

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

BROOKINGS WELFARE REFORM & BEYOND INITIATIVE PUBLIC FORUM

THE MARRIAGE MOVEMENT AND THE BLACK CHURCH

**INTRODUCTION AND PANEL ONE**

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9:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Falk Auditorium

The Brookings Institution

1775 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.

Washington, D.C.

[TRANSCRIPT PREPARED FROM A TAPE RECORDING.]

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **RON HASKINS**

Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution

### **DEL. ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON (D-D.C.)**

## **PANEL ONE**

### **Moderator:**

### **ROBERT FRANKLIN**

Presidential Distinguished Professor, Emory University

### **Panelists:**

### **REV. LESLIE BRAXTON**

Senior Pastor, Mount Zion Baptist Church, Seattle, Washington

### **REV. DR. CHERYL ANTHONY**

Founder and CEO, Judah International Christian Center, Brooklyn, New York

### **REV. MICHAEL NABORS**

Senior Pastor, New Calvary Baptist Church, Detroit, Michigan

### **REV. THABITI ANYABWILE**

Associate, Center for the Study of Social Policy, Washington, D.C.

### **Question & Answer Session**

## **PROCEEDINGS**

MR. HASKINS: Hi. My name is Ron Haskins. I'm a senior fellow here at Brookings and also a senior consultant to the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Our project here, Welfare Reform and Beyond, sponsors 8 or 10 events like this per year, but I don't think I can recall, in the 4 years that we've been doing this, that I've looked forward to an event quite so much as I have this one.

Here is the question before us: Is it possible to increase marriage rates among African Americans? And what role in promoting marriage could and should be played by black churches?

Here's the problem. Here we have from the Census Bureau the record of nonmarital births for whites, and for Hispanics, which we haven't been collecting data that long, and for blacks, and we now have reached the point where one out of every three American children is born outside marriage. Almost 70 percent of black children are born outside marriage and about 45 percent of Hispanic children.

Fortunately, as you can see, this has leveled off, in each case, in about 1994, '95, '96, right in that area. It's declined some years, gone up a little bit, but there's clearly a break in all of these data series. So we at least have mitigated the increase, but we haven't really turned it around and made it go down yet.

And then the second thing, of course, is that we have monstrous declines in marriage rates, both among whites, but even more among blacks. So we have very, very low rates of marriage, very high rates of births outside marriage and, as a result of that, well over half of America's children spend some time in a single-parent family during their childhood and perhaps 85 percent of black children spend some time during their childhood in a single-parent family. So what difference does that make?

Well, the first thing is that has a huge impact on poverty. Poverty rates are six, in some years, eight times as much among single-parent families as among two-parent families. We also now have a fairly substantial literature that shows that there are definite effects on children's development so that children who are from single-parent families have worse education records, are more likely to be arrested, to commit a delinquent act. The young ladies are more likely to have a child outside marriage and several other effects. So marriage is a protective factor. It promotes children's development.

And the third thing is, of course, that it has very substantial impacts, and on this we again have a very, very substantial literature, including excellent national probability sample studies that show that the health, both mental and physical health, and the well-being, and the wealth of adults are dramatically affected by marriage. So the married couples are much better off individually, both males and females, than are unmarried adults.

So, with all of these benefits of marriage, you would think that we would greatly support this institution, but, in fact, we do not. And what kind of an introduction will I give at Brookings if I didn't mention a Brookings' study? This is a study done by Belle Sawhill and Adam Thomas, and this is really, it's a complex methodology, but the idea is simple. The idea is take the entire cohort of poor people in the United States in 2001 and then use statistical techniques to assume that they had different characteristics. And the three that I want to mention here are work, marriage, and welfare.

If we projected that all of these families would work at the rate that they currently work and work full time, and if they didn't work at all, then ascribe to them the wage that people of that education and background would earn. And if we did that, then,

as you can see in this full paragraph, there would be a 42-percent reduction in poverty, without any government programs, without any additional systems from government, just full-time work at whatever wage they are currently making. So a huge impact on poverty.

But the second-biggest impact would be on marriage, that marriage would produce over one-quarter of a reduction in child poverty in the United States. Here, we assumed that the marriage rates were simply the same as in 1970, and the analysis matched people by race, education, and one other characteristic in their background. So these are actual people that existed in America, and if they got married, then poverty would decline by 27 percent.

So there is no question that if we increase marriage rates, we would have a very substantial impact on poverty, and then of course research suggests that we would also have impacts on children's development and the health of adults.

So why don't we do it? And the answer is it seems that we are beginning to. Everybody is well aware of the initiative by the Bush administration, which has not yet passed Congress, but this initiative joins a growing grassroots movement that has been sort of percolating for at least a decade or so now in cities and communities around the United States. So we could be at the cusp of a much greater emphasis on marriage as a way to increase the health of our children and reduce poverty.

So we are very fortunate this morning to have two extremely terrific panels of people to help us think through this issue, but first we are also fortunate to have our own Congresswoman, Eleanor Holmes Norton, here to join us, to make some brief opening comments. As everybody in this room probably knows, Ms. Norton is a celebrated civil rights leader. She's been an advocate for the District of Columbia and,

as a former staffer in the House, it's always amazing to me that Ms. Norton is able to squeeze out benefits for the District that nobody else in the country has out of a Republican Congress. So I would take that to say that she's quite an extraordinary representative for the District.

And something that I did not know until recently is that Ms. Norton is a tenured professor of law at Georgetown, and I think, probably upon retirement many years hence, she will return to Georgetown to bestow her gifts on many students.

So we are very pleased to have Mrs. Norton.

Thank you.

[Applause.]

MS. HOLMES NORTON: Well, thank you very much, and I want to thank the Brookings Institution for bringing policymakers and ministers of the black church together for this important public forum. It's a public service to our country and to our community.

I want to apologize that I am, as I speak, AWOL on two hearings, which make it impossible for me to stay. I need to stay. The whole Congress needs to stay. So I apologize that I have to speak and run. It's terribly impolite. It's like eating and running, but the District doesn't have any Senators. It has only me in the House, and it is only half a joke that if I'm away too long while they're in session, they may sell the District. I've got to get back there.

[Laughter.]

MS. HOLMES NORTON: I've just got to get back there.

Let me begin at the level of real life, that I think every American, every African American, encounters on one level or the other. Every member of Congress has

a small staff. I have the same as every other staff. In my congressional office, district office or congressional office, my two young black men who are legislative assistants are both getting married this summer. Well, there is great joy in my office. That is a very unusual occasion in the African-American community.

Let me tell you the other side of that story. Equally beautiful, attractive, educated young black women in my office work in my office. Everybody in the office has a college education, the men and the women. Not one of the young black women is married or about to get married. In my generation, the generation ahead of them, everybody at their age would be either married, engaged to be married, shortly going to get married.

My friends, we are seeing a sea change in African-American life. It cannot continue or we will not continue as a viable people. I just want to put it as starkly as I can. We've got to get the attention of our community and our country. It is impossible to overestimate what has happened to our community in only a single generation or two or what might then happen in my son's generation if it continues at this pace.

There is already a catastrophic disparity between the number of marriageable young, black men, and by that I only mean men with enough sense of their future, men without a felony conviction, men whose lifestyle is not rooted in the underground economy or the ghetto culture, between those men and the number of marriageable young, black women; that is, women who have jobs or who know they're going to get a job, who are trying to get a job, who are trying to get an education. That is the catastrophic disparity. These disparities are worse than wartime disparities.

In time of war, great wars, there's a period of time, usually not as great as the disparity I see here, when there are more young women than young men. That rights itself immediately. In the next generation, an equal number of men and women are born, and that balance is straightened out. In the African-American community, the balance isn't being straightened out. It's getting worse.

Now, the difference between the young men in my office and many of my constituents in the city is, of course, that they've got a job, and they have an education. In case you think, well, you know, they're middle class, well, I guess anybody who gets his way finally through law school, both of these young men are fresh out of law school, you know, can be called middle class.

Another young man in my office graduated from Eastern High School. He's only 22 years old. He comes straight out of Southeast. He's married, has two children, joined the Reserves when he was in high school, got called up to Iraq. Thank God he's back. He spent a year in Iraq, was going to school at George Washington in the daytime part-time, working at night--two kids, straight out of the ghetto. Had a sense that he had a future, that there could be a job. A job and legitimate work or the desire to look for work is, I believe, a predicate to the mind-set that leads to family formation, and we've learned that in this generation.

There has been so much black unemployment. Perhaps we have not understood that at least the prospects of a job, the notion that if you go from Alabama and Mississippi to Detroit, you can find a job, all of that is part of the ingredient of wanting to get married.

So I hope we will not take marriage in a vacuum, and we will understand it in its context. This is not a task for the economy or policymakers alone. I hasten to



add, however, the deterioration of the black family and of black family life is too deep and too complicated to respond to any single stimulus, including the powerful stimulus of the economy.

It has penetrated the culture of many parts of the African-American community to become acceptable or to have children without being married. And part of the reason it's acceptable is young women want to have children, but they do not want to marry no-count men. So it is quite possible that somebody will be married [sic], know who the father is, and will not marry that man because that man has no prospects or that man has a felony conviction, that man has nothing to give to this child. There goes marriage, and there goes, in many ways, the future of that child or at least the future that that child might have had, had marriage, in the normal sense, in the sense that their fathers, and their grandfathers, and their great-grandfathers engaged in marriage been possible.

There is, I want to stress, an important and necessary role for many actors. So I want to say to the ministers who are here that we're not asking you to revive marriage alone. How unfair it would be to think that from the pulpit, somehow or the other, we could put marriage together. It wasn't a pulpit that pulled it apart, and I don't think we can ask ministers to act by themselves and on their own.

I know that this forum is called, "The Marriage Movement and the Black Church." My friends, I'm a daughter of the civil rights movement. I spent our college years in that movement. I know what a movement is. I know what a movement feels like.

But no one knows more about what a movement is in the black church because the black church invented a movement. The black church created and started

the civil rights movement at great personal risk to ministers, with churches burned down and all of the rest of it. There are these sparks in the society that must be nurtured. But I have to tell you it is no movement yet. A movement is something that the people feel, and here's where the ministers can be very helpful.

You've got to feel it. You've got to want to be a part of it, and there has got to be a lot of reinforcement that makes people want to be a part of it. There is no marriage movement yet, but we've got to make a movement just like when Rosa Parks sat down there was no civil rights movement. But shortly after she got up, a movement had formed. I don't believe it will be a spontaneous movement. I believe it will be more difficult.

The black church has a unique leadership role and standing to, in fact, be at the helm of this movement. Marriage promotion, of course, of course, speaking very frankly from the pulpit--I'll never forget I went to a Baptist Church just recently to speak in the pulpit, and the minister was Reverend, I don't know, let's call him John Jones, Jr., and I was going to be talking about the black family, my favorite subject in churches.

And so when I got up, I thanked Reverend John Jones, Jr., for introducing me so generously. And I said: I want an America where there are more juniors, and what I'm going to talk about this morning is how our community has descended from where we were full of juniors to where black children don't know who their father is, much less get named for their father. And the pulpit can talk that talk in a way that very few others can, and that's why black ministers are indispensable.

Don't expect black women to simply respond to the notion that black women ought to get married. They are like other women. We have done a great deal. We have done wonders with many black women. People don't have eight or nine

children they can't care for any more. They use birth preventatives of every single description. We've reduced teenage pregnancy. We've got girls going to college in great numbers, but that's not what we expected. We did not expect to see this one-sided success in our community, and our community is not successful, and our country is not successful, as long as it is as one-sided as it is.

I say to my friends from the ministry today, if the church will lead, I will certainly follow. I think it's impossible not to underestimate the response of our community to your leadership. Out of desperation, I started a Commission on Black Men and Boys. We've had three hearings--standing room only, people coming to these hearings, as we call them, who never come to such hearings.

The hearings were on education and work. We had one hearing which really caught the attention of the community. There was a husband-wife family, there was a woman raising sons by herself, and there was a man raising sons by himself. The Commission consists of black men with credibility in the community, a former police chief who grew up in the streets of Southeast to become police chief, a WOL talk show host, a football star. It's gotten the attention of the community.

There is a role for everybody, and everybody has got to find his role. We're doing an action plan to be given to the mayor and the city council, and it will have things not that can be done in the great beyond when we have a perfect world, but things that can be done now like having academies for School to Work because vocational schools don't work any more, nobody can afford all of that equipment; School to Work, which has a young man working and going to school at the same time so he's making money and seeing the connection between education and work. There are too many of those to go into. But work is key.

In my own role as the ranking member of the committee with jurisdiction over the federal government construction and renovation, I have simply negotiated an agreement that the GSA will not renovate any building in D.C., will not do any construction in D.C. unless there is a certified apprenticeship program and young men and women in this city are, in fact, learning those trades there, and they are all over this city any time you see something going on in this city, and in this city we are having a boom in federal construction. My folks, my young folks, are there on the ground learning those trades.

I cite these only as real-life examples of how each of us can and must look at ourselves and ask what is our role. The role of the ministers is almost a given, particularly in our community.

If I am asked is marriage the answer, watch out how you pose that question in our community, it certainly was for my two sisters and I, who were brought up by a mother and a father, it certainly was for my own children. Single parents and their heroics are legendary in our community and have been, but we've got to tell the truth about what the absence of marriage, widespread in our community, has done to millions of children. The decline of marriage is not about the decline of a great institution. In the black community, we date the decline of marriage from the flight of manufacturing jobs which left our communities beginning in the late '50s and the 1960s. That world is gone. We can't strive to bring that entire world back.

The challenge is to come to grips with the world we now live in and to try to put the shattered pieces together to form a composite that meets the needs of this world, but this is a world in which marriage can thrive again. Somebody has to speak up for marriage. Somebody has to speak up for family. Somebody has to talk some turkey

about it, but they need somebody to back them up because preaching about it can make people cynical if they see nothing in the society that makes them marriageable. Yet, somebody needs to bring the moral and practical clarity up front about marriage, about what it's meant to family life, about what it's meant to the progress of African Americans from slavery until today. It must be done in the name of marriage. We must do it in the name of the black family, but we must do it, first and foremost, for our own children.

Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

MR. HASKINS: Well, as often happens when Eleanor Holmes Norton talks, it has resulted in a change. The new title of our program this morning is, "The Incipient Marriage Movement and the Black Church."

[Laughter.]

MR. HASKINS: Now, when we planned this program, we thought that it was obvious that we should begin at the grassroots. If we want to know about the status of marriage and of an incipient marriage movement in the black community, who better to ask than black ministers? Not that we expected them to do it alone, but clearly they will play a crucial role.

So we have invited four distinguished black ministers, and we've asked Dr. Robert Franklin, himself an ordained minister and really a giant in social welfare in the United States. He's not only a distinguished professor of social ethics at Emory, but he also is the author of a book directly about this topic called, "From Culture Wars to Common Ground: Religion and the American Debate."

So we're very fortunate to have Dr. Franklin here, and, Dr. Franklin, it's yours.

DR. FRANKLIN: Thank you, Ron.

After hearing Representative Norton today, I will hereafter refer to her as a lay preacher and public theologian.

[Laughter.]

DR. FRANKLIN: She said it eloquently. During the civil rights movement, African-American churches played a significant role in the public square. I like to refer to the civil rights movement as a social revolution led by preachers, church women, and Sunday school children. The sacrifices, prayers, and hopes of those ordinary people led to the rehabilitation of American democracy.

Since that time, this nation has witnessed dramatic, positive change, higher rates of African-American home ownership, higher levels of educational attainment, increased levels of charitable giving and civic engagement in African-American communities and so on. But amidst this celebration of black progress, we received an unhappy and disturbing memo. That memo had to do with the extent and rapidity of marriage and family decline in African-American communities.

While we were struggling for social justice and for race group advancement, we were losing ground in the areas of personal well-being. In my capacity as a consultant for the Annie E. Casey Foundation and a senior fellow at Emory Center for the Interdisciplinary Study of Religion, I've been intrigued with the following question: What might happen if America's 65,000 black churches were to focus their energy on strengthening and promoting healthy marriages and families?

We'll say more about what we've been learning in focus groups around the nation during our Q&A period, but at this time, I'd like to introduce the terrific panelists.

The Reverend Leslie Braxton is pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church in Seattle. The Reverend Cheryl Anthony Mobley is founder and CEO of Judah International Christian Center in Brooklyn. Reverend Michael C. Nabors is pastor of the New Calvary Baptist Church of Detroit. And Reverend Thabiti Anyabwile is a senior associate at the Center for the Study of Social Policy.

Each of our speakers will speak for eight minutes. We have a timekeeper on hand--these are preachers.

[Laughter.]

DR. FRANKLIN: But we do intend to allow time for questions and answers before our second panel this morning.

Reverend Braxton, please.

REVEREND BRAXTON: Thank you, Dr. Franklin, and good morning to you all. I enjoyed that little slight he gave. They slight you, slap you, and then introduce you.

[Laughter.]

REVEREND BRAXTON: So we are happy to be here and, yes, as evidenced by my presence here today, there are black folks in Seattle.

[Laughter.]

REVEREND BRAXTON: Let me jump right in, since we only have eight minutes, and I'm down to about seven and a half.

Marriage matters. We live in a world where that is increasingly an issue of debate. In the book, "Changing Congregational Culture," the Reverend Dr. Anthony Robinson, the pastor of Plymouth Congregational Church in Seattle, says that we live now in the post-Christendom era at a time when America is officially secular. We no

longer live in the time of the unofficial, where Christianity, rather, was the unofficial official religion. We live in a day and time where public symbols of religion are being pulled down and outlawed, and there is no longer this cushy relationship between church and state. It is being debated and fought at every point.

It was in that era, that time frame where the state supported the church, the church supported the state. Whether you believe that was right or wrong, there were certain presumptive principles that helped to order and organize society. Society was very flawed, but one of them was an understanding that marriage is a part of God's basic covenant with humanity, a God who organizes his relationship with us, God's relationship with us and our relationships with each other around covenants, and marriage being the basic ordering principle of human society. That is debated now, but that has been the presumption, that there was a sense of order, and that marriage was more than an individual or rather an agreement between individuals, but it was really a kind of an embrace of a public contract, a public covenant to a way of life, and that way of life provided a stable environment, when the individuals in the covenant were stable, for children, a more economically stable environment, more socially stable environment, economic stability in the community. Indeed, societies' entire economy is driven by the needs of families--child-bearing, rearing families and an attempt at lifelong covenants.

Well, we know the kind of Norman Rockwell America has passed, and it was very flawed because some of us were missing from that picture. Some of the moral principles there, however unequally or imperfectly applied, did represent a kind of Judeo-Christian perspective on basic covenant and orderings and marriage being at the heart in the organization of human society.



Marriage has declined for all of the reasons that have previously been stated. I believe that a marriage movement in the black community really has to be a movement to educationally and economically empower black men. The bottom line is or the skinny of it is that men without jobs, men without stable jobs, men without economic esteem, don't marry or don't stay married. Those papas become rolling stones, and so one cannot talk seriously and substantively, genuinely about marriage movement and marriage values if you're not talking about educationally and economically empowering men. The best social program remains to give a man a job. Men who are economically stable are more likely to marry and are more likely to look for a family to raise and to be there. These are generalizations, but I think they are generalizations that hold true.

Now, in the post-Christendom area, as marriage is declining for economic reasons and being challenged ideologically at many points, the critical question is what are we replacing that way of life with and what are the fruits of that? You judge the tree by the fruit that it bears. We're talking in a religious context.

Harry Wright, the former pastor of the great Cornerstone Church in Brooklyn, New York, said, "If you want to ethically test something, then," he said, "universalize that behavior and see what the world looks like if everybody does it." And if you universalize the absence of marriage, what does the world look like in terms of stability for children? What does the world look like just in terms of the longevity of individuals? What does the world look like in terms of the growth of neighborhoods and the shape of the economy?

The Bible says in St. John 10:10, "The thief comes but to kill, to steal, to destroy, to tear down." If that life that we're talking about--universalize--leads to the

ruin of society, then it gives you a sense of what is the ethical stock of it, what is the moral DNA at work there, what is the germ being unleashed?

And if you look at the marriage principle, if you universalize it, how does the world look? Now, you can have bad marriages that psychologically scar, warp children. But assuming stability of individuals, it is still the organizing principle that provides us the best possible opportunity at an abundant life understood in a very holistic manner.

My time is running out, but you know I look at my own family. My mother raised five children principally by herself--five children produced by two marriages. Both husbands ended up incarcerated. We all grew up poor, black, single-parent home, incarcerated fathers. We all now have children.

Two of the five in the sibling brood are married and had children after they were married. Those children and what they are experiencing are very different from the children born to the three that were born prior to marriage, outside of marriage. The two who are married continue to this day to have to economically support not only their own, but the children in the other circumstances.

And so we find that, in organizing our life around it, all born poor, all born black in less-than-rationally-just America, all children of incarcerated fathers, the simple pattern of marriage, employment, then children has provided us, in one generation, turned an unhealthy situation around and provided stability. And so sometimes life is simpler than people think, and sometimes it's not as simple as simple people think. But as Howard Thurman says, "Truth lies in paradox," but marriage matters.

[Applause.]

REVEREND ANTHONY: Good morning. Let me just say how pleased and how honored I am to be here this morning and to acknowledge our moderator, Dr. Robert Franklin, and to my other colleagues on the panel this morning.

When we look at the place where we are right now, we must look back to that year of 1996, when the legislation came through that changed the way in which we are looking at welfare as it affects our communities. With the passing of the legislation in 1996, with welfare reform, many leaders in the faith community began to grapple with finding solutions to the ramifications of welfare reform and how it affected our communities and also looking at some of that legislation that did not talk about just moving women from welfare to work, but also changing the way we looked at families, and marriages, and teenage pregnancy.

To this end, with the help of our colleagues in both the public and private sector, we were able to look at creating a national faith-based initiative and best practice that addressed holistically looking at the family. So, when we look at it, we looked at it from not just the economic perspective, but also the spiritual, the moral, the financial aspects of the family.

And this model looked at women, and I know that some of the issues, when we look at welfare reform and beyond, looks at that community and that population. In looking at that population and having hands-on experience--and I say that because we, in New York, we ran a program that moved families from welfare to work, reaching out to 1,500 families and then reengaging them--and in looking at this population, it was not just to look at where they were economically, but where they were socially and where they were emotionally and putting together a two-tier program. So that we looked at the mothers, but then we began to look at the teenagers in the

household and the incidents of out-of-wedlock births and the relationship between the young women and the young men and in that found some real interesting findings in terms of why they were or were not marrying, why they were having children and what were the reasonings behind the choices that they made.

When we look at the question of whether or not marriage matters, I must say that it's interesting because a year ago this time I was a single female pastor in New York City. Since that time, I've been married all of 329 days and counting.

[Laughter.]

REVEREND ANTHONY: And so when we say, does marriage matter, it does matter, and it matters in the terms of stability, it matters in terms of support. And I'm pleased that my husband joined me this morning because doing the work that we do in the faith community, you need support. One of the conversations that I had with Reverend Nabors yesterday was that, what does it take, and what does it look like coming together to do this kind of work as the black church in the community? And what it is, is it is providing the kind of leadership that says marriage is important. Marriage is important why? Marriage is important, as we are ministers of the gospel because in the gospel, it was ordained by God, and that marriage was ordained and an institution that was put forth before anything else--the family and marriage.

And so therefore the basis of our faith says that marriage is important. It is important to us because it was important to God in terms of coming together in order to procreate and in order to provide leadership and dominion and to replenish the earth. And so in looking at it from that context, marriage is important that we might be able to have stability, that we might be able to have a sense of belonging.

Interesting enough, in preparing this morning to come, one of the things, and I've traveled the country speaking on different issues, but being able to come this morning and not have to call my husband long distance in order to have a conversation and having him wish me well in presenting this morning, but to be able to have him there and to pray with me and for me before going out, adds something to your life, even on this level.

And so when we look at whether or not marriage matters, it matters to women, it matters to children, and it matters to families. It matters to those who are in the community because there is a network of support that comes in a relationship that has some stability, as far as marriage being a part of it.

When we look at some of the clients and the individuals that we are working with in the community, they have a number of issues and a number of challenges that have been brought to the church that we address on an ongoing and everyday basis. We support marriage, and we support marriage in certain kinds of contexts. And the context is that it is healthy. It is a context where if there is abuse going on, if there is domestic violence, it is not something that we support in that kind of context. We need to look at it in terms of informing our young people, those who are making these decisions.

I think I have come to realize that there has not been enough information, there has not been enough training, there has not been enough information given to them in terms of what marriage really is and how marriage works. There is a commitment. There is trust. There is love. There is respect. And I think that when we look at our communities and our neighborhoods, there are some pieces that have been missing that have not been given to our young people.

You cannot learn to respect someone else if you have not been taught how to respect yourself. There are things that need to be looked at in terms of self-esteem. How do I feel about myself, who am I, and what do I bring into a relationship, and why is it sometimes that I feel that the opinion of someone who was outside of me is more important than the opinion that I have of myself?

And so we have begun to put programs and counseling together in the Brooklyn community. Interesting enough, I pastor a church in Brooklyn, Judah International Christian Center, and I am pastor of Judah. But on the other side of town, I am the first lady of United Community Baptist Church in Coney Island. And so there are hats that come together in our community, in terms of looking at roles and responsibility.

When we look at putting pieces together, and we have been bridging the gaps within the borough of Brooklyn, what we have found is that you've got to be able to identify and even speak with young people about where they are and what their feelings are. In looking at that, we have developed some solutions.

And there is a program that is being run, as we look at young people, and one of the programs is called, "T.H.U.G. School," and T.H.U.G. School is "Truly Holy Unto God," but being able to talk about it from a young person's perspective.

There is also an initiative in our church called, "C.H.I.C.K. School," and it's Coming Humbly Into Christ's Kingdom. When you begin to have young people to understand that they are fearfully and wonderfully made, that they have something to contribute on an individual basis before even coming into a marriage relationship, then they are more equipped and more prepared for making adequate decisions about whether

or not they marry or not. But the marriage institution has been instituted by God, and marriage does matter, and after more than 300 days, I know that marriage works.

[Laughter.]

[Applause.]

REVEREND NABORS: To Dr. Franklin and the other distinguished panelists for the day, and the Brookings Institute, and to the timer--

[Laughter.]

REVEREND NABORS: I, generally, in sermons back at New Calvary in Detroit, it takes me at least 10 minutes just to finish introductory remarks, and now I have eight minutes to say this: Should the black church focus its attention on promoting marriage and reducing nonmarital child bearing and what action should be taken to promote these goals?

I will respond to the specificity of this inquiry regarding the nature of the black church's focus, first of all, with a general and decidedly apologetic inclination regarding the black church as a whole. Immediately, we must dispense with the spurious notion that the subject matter known as the black church is a singular monolithic and homogenous entity, and determining just what the black church should focus upon presupposes the assumption that there is a single black church upon which a focus may be emitted.

In 2004, what is the black church? Is it Floyd Flake and Alan Temple AME Church in Queens, New York? Is it T.D. Jakes and the Potter's Field in Dallas, Texas? Is it Bishop Keith Butler and the Word of Faith Church in Greater Metropolitan Detroit? Is it Bishop Eddie Long down in Atlanta, Georgia? One would think that these

voices clearly articulate and inculcate the essence of the black church in America.

However, this is clearly not the case.

There is another black church described by E. Franklin Frazier as the "invisible institution." Martin Luther King, Jr., called it, "the colony of Heaven for the God intoxicated," and W.B. DuBois called it "the social, political and economic centerpiece of the black community."

It is the contrivance of Christ, whose primary responsibility it is to catapult omni-diminutive nobodies into creative somebodies. This has been our job since the first "colored" Christian church began in 1734 and the first colored denomination began in 1786. Always, and in every generation, our sacred calling in the church has been to stem the nefarious tide of oppression and to raise the bar of excellence, with and for our people and nation.

The black church 2004 includes those congregations with pastors who have Ph.D.s and those pastors who work on assembly lines Monday through Friday. The black church is that sacred place filled with sophisticates and bourgeois, and that place for the downtrodden and dispossessed. It is a living, breathing thing upon which rests the hopes and dreams of a people. It is, at once, a permanent part of America's topography and an ever-changing entity from generation to generation.

Inasmuch as all of this is true, then the reality is that the black church, in its multi-variegated form, has always focused both on the sacred and saneness of the institution of marriage. To say that we in the black church must now focus on marriage, after a \$1.5-billion initiative has been presented, is to suggest that we have not been focusing on marriage, and this is not true. The emphasis is not on promoting marriage. The black church has been the leading promoter of marriage in the black community.



Emphasis must be placed upon creating and sustaining an environment which undergirds and supports individual and family progress and success.

What is the business of the black church? It is to put value into the personhood of one who has been devalued by the realities of social inequities and upheaval. It is to validate the honor, improve the status, affirm the esteem, empower the minds and set free the souls of those who have been blown by adversity, blinded by injustice, beaten by discrimination and bruised by the gnawing teeth of a cruel and inhumane history.

The excellence of the black church is intricately connected to the very nature of its genesis. We are called to lend reason to an irrational world and hope to a maligned and suffering people. This is what we are. This is what we do. We are no panacea for America's social ills. We are a spiritual enclave offering rest for the weary, water for the thirsty, clothes for the naked, and food for the hungry. This is our excellence, and of this excellence we may lend insight into the complex nature of modern problems, such as marriages, with all of its glorious triumphs and tragic downfalls.

Black churches must engage in the hard and serious task in three areas:

Number one, the black church, perhaps for the first time in its history, must engage in self-critique. Something is not working well. There is a horrible breakdown in the black family, and we in the black church bear some responsibility here.

Part of this self-analysis lies in awakening to the realization that most black churches cannot do everything. We cannot maintain the bar of excellence in child care, fiscal management, gerontology, counseling, employment and promoting

marriages. Thus, we must engage in the process of collaboration, partnering with those organizations who bring professionalism to the table. We must assert ourselves in doing what we do the very best.

Number two, after self-critique, we must engage in the almost impossible effort of shifting the paradigm, changing our church culture. We must expand our horizons and definitions of ministry to include marriage therapists, guidance counselors, lending institutions, foundations and even things like human think tanks. No longer can we exist under the old order, which shouted out, "Us against them."

No, we are caught up in an obligatory orbit of mutual interdependence. Much in our communities around the nation can strengthen our mission and extend our outreach to the most disenfranchised. We must forge paths and pioneer movements that will take us further than ever before.

Number three, finally, after self-critique and cultural shift, we arrive at a truly grand notion. The black church, we must dedicate ourselves towards achieving and bringing forth genuine human community. This genuine human community is one where every human being is respected, every relationship is supported, every marriage is sustained, and every family is nurtured. Genuine human community demands that we address and eradicate systemic ills which have heretofore suppressed opportunities for progress.

For African Americans, Latinos, and the poor of all persuasions in this country, these things include inadequate health care, horrible inequity in public education, environmental injustice, fewer chances for higher education, unemployment and underemployment, racism in lending, geographic racism, proximity to crime and violence, on and on.

To say that we're going to go in the black community and fix marriages and everything else will fall into place is a misnomer. We have got to work on trying to repair all of the damage that has been done in our black communities, as well as promoting marriages.

Yes, I want marriages to improve among African Americans, but by God the entire arena around the marriage must be improved for marriages to survive and flourish. Only with such a massive undertaking will we ever hasten the day when we all can lay down our burdens down by the riverside, lay down our sword and shield and never accept injustice again. Only then will we be able to speed up that day, truly, when we can say everything works together because we are all on the same page.

Never think that to cure the ills of the black community is simply a one-perspective notion in curing marriage. Let's attack the whole thing, and then watch marriages and relationships flourish and be nurtured.

Thank you.

[Applause.]

REVEREND ANYABWILE: When I was growing up, one of my favorite rappers was the fellow named Eric B. and Rakim. Some of you all probably remember them. And Rakim had a line in one of his poems, one of his raps, he said, "When I was done rapping, I used to drop the microphone and let it smoke. Now, I slam it when I'm done and make sure it's broke."

[Laughter.]

REVEREND ANYABWILE: And I wish the brother had slammed the microphone and just, you know, and start with the Q&A.

[Laughter.]

REVEREND ANYABWILE: But it's a pleasure to be here, and I want to thank the Brookings Institution for organizing this panel and organizing a discussion on this very important topic, and specifically for organizing it in such a way that invited and welcomed a distinctly Christian point of view.

And I think I share much with my colleagues, in terms of sentiments, about Christianity and the church and its role and importance in promoting marriage, but I do realize that there may be some people here who perhaps don't share those assumptions or don't clearly understand what it is we mean when we refer to a person as being a Christian or what it is we have in mind when we talk about a Christian world view and what it entails for an issue like marriage.

So, before I get into some specific recommendations about the role of the African- American church in engaging the marriage movement or promoting marriage, let me just sort of make bare my Christian presuppositions so that we might have a more informed dialogue about this.

First, what a Christian is not. A Christian is not someone who's perfect, and a Christian is not someone who's perfectly righteous, though we might all be able to point to professed Christians who are clearly self-righteous.

[Laughter.]

REVEREND ANYABWILE: And a Christian is not someone who's born in a "Christian country" or born in a "Christian home." No, being a Christian is not a matter of citizenship or inherited birthright. A Christian is someone who recognizes, and accepts, and responds to a number of truths. And I just want to sort of tick these truths off real quickly.

First is that God exists, and that God has created the universe, and that God, as creator, sustains life, and that all of life--material, immaterial, spiritual, caporial--ought to worship God is the proper response of this creation.

Secondly, God has created man and created man in a particular way--has created man in his own image. We share some attributes of God that allow us to communicate in fellowship and relate to God.

But, thirdly, however, as a serious problem with the world that we know now, that this world is not the world originally created, that man has, in fact, rebelled against the rule of God, has rebelled against the love of God and has preferred what we Christians term "sin," that we have, in fact, whether it's in terms of marriage and a sexual relationship or any other number of sins we might be gathered to talk about, we have, in fact, rebelled against that order.

And that, fourthly, having rebelled, that we have incurred the right and just wrath of God upon ourselves, that we stand now separated from God, having been made to fellowship with God, been made in his image, we have so marred and disfigured ourselves with sin that we now have this serious problem of standing before a holy God needing to be cleansed and reconciled.

Now, the good news is, fifth, that God has, in fact, provided a way for that reconciliation to occur. He has sent his beloved son, Jesus Christ, who took on flesh, who lived among us, who died as a substitute for our sins, taken upon himself the wrath of God that we could not stand, and has made a way, through repenting from our sins and faith in him, to then be reconciled to God and then to live in part, in this life, the life that God had intended, the life of fellowship with him, knowing his love, his joy, his forgiveness, and in the life to come, to know God more perfectly.

That is what we mean when we refer to a Christian, and those are sort of the general planks, if you will, for a Christian world view on the question of marriage. That is what we term the gospel, the good news. So what does this have to do with the question that we have in hand?

Well, it's interesting. From the second chapter of the Book of Genesis, God is talking about marriage. As my brother pointed out, it is the institution that he established to organize society around. And as you read both through the Old Testament and New Testament, God describes his relationship with the people who worship him as a marriage. So, when Israel, for example, in the Old Testament, turns to idols to worship false things, he refers to that as adultery. And in the New Testament, we're told that marriage, the relationship between a husband and wife, in particular, the way in which a husband is to love his wife and to sacrifice himself for her is emblematic of the love and the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made for his church.

So, in one sense, the very glory of God is bound up in this idea of marriage and, not surprisingly, the health of the African-American church and the health of marriages in the African-American community are bound up together. Should we have a strong family, we'll have a stronger church. Should we have a stronger church, we'll have a stronger family.

I'm getting the three-minute warning sign here, so I want to move real quickly to talking about the way forward. So what is the role for engaging this important issue? And I want to sort of make clear that what I am concerned with is both the health of the marriages we promote and the health of the church because I am not altogether sure the brother was alluding to the health of the church is sufficiently strong

to take on all of the activities that we think might be necessary to, in fact, make some progress on this issue.

So a number of suggestions. First, I want to suggest that because we believe that the church should promote marriage, that does not make for an explicit endorsement of any particular policy proposal, that, in fact, part of the self-critique that needs to happen is a list of questions that actually gauge whether or not a particular policy proposal will, in fact, help or hurt the health of the church itself.

We might ask questions like: Does the policy preclude or limit our ability to freely preach the gospel? Does the policy require us in any way to contradict or ban the scripture as our authority and how we understand relationships ought to be organized? Does the marriage program, in fact, pull away pastors and other key staff who are charged with looking after the souls of the congregation into roles and activities that, in fact, hurt the ministry or overtax the staff? Does the policy require the church to carry out its business as if it were just another social organization?

Failing any one of these questions or examinations, I think we are looking potentially at a policy that has bad effects on the health of the church.

The second thing I want to suggest, in terms of recommendations for the way forward, is the church must be sure to preach that Biblical gospel and all that it entails for how we organize relationships. It's curious to me that someone--I forgot who made the comment earlier--said that we're not a state where women consider it okay a man worthy enough to have a child by, but not worthy enough to marry.

REVEREND ANYABWILE: When did we get into the position where we have so divorced the act of rearing children from the commitment, and the trust, and the love of marriage that we think marriage is the option, rather than children? And so

we must begin to put, as it were, the moral and spiritual horse before the cart in preaching the gospel.

Thirdly, the church should, and can, play a role in restoring the normative messages and expectations that support chastity until marriage and fidelity in marriage, so that much of what we've talked about here and much of what we're concerned about, in terms of employability and other things, really seems, to me, to be, in part, missing the point, that we have lost a culture that encourages and prepares young men to be married and that has a high expectation that they will, in fact, enter marriage before they enter into other kinds of relationships and activities that are privileged only in the marriage covenant.

And so we must begin to rebuild, as it were, the social fabric, the social messages, dare I say it, in some places, some stigmas that shape and guide people into normatively expected behaviors.

One last comment. The church must also focus on developing a high view of church membership. Many of the issues that we're talking about are issues that are not generally sort of just out there in the world among people who are non-Christians. They actually occur inside the walls of the church. And part of what's missing, in terms of the health of the church, is a healthy view of church membership that makes clear that what we are doing when we join a local church is covenanting together to live together, encourage one another, help one another and hold one another accountable for living out the gospel in practical ways in our lives and conforming to the call and the demands of the scriptures, that our lives, in fact, might be ordered in the way that God has so purposed.

So I need to stop there. I look forward to the question and answers.



Thank you.

[Applause.]

DR. FRANKLIN: Thank you to each of our panelists for the rich intellectual capital that's been provided.

I'd like to--our Q&A session may be a bit abbreviated. I'll wait for the word from Ron--but I'd like to pose two questions and ask each of our panelists for 60-second responses, sound-bite responses. We don't want the sermonette, but rather the outline, the talking points.

The first question is must the marriage movement essentially be, as Reverend Braxton suggested, as Representative Norton suggested, with the imbalance of female readiness for marriage, male lack of interest, must the marriage conversation fundamentally be a male reclamation movement, an effort to generate incentives, interests by men in marriage--yes or no? Quick answers.

And then, second, what is your greatest hope or fear about the current administration's marriage initiative--the talk, the policy initiatives, hope/fears as we move through this season?

Sixty seconds, two questions.

REV. BRAXTON: That's 30 seconds apiece. No, I don't see marriage as a conversation about a male reclamation project. I see it as a people growing up with an expectation of what are the basic expectations in the larger community? In my house, my children know they're going to college. It's not a question. They also know they're going to clean up their room. They also know that they're not going to talk back because those who brought them in the world will take them out.

[Laughter.]

REV. BRAXTON: Basic assumptions. I want them to also know that they're going to get married and to have a family, and we're going to continue a larger legacy that we're all grafted onto--basic assumptions of life, and I think those are proper.

Also, the Bush administration, I think the President means well, but you've got to be more than just sincere. I think George W. Bush lives in an oversimplified world, and the world is not as simple as some simple people think. And I think, from his Iraq policy down to his marriage policy, that on the details it shows that there is more he needs to learn. And so I appreciate his sincerity. It's a good place to start, but we've got to help him out.

DR. FRANKLIN: Thank you.

Reverend Anthony?

REVEREND ANTHONY: I think that when I look at the scriptures, in terms of leadership and headship, and responsibility, I think that there is leadership that comes from men as it relates to the family and really kind of just the pecking order.

I think that women have been given some advantages and given some support in some areas that black males have not been given and that we understand that we have responsibility, in terms of the leader of the family, in order to work with our brothers and with the men in the black race in order to build the family itself, and so it's a partnership.

In terms of the policy by our President, I think that he does mean well, but I think that he has, at this point, begun to put his money where his mouth is, in terms of establishing some programs through Health and Human Services, through the Administration for Children and Families, that will provide the black church with some

finances in order to be able to build the collaboration and work through the program of marriage in a context that is led by the church, as opposed to being led by government.

REVEREND NABORS: No, I don't believe that the marriage movement should or must be a male reclamation movement all by itself. I think that would be an utter failure. In some of my remarks, I talked about a paradigm shift or a cultural shift, and sometimes I think that means that we also have to go to our scripture and reinterpret some of those things that exist with regard to relationships and the way things have been structured in the past.

I know that there is a pecking order, Biblically, about the husband being the head of the household and that sort of thing. I'm married to a woman who's very modern, and I stake no claim in being that at all. We are both leaders in our household, and we both share 100 percent in every decision that is made within the household, and I think that's a new kind of paradigm that may need to be introduced to the Christian church as we talk about marriages and relationships.

I think that there must be equal responsibility given to the male and the female, although I understand that individually and independently both of those entities have unique problems and situations that must be addressed.

Secondly, regarding the President's marriage initiative. Everything about the President's marriage initiative worries me. Everything about the President worries me, but that's just me.

[Laughter.]

REVEREND NABORS: So I think, with regard to the marriage initiative, my concern, in the larger context, I think is with the entire faith-based initiative that the President is continuing to try to push through Congress. I have issues,

and I spoke about them again in my remarks earlier, with the black church somehow being a panacea to address all of the concerns. When the black church ends up getting money to run social problems, I think that sometimes the shift for ministry and focus on genuine community is taken away. And I do not think that we are responsible for running social programs. We are responsible for ensuring that whoever is running those programs is doing it right.

REV. ANYABWILE : I think it's, in part, any movement about marriage has to include some notion of reclamation of men. I mean, if we believe that the disparity of "marriageable men to marriageable women" is so great, then, by necessity, we are talking, on some level, about reclamation.

Secondly, though, I think the gospel itself is about reclamation. And so the notion of marriageable men as men who are already sort of economically viable, and educated, and have a number of things seems to me to be a way of viewing men that is not necessarily consistent with the gospel, and so we ought to be seeing sort of what God sees in men and working with men wherever they are and state, first of all, that they might hear the gospel and repent and believe and, secondly, begin to live out that new life with faith.

Yes, I think there are poor men all over the world who have children who don't abandon their children, and so we need to be concerned about the levels of abandonment and the levels of activity or uninvolvedness that we see, and that, for me, is in part reformation.

With regard to the president's movement or initiative, I'm both hopeful and cautious. I think it, at the very least, is partly the forum like this and partly some

discussions that at least on a national scale we have not been having, even though I agree lots of churches preach about family and marriage from Sunday to Sunday.

My concern would be, as the brothers just stated, whether or not the initiative, in the way that it's implemented, has a harmful or a helpful effect on the health of the church itself and whether or not it draws the church from its core business of preaching the gospel and caring for the people in the congregation and reaching sort of through the gospel to the wider community.

DR. FRANKLIN: Before this panel concludes, I'd like to review just 10 big learnings or lessons that have emerged from focus groups that the Annie E. Casey Foundation has enabled us to lead, and I'm grateful for Ralph Smith and Carol Thompson, who are here, who have given shape to this initiative. But I'd like to open the floor to question and answer at this time, and I'll just tick those off at the end of our session.

I see a question in the last row.

RICHARD BAVIER: Thank you. I think, except for the last speaker, the tenor of the discussion about marriage is marriage is good. It's good for adults. It's good for children. It's good for the social fabric.

One of the elements I think that was present in lay churches, at least, in the period of the '50s, when marriage rates were much higher on Ron's chart, was that having children outside marriage was wrong, not that marriage was just good, but that bringing children into the world without the promise of marriage between the parents was something that was wrong. There was an element of judgment in that.

The black church still I think eloquently speaks with an element of judgment about the social environment which makes marriage very hard to sustain. I

would like to ask the three first speakers whether an element of judgment is also an important part of the black church's role in promoting or rehabilitating marriage.

REV. BRAXTON: I want to take a stab at that, and I apologize for the violent metaphor. I don't think there's been any institution that has been more consistently and fiercely "judgmental" about persons bringing children in the world under what we would perceive as unholy circumstances. We have had what I think are improper practices, such as dragging a young girl up front, having her apologize to a congregation full of people who all had sex outside of marriage, about having had sex outside of marriage and got pregnant, and the sin, practically speaking, was that she got caught and got pregnant, and then the young man who got her pregnant wasn't there.

But the fact that these practices were in place because this was an institution who there was some enforcements, there was some judgment upon breaking the holy code, and I think the code is proper, and there needs to be some discouragement, but also keep it in context. Black folks, since the time we were dragged away from Africa and brought here, for a lot of our history had no control over what happened and who handled their bodies and had to learn to affirm life under any and all circumstances into which it was born.

A black woman, for 244 years and thereafter, when they worked in the homes of Strom Thurmond and others, had no control over the color of the child that came out of there, but they knew that though people make a mess, only God makes a life. So there's a paradox there in that we have embraced a holy code at the same time we have affirmed life because God brings something special out of even the most insidious of circumstance, and we have, I think, very majestically, though imperfectly, we have walked in that paradox.

I also note that in 1910, the census showed that African Americans had an out-of-wedlock birth rate that was lower than that of white Americans. It was in the migration from South to North where some other underpinnings was lost, and something started to spiral out of control. So it is not in the cultural DNA of black people to have children under any and all circumstances if those trends have reflected the sociopolitical context in which we have lived.

[Applause.]

DR. FRANKLIN: Any others on that?

MR. : Well said.

[Laughter.]

DR. FRANKLIN: I see a hand here and one in the front.

NEAL TEW: First of all, thank you all for, each of you, for being here. I've really enjoyed your comments.

I'd like to also apologize in advance for raising what may be a sensitive issue, but it's also an obvious issue, and I can think of no better place to ask this question, and it's in respect to the same-sex marriage side of this current cultural debate on marriage.

Specifically, addressing the question the way in which part of the argument in advance of same-sex marriage calls upon the civil rights movement and makes analogies and comparisons, and I would just be curious, particularly addressed to the latter two speakers, whoever would like to address this question, could you comment on generally how that's perceived.

Is it perceived as a fair comparison, on the one hand? Probably there's going to be differences of opinion. But on the other hand, is there anywhere a concern

for the way in which--and I'm going to put it bluntly, so forgive me if I offend anyone-- that is kind of a misappropriation of what I've heard said about Martin Luther King is that he had an incredible moral authority and that the African-American experience has incredible moral authority, and is it a misappropriation of that moral authority?

So, forgive me, if that's stated bluntly.

DR. FRANKLIN: Brief responses.

REV. NABORS: A very brief response. Thank you for bringing up that issue. It's something I think that the marriage group of ministers has talked about with the Casey Foundation, bringing their ministers from all over. And as you probably know, if you line up 10 ministers, they will probably have 10 very different perspectives on this very, very sensitive issue.

I believe, personally, that it's critical and important for the black church to somehow be able to preach and talk about the boundless and endless grace of God and that somehow God's grace is sufficient. And, for me, my perspective is that we have got to figure out a way where those persons who engage in same-sex marriage and those persons who are homosexual still are a part of God's grand design for creation.

The Bible says that all human beings were made in God's image and, for me, my perspective then is that somehow we've got to figure out a way where the civil rights and the human rights of individuals who have sexual preference choices that are different than what the Bible mandates, that somehow their civil rights and human rights are still not negated, that somehow the discrimination they may receive because of their sexual preference, I think that the black church and all churches can still speak to that and stand up and fight along with them for their civil and their human rights. And that's basically my perspective because we only have a minute.



REV. ANYABWILE: So, in a minute, as you sort of astutely observed, there would be a difference of opinion on this question. So, in a minute, let me give you the other side.

I think one of the differences we would have that is noticeable in our comments is the authority that scripture has in these questions. I'm hopeful that if you lined up 10 ministers that those 10 ministers would give you the same answer because we're not at liberty to make up an answer to this question.

God has spoken about the very issue of sexual sin, be it homosexuality, adultery or sex before marriage. Romans, Chapter 1, would be a great chapter to read. And there the conclusion that God lays out in the scriptures is that those who practice such things shall not enter the kingdom of God.

So, when a Christian or I or some of the other panels engages a person who has a different sexual preference, we are engaging them concerned mostly about their soul, and about their eternity, and their status before God. And so we would call that person to repent just as we would call a thief or any other person who committed any other sin to repent and to so order their life that it's consistent with the scriptures.

In terms of your comment or your question about its analogy to the civil rights movement, yeah, I think that's a bad analogy. I think that's a bad comparison. I don't see that it shares much in the way of common experience with the history of African Americans in this country, and I don't think this is primarily a civil rights issue.

So that part of what worries me about this current debate around same-sex marriages is all principled on the notion of the individual ought to be able to do what he or she pleases, a sort of libertarian kind of argument. Well, we don't make social

policy in that way, and so we have to attend to the social consequences and ramifications that surround questions of this sort.

If we buy that argument, for example, then we effectively deny ourselves of making any ability to distinguish upon what people might call forms of marriage.

You've heard the "slippery slope" argument, but how would we stop at two same sex as opposed to three persons or as opposed to any other kind of polygamist relationship or age limits, et cetera. So I think that's an interesting and an effective rhetorical device. I don't think it's a true and accurate analogy.

DR. FRANKLIN: We're going to take our final question. I would point out that there's vigorous debate I think in black church circles and certainly in the larger civil rights movement about how to frame the issue of same-sex marriage, with Congressman John Lewis, Coretta Scott King, Julian Bond, and others argue that it is indeed a civil rights issue, and the authority of the civil rights movement and black church ought to be thrown behind the struggle of gay and lesbian people, while, as you've heard, many other African-American clergy arguing that it is not.

So I would say, as I read pulse around the country, there is a vigorous debate underway now and clearly no consensus.

A final--

QUESTIONER: My question is are we not really possibly fighting a cultural trend here that is worldwide, particularly in the Western world, where women are more and more choosing not to marry, and men as well, of course, and whether we shouldn't really, in view of that, focus more on assistance to the single parent, particularly as far as quality child care, which should be available to all parents,

particularly with teachers and caregivers, professionally trained in preschool education, and paid in a commensurate way a salary for their training.

In other words, I think if you look at Europe now, you'll find that marriage is not popular there either. I mean, and I think we're seeing it not only in the black community here, but the white community as well, that women are preferring to remain single.

DR. FRANKLIN: The African-American clergy that I talk to most are most concerned about the current marriage initiative if it is likely to become a marriage-only initiative. Most others want to support what I think the Center for Law and Social Policy has aptly characterized as "Marriage Plus" effort. So, yes, promote marriage and, at the same time, support the efforts of single parents who are struggling to move toward self-sufficiency.

Any other quick response on this--a more global?

REV. ANYABWILE: Just to say I think you're right in terms of a cultural trend, but I think, in all times, in all places, it's been churches and many religious faiths who are called to be prophetic and who are called to not just sort of go along with the culture, but to be countercultural, and I think this is an example of a very countercultural kind of incipient movement, if you will, in response to that question.

REV. BRAXTON: I also think that the African-American community has always made a point of not choosing either/or--it's kind of "and" and "both." While we continue to promote marriage and all of the underpinnings, we also do help the single mother and all of those things, which we've always chewed gum and walked at the same time.

Also, Europe would not necessarily be our reference point here.

[Laughter.]

[Applause.]

DR. FRANKLIN: Time doesn't permit to review that list of learnings.

The Annie E. Casey report on the marriage conversation in the black community will be coming out I think later this year, and I can certainly make these learnings available to Ron if you have a website where they might be posted.

Join me in thanking our panelists.

[Applause.]