



## Recent Events

### **Harvard Professor William Julius Wilson lecture on structure and culture: framing the dialogue for combating racial inequality in the U.S.**

By Jamaal Bell, Media Relations Manager, Kirwan Institute

Let's have a universal stimulus package that addresses the problems of all poor people. In addition, let's have race-specific programs that recognizes the cumulative effects of living in racially segregated neighborhoods are different for blacks than for whites. Those are just a few suggestions of the Kirwan Institute's recent featured speaker -- Professor William Julius Wilson of Harvard University. Wilson made two presentations at The Ohio State University on October 15.

Once named one of America's 25 Most Influential People by *TIME* magazine, Wilson focused his discussion on his framework for understanding forces that contribute to or reinforce racial inequality.

Robert L. Borosage, co-director of the Campaign for America's Future in Washington D.C., spoke briefly before Wilson's lecture about the significance of Wilson's research and how Wilson's reflections and conclusions concerning structural racism and cultural influences are compelling.

Borosage explained that in this age of Obama we proclaim to be in a post-racial society but we are having debates latent with race on topics such as immigration, health care, and the confirmation of Justice Sotomayor.

"We need to have the courage to have an open, honest and serious discussion about race and how we deal with the reality before us," Borosage said. "The US Attorney General wonders if we have the courage to do that."

Wilson began his afternoon lecture by presenting the problems of racial inequality. He said that in America's race debate, conservatives tend to emphasize cultural factors whereas liberals focus on structural conditions. According to Wilson, "In order to improve racial inequality we must integrate cultural factors with two types of structural forces -- those that directly reflect explicit racial bias and those that do not."

Wilson said policy makers who are dedicated to combating the problems of race and poverty and who recognize the importance of structural inequities face an important challenge, namely, "How to generate political support of Americans who tend to place far more emphasis on cultural factors and individual behavior than on structural impediments in explaining socioeconomic processes."

In his lecture, he described the Harlem Children's Zone Program which is generating breakthrough success in education and referenced President Obama's proposed Promise Neighborhoods program, which is based on this model. The program is designed to combat the effects of poverty and improve education and life outcomes for children, from birth through college. The core idea behind the initiative is that providing both effective schools and strong systems of support to children and youth in poverty, thus meeting their health, social service, and educational needs, offers hope for a better life. As of May 7, \$10 million had been allocated to Obama's pilot program.

After Wilson's lecture, a panel discussion included John A. Powell, Kirwan Institute executive director; Andrew Grant-Thomas, Kirwan Institute deputy director; and Lauren J. Krivo, associate director of the Criminal Justice Research Center at The Ohio State University, as well as audience questions.

A second presentation in the evening featured an interview and public discussion with Fred Andrie, former WOSU Radio *Open Line* host. Both events were well attended and sparked insightful dialogue. Both can be viewed in full at <http://kirwaninstitute.org/events/archive/william-julius-wilson.php>.