Orlando Patterson will present an excerpt from his latest book *The Cultural Matrix: Understanding Black Youth* (co-edited with Ethan Fosse, Harvard University Press, 2015), which addresses a uniquely American paradox: the socioeconomic crisis, segregation, and social isolation of disadvantaged black youth, on the one hand, and their extraordinary integration and prominence in popular culture on the other. Despite school dropout rates over 40 percent, a third spending time in prison, chronic unemployment, and endemic violence, black youth are among the most vibrant creators of popular culture in the world. They also espouse several deeply-held American values. To understand this conundrum, the authors bring culture back to the forefront of explanation, while avoiding the theoretical errors of earlier culture-of-poverty approaches and the causal timidity and special pleading of more recent ones.

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