



▶ PROJECT BACKGROUND

In 2009, CFFPP began compiling research on life outcomes for African American men across four broad categories: (1) resource security, (2) health, (3) opportunities for work and learning, and (4) social and political agency (see Table 1). We developed these categories in an attempt to consider men’s lives from a range of multiple intersecting dimensions, rather than one set issue or area. The Center entered into this project with the belief that by any measure of social inclusion—levels of educational achievement and literacy, employment status and sustainability, access to resources (economic and social), access to housing, rates of incarceration, political disenfranchisement, access to healthcare—this population is among the least valued in the US.

While we knew at the outset that important work is being done regarding disproportionately high rates of incarceration, low rates of graduation, and advocacy efforts on behalf of African American boys, we have found that black men are often missing from advocacy conversations concerning vulnerable individuals and families in low-income communities of color. Where they are included, it is our experience that these men are frequently pathologized, therefore, interventions often focus on the individual and rarely advocate for changes to the surrounding institutions and structures. At CFFPP, we assume this larger social and political context

▶ TABLE 1
INDICATORS OF WELL-BEING

Resource and Economic Security

Disparate impacts of economic growth and contraction, income, unemployment, wealth, housing, food security, retirement, child support, affordable credit

Health

Quality of life, environmental impacts on health, rates of disease, access to health care, mental health, alcohol and other drug addiction, rates of violence, life span, causes of death

Opportunities for Work and Learning

Public school funding and policies, graduation rates from high school and secondary education, affirmative action policies, opportunities for self-actualization

Social and Political Agency

Legal representation, equal protection, incarceration, death penalty sentencing, voting policies and practices, media representations, identity construction, representation in positions of economic and political power

leads to inequalities and explains why many ongoing efforts to intercede on behalf of individuals, such as prisoner re-entry or employment programs, have not resulted in marked improvements for the majority of black men. It has been our intent throughout this project to consider low-income black men's life outcomes within this broader structural context. The aim of our research was to gather what is known about the conditions of black men's lives and use that knowledge to inform a comprehensive advocacy agenda for low-income communities of color.

In conducting this work, it readily became apparent that our initial assumptions are borne out in the evidence. Academic research, nonprofit publications, and mainstream news media have all documented the deteriorating circumstances of low-income African American fathers over the past decade: the unemployment rate of black men has risen, rates of incarceration

► TABLE 2
LIFE OUTCOMES

**From the Kirwan Institute's
*The African American Male
Initiative Report***

- Education
- Identity
- Marriage and Family
- Mental Health
- Economics
- Incarceration and Juvenile Justice
- Homelessness
- Music

remain disproportionate and high, noncustodial fathers owe tremendous debts to the government in repayment of public assistance provided to their children, a vast number of these men are unable to secure housing, and their access to healthcare is negligible. In a 2008 report, *The African American Male Initiative*, The Kirwan Institute systematically catalogued academic research on life outcomes for black men and boys, revealing multiple stark disparities and gaps in the literature across eight categories (see Table 2). Similar to CFFPP's position, the authors conclude that

... much of the research and scholarship on black males has been rooted in a 'cultural' or 'deficit' model in which disparities are attributed to black males themselves rather than to their environments or to institutional arrangements.

Of course, there is often a complex interaction between the cultural and personal, on the one hand, and the institutional and environmental, on the other, an interaction the literature has largely ignored (Trammel et al. 2008, p. 2).

They further write, “Truly transformative efforts on behalf of black males can only be grounded in a deep recognition of and prescriptive attention to this structural context” (ibid., p. 1). Therefore, there is vast evidence for the need to improve life circumstances and outcomes in low-income communities of color, and CFFPP proposes that a focus on individual improvement without systemic and structural change is inherently inadequate to achieve greater equality of opportunity or condition.

In the following pages, we posit that disproportionately worse life outcomes for people of color are well documented, as are the historical and structural underpinnings that lead to such outcomes. At the same time, there is dissonance in both public opinion and policy between what is known (i.e. widely reported) and what is perceived or acted upon. While the legacy of past discrimination and the effect of present-day institutional racism are widely publicized, interventions (e.g. policy, services) and public opinion focus heavily on it being the responsibility of individuals to rise above their conditions. We conclude that we need a comprehensive advocacy campaign on behalf of low-income black men that is grounded in a social justice framework, challenges the myth that everyone can “pull themselves up by their bootstraps,” and aims to break down the institutionalized barriers that inhibit men from making their desired contributions to their families and their communities. We recognize that low-income black men are integral members of their communities who have the right to be afforded the promise of the American Dream. Furthermore, we believe that a comprehensive advocacy campaign that dismantles structural obstacles to opportunity and success will benefit not only black men, but will simultaneously improve conditions and life outcomes for all members of low-income communities of color.

We need a comprehensive advocacy campaign on behalf of low-income black men that is grounded in a social justice framework.

► PART 1 ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

*Economic Well-Being**

Prior to the recession that began in December 2007, Americans—and African Americans in particular—had already experienced nearly a decade of growing income and wealth disparities, mounting unemployment, and deepening poverty. Over this same period, economic growth continued; however, policies concerning income distribution (i.e. tax and welfare policies) governed that a greater percentage of the wealth went to those at the top of the economic spectrum. In fact, the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities reports that “two-thirds of the nation’s total income gains from 2002 to 2007 flowed to the top one percent of US households, and that top one percent held a larger share of income in 2007 than at any time since 1928” (Feller and Stone 2009, p. 1). The same report highlights that

In the three decades following World War II (1946-1976), robust economic gains were shared widely, with the incomes of the bottom 90 percent actually increasing more rapidly in percentage terms, on average, than the incomes of the top one percent. But in the three decades since 1976, the incomes of the bottom 90 percent of households have risen only slightly, on average, while the incomes of the top one percent have soared (ibid., p. 3).

In other words, income inequality is contingent not only upon economic growth, but also on tax and other income distribution policies. The greater rates of income inequality experienced in the US in the 2000s are (at least partially) attributable to tax cuts enacted in 2001.

Similarly, Algernon Austin of the Economic Policy Institute draws attention to the fact that poverty rates are also largely driven by policy decisions. He writes, “All other rich nations ... have a stronger commitment to reducing poverty through

* While this project focuses on a wide array of indicators of well-being, for the purpose of this paper we narrow the discussion to economic issues.

progressive taxation. We could do better, but we don't” (Austin 2009b). Like disparities in income distribution, poverty rates are contingent.

Furthermore, American disparities in income, wealth, poverty, and employment are not borne evenly across races. It is widely reported—from academics, policy organizations, and the news media alike—that people of color have lower incomes than whites in this country (Dillahunt et al. 2010, Pew 2010, Reidenbach and Weller 2010, Acs and Loprest 2009, ARC 2009, Berndt and James 2009, PhysOrg.com 2008, Austin 2008a). A recent Pew publication states that from the 1970s through the 1990s, African Americans had been narrowing the gap in median household income, and that on this measure, blacks have “lost ground to whites since 2000” (2010). On average, African American median household income is 65% that of white households (Reidenbach and Weller 2010). Disparities around wealth accumulation are even starker (Dillahunt et al. 2010, ARC and CSSP 2009, Berndt and James 2009, Hamilton and Darity 2009, Lui 2009), despite the fact that African Americans have been found to save at a higher rate than their white counterparts. In a comparison of households “regardless of age, household structure, education, occupation, or incomes, black households typically have less than a quarter of the wealth” of white households (Hamilton and Darity 2009). Like income distribution, wealth accumulation is affected—either supported or subverted—by policies, and “historically, white families have enjoyed more government support and tax-paid subsidies for their asset-building activities” (Lui 2009).

In 2008, the official US poverty rate¹ stood at 13.2 percent—8.6 percent for whites and 24.7 percent for blacks (US Census Bureau 2009a). Given these rates, it is unsurprising that 10.7 percent of white households reported experiencing food insecurity that year, compared to 25.7 percent of black households (Austin 2009d, Boteach and Weill 2009). Furthermore, nearly half of African American families fell beneath 200% of poverty in 2008 (US Census Bureau 2009c, Austin 2008c), a

1) There is much discussion about the inadequacy of the official poverty rate for capturing the extent of chronic deprivation experienced by a much larger segment of the population. Nonetheless, it is still a commonly used measure for understanding poverty. In 2008, the poverty threshold for a family of four was \$21,834 and for a single adult was \$11,201 (US Census Bureau 2009b).

This recession, in particular, has had a disparate negative impact on communities of color.

startling statistic that reveals how many black families are struggling financially. Again, it is widely recognized that people of color in the United States disproportionately experience poverty (Dillahunt et al. 2010, Rivera et al. 2009, Sharkey 2009, Austin 2008c, Lin and Harris 2008). However, the starkness of this difference is perhaps best expressed by Sharkey, who writes: “By broader measures of neighborhood disadvantage [including concentrated poverty, unemployment, and segregation], it is impossible to compare black and white children because they live in such different communities” (2009, p. 10).

Prior to the official start of the recession in December 2007, African Americans had higher unemployment and lower employment rates than other groups, and approximately twice the unemployment rate of whites (ARC 2009, Cawthorne 2009b, Weller and Logan 2009, Austin 2008a). In fact, unemployment rates for people of color during good economic times are consistently higher than white unemployment rates during recessions (ARC 2009, Austin 2008a). This recession, in particular, has had a disparate negative impact on communities of color, a fact that has been widely reported (Baker 2010, Orr 2010, Reidenbach and Weller 2010, ARC 2009, Austin 2009a, Berndt and James 2009, Bhargava et al. 2009, Cawthorne 2009b, Edwards 2009, Evans 2009, Hamilton and Darity 2009, Rivera et al. 2009, Weller and Logan 2009). Some authors have further acknowledged that by the time white Americans experience a recession, communities of color are already into a depression (Bhargava et al. 2009, Evans 2009, Rivera et al. 2009).

It is readily apparent that communities of color, in general, and African American communities, in particular, are disadvantaged within the American economy. Black communities have not proportionately shared in the wealth during good economic times, face higher rates of un- and underemployment in both good times and bad, and are disproportionately at the bottom of the income scale. The recession has hit black men particularly hard, and their employment status was already precarious well before 2008 (Cawthorne 2009b, Evans 2009, Weller

Employers are more likely to call back job applicants who are white men with criminal records than black men without records.

and Logan 2009, Austin 2008b and 2008c, Fortune 2005, Holzer et al. 2004). The US Bureau of Labor Statistics reported an overall unemployment rate of 9.7 percent for January 2010. The rate is significantly higher for blacks (16.5), and is particularly high for black men at 17.6 percent. In comparison, the composite rate for whites is 8.7 percent and 9.1 percent for white men (2010).

Several researchers have undertaken efforts to investigate the underlying reasons black men experience higher rates of unemployment. While high and disproportionate rates of incarceration are one significant factor contributing to black men's absence from the work force (Cawthorne 2009b, Holzer et al. 2004), researchers also find that black men face substantial discrimination from employers. In two pivotal studies, Pager found that employers are more likely to call back job applicants who are white men *with* criminal records than black men without records (Pager and Quillian 2005, Pager 2003). She further discovered that (1) employers who self report that they would not discriminate based on criminal record are not more likely to hire an ex-offender in practice and (2) discrimination regarding criminal records is further compounded by race (Pager and Quillian 2005). These studies did not find that the employers were overtly racist, but rather that their actions were informed by implicit bias.

Littrell and Beck (2000) investigated the assertion that low employment rates for low-income black men can be attributed to "bad work attitudes." Their study found no attitudinal differences toward work or being treated unfairly in the workplace between low-income black men and majority white college students. To the contrary, they found that the low-income men were more likely than the college students to assign positive characteristics to ambiguously described employers.

The US has long prided itself on being a "Land of Opportunity" in which hard work and persistent effort are rewarded with economic success. For people of color, this national narrative is overshadowed by a long history of racial discrimination and exclusion from prosperity. It is no secret

that throughout our history, a variety of institutions have systematically excluded African Americans from realizing the promise of the American Dream. The legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, exclusion from FHA and VA housing loans, redlining and its effects on public school systems, the Tuskegee experiments, welfare policies, child support enforcement, and policing/incarceration practices makes it particularly difficult to believe that every American has equal access to opportunities in this country. Rather, policies and practices have systematically excluded people of color (and black men, in particular) from access to education, housing, health, and employment resources.

While the vast majority of overtly discriminatory policies have disappeared, racism is still embedded in this country's structures and institutions, and the cumulative effects of past and present discrimination continue to shape disparities in the lives of African Americans (ARC 2009, Rivera et al. 2009). One needs only to consider public school funding and policing practices to see the disproportionate effects of institutional racism.

Public Policy and Social Services

Public welfare policy targets the most vulnerable and the least financially secure, and prioritizes the needs of low-income children. As evidenced by the increasing rates of child poverty in the United States (ARC 2009), however, these policies do not adequately respond to existing need. Regardless, as a society, we have continued to agree to provide a small proportion of low-income families with children at least some economic support through TANF², relatively stable housing through Section 8, and health care through the Medicaid and S-CHIP programs. When it comes to low-income adults, there is less inclination to provide support. Most adults are only included in social welfare programs vis-à-vis their custodial children. The food stamp program (renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) stands out as an exception. It is one government social protection provided to able-bodied adults who do not

2) "The percentage of poor children receiving temporary assistance under the main 'welfare' program has fallen from 62 percent in 1995 to 22 percent in 2008. TANF benefits in 2008 averaged only 29 percent of the money needed to reach the official poverty line" (Bhargava et al. 2009, p. 1).

have legally recognized custody of a child. Given that most poverty-related social programs center on the needs of low-income children and their custodial parents, and given that most custodial parents are mothers, low-income fathers are largely excluded from government-run welfare policy, despite the fact that they share the same level of need for assistance.

It is crucial we recognize that low-income women and children are not being provided adequate social protection and that, at the same time, men are predominantly left out of social welfare policy. Excluded from eligibility for assistance on the one hand, noncustodial fathers are also forced into a kind of false invisibility on the other. As policy currently stands, acknowledging a man's presence in a home—making him visible—affects women's access to desperately needed, albeit minimal, resources. Therefore, not only are men largely excluded from social protection, but they are forced into further obscurity by the very policies intended to assist low-income families. What we find then, is that low-income black men are excluded from many employment opportunities as a result of poor education, criminal records, and employer bias, and live in a society without policies that are able or inclined to address their needs (see Table 3 on following page).

Outside of public policy, attempts in recent years to improve outcomes for African American men have largely focused on interventions aimed at the individual, such as prisoner re-entry and employment programs. Some initiatives have gone beyond trying to boost the chances of some disadvantaged men by advocating for policies that would assist larger numbers. However, as the 2008 Kirwan Institute report reveals, a majority of initiatives are based on a deficit model that does not address the structural oppressions which continue to drive outcomes.

Moreover, if we maintain a focus on the individual by offering only mentoring programs and encouraging education, how can those strategies overcome the disadvantage of poorly funded schools, a dearth of job opportunities, or employers' implicit biases? Austin writes:

It is crucial we recognize that low-income women and children are not being provided adequate social protection and that, at the same time, men are predominantly left out of social welfare policy.

► TABLE 3

LOW-INCOME AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN AND COMMONLY PROPOSED ANTI-POVERTY AND ANTI-RECESSION POLICIES

The following employment and income-support policies are useful in that they can benefit many low-income individuals and families. At the same time, low-income black men are frequently excluded from their provisions, as described below.

Employment-Based Supports

- **Job creation** (e.g. rebuilding infrastructure, “green” jobs, retrofitting)
- **Raising the minimum wage**
- **Unionization and the Employee Free Choice Act**

Given the evidence that black men face substantial labor market discrimination, these policies are not likely to reach or benefit marginalized men unless they are coupled with affirmative action and strong enforcement of anti-discrimination laws.
- **Extending and/or increasing Unemployment Insurance benefits**

Low-income men who are marginally attached to employment are unlikely to qualify for benefits.
- **Expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit for noncustodial adults**

Noncustodial low-income men commonly owe large arrears to state governments as repayment for welfare benefits their children received. As a result, those who qualify for EITC often have their tax returns intercepted by the government and applied toward this debt.

Income Supports

- **TANF** (e.g. waiving time limits, providing states an emergency contingency fund)
- **Child care assistance**
- **Child Tax Credit**

Low-income men who have legally-recognized custody of at least one child would benefit from these policies, however, most low-income fathers do not have custody and are therefore ineligible.

Policy Recommendations That Would Benefit Low-Income African American Men

- **Food assistance funding, including expansion of food stamps (SNAP) and food pantries**
- **Emergency shelter grants and housing vouchers that are not contingent on custody**
- **Universal health insurance**
- **Comprehensive re-entry services for formerly-incarcerated adults, including employment services and transitional jobs**
- **Affirmative action policies and strong enforcement of anti-discrimination laws**

Policy recommendation sources: Dillabunt et al. 2010, ARC 2009, ARC & CSSP 2009, Casey Foundation 2009, Austin 2009c, Bhargava et al. 2009, Boteach and Weill 2009, Carwithorne 2009a and 2009b, Moses 2009, Rivera et al. 2009, Weller and Logan 2009, Pitts and Spriggs 2008, Center for American Progress 2007

Many argue that the key is to have more black men stay in school and earn college degrees. More education is a good idea for many reasons, but, unfortunately, it's only a partial solution to the black employment crisis. . . . The gap in the employment rate between black and white men, however, is not just about education. At every education level, whites are more likely to be employed than blacks (2008b).

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While advocacy and services for individuals will benefit some people directly, advocacy strategies focused on personal improvement and rehabilitation cannot, on their own, bring about great change in the lives of low-income individuals or communities. Consequently, CFFPP supports a multi-level approach to advocating for change, as discussed further in the next section.

One of the great challenges of addressing structural change and thereby improving outcomes for low-income communities of color is the fact that—contrary to the evidence—the public largely believes in the viability and health of the American Dream. Because of the commonly-held faith that there is a “level playing field” for everyone in the United States, “Americans believe ambition, hard work and education primarily drive [economic] mobility, rather than outside forces like the current state of the economy” (Economic Mobility Project et al. 2009, p. 2). As a result of this deeply-held belief, there is greater support for policy and advocacy efforts that focus on individual shortcomings, rather than remedying the historic, structural, and very racialized underpinnings of inequality in the United States.

► PART 2 COMPREHENSIVE ADVOCACY

As a concept, “comprehensive advocacy” is firmly rooted in the promotion of human rights and social justice for low-income African American men and their communities. It stems from a worldview that regards people in their environments as complex, interactive, and dynamic. It may best be summarized as a multi-dimensional approach to advocacy that entails considering people, understanding their circumstances, and assessing their strengths and needs within a broader social and political context, and advocating for change based on this matrix of information. Because it recognizes the complexity of people’s lives, as a method for promoting positive change, comprehensive advocacy suggests we need interventions directed at the individual, policy, and structural levels. In other words, comprehensive advocacy entails enlisting a variety of advocacy approaches working in concert in order to bring about lasting change for members of low-income communities of color.

Furthermore, comprehensive advocacy supports the perspective that in addition to the need for personal responsibility, there is also a shared social responsibility to provide for each other’s care and protection. While as a society we may not fulfill this obligation to one another, and, in fact, laws over the past several decades have eroded our national capacity to fulfill the social contract, we posit that the promise of social protection nonetheless still exists. When it comes to economic stability and well-being, it is clear that income support programs do not effectively respond to the needs of women and children. CFFPP therefore supports the aforementioned policy proposals that would reduce poverty and respond to the recession for some people. At the same time, many of these policies do not—and cannot—address the needs of very low-income black men. Despite their invisibility vis-à-vis social welfare policy, men remain important, valued members of

their families and communities. We must recognize that what little assistance is afforded to mothers and children is being stretched even further to house, feed, and care for fathers as well. Therefore, in acknowledging the presence of low-income African American men and advocating for services, policies, and structural changes that address their unique needs and position in American society, comprehensive advocacy concurrently promotes the well-being of women and children.

In the past, there were some services that responded to the needs of low-income noncustodial men of color. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, community-based organizations sprouted up in metropolitan neighborhoods across the country to provide services to low-income fathers. These early “responsible fatherhood” programs helped men look for work and provided space for peer support groups. Over the years, as funding became increasingly tied to child support enforcement and marriage promotion, these agencies largely changed their focus or closed their doors. In the absence of such grassroots services, there is really very little structured support for low-income men of color. In a series of focus groups CFFPP held across the country in 2008-2009, low-income African American women stated that the services available to them (as mothers) are insufficient, and they are struggling to support their families. At the same time, they said that there is next to nothing for the men in their communities. By and large, the women were able to identify food stamps, some homeless shelters, and re-entry from incarceration as the sole services available to low-income men of color, and they were extremely supportive of the idea of having more services and supports available for men.

As mentioned at the outset, the concept of comprehensive advocacy was organized around four broad categories, which summarize the myriad facets of people’s lives. One purpose of these categories is to help us keep in mind that any given area is only a single aspect of people’s experiences; that we all have a variety of intersecting issues, needs, and strengths; and that any given issue both affects and is affected by other life

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Outcomes are not purely the result of individuals' life choices, but are rooted in systems and institutions that structure and limit black men's opportunities.

circumstances. Therefore a comprehensive approach to advocacy considers a person's or a demographic group's well-being across the (non-discrete) spectrums of: (1) resource security, (2) health, (3) opportunities for work and learning, and (4) social and political agency (see Table 1). Because so many different factors are at work in people's lives, a variety of efforts are necessary to create change. Consequently, comprehensive advocacy is a multi-faceted approach that supports providing holistic, collaborative services, advocating for policy changes, and challenging the systems and structures of privilege that perpetuate racialized outcomes.

It is well-documented that across all four dimensions of well-being, black men disproportionately experience worse life outcomes. In many respects, these outcomes constitute a human rights crisis. Among the findings, the stark reality is that black men, particularly from low-income communities, experience low graduation rates, high rates of unemployment and incarceration, crushing child support debt, shortened life spans, and dramatically constrained life options. These outcomes are not purely the result of individuals' life choices, but are rooted in systems and institutions that structure and limit black men's opportunities.

In conclusion, CFFPP's rationale for a comprehensive advocacy agenda rests on four primary arguments: (1) the disproportionately negative life outcomes African American men experience constitute a violation of their basic human rights; (2) the promise of the American Dream is not (and therefore must be made) accessible to everyone, with comparable life options and outcomes across groups; (3) low-income black men must be included in the promise of social protection; and (4) interventions aimed at individuals alone cannot overcome the effects of past and present racism—we also need an advocacy platform targeted at changing structures of power and exclusion.

CFFPP recognizes that we are one of many voices striving to challenge and dismantle the structured hierarchies of race, class, and gender. Low-income men of color, while being integral

members of their families and communities, are largely excluded from social welfare policy, do not benefit from most social protections afforded to the least well-off in our society, and do not have equal access to opportunities. To the extent that low-income men of color (black men, in particular) are considered and included in policies or services, it is most often from a deficit model, one that frequently pathologizes and/or vilifies. It is our position that meaningful opportunities for these men are incredibly limited and are constrained by institutionalized processes of oppression. We finally posit that African American men and women in low-income communities share overlapping needs, while simultaneously facing different challenges. It is our intent that a comprehensive advocacy campaign that takes into account past and present oppressions and affords African American men their rights would also benefit women and children.

A comprehensive advocacy campaign that addresses past and present oppressions and affords African American men their rights would also benefit women and children.

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