

# Foreword

As we take stock of the current state of America's children and the desperate need to change direction for the future, some ancient wisdom can give us a blueprint for setting sail and getting our children to safe harbor. Everything our nation and all of us need to know about life can be learned from Noah's Ark according to an anonymous writer.

**Lesson One: Don't miss the boat.** The United States is going to miss the boat to lead and compete in our globalizing world because we are not preparing the majority of our children for the future. The greatest threat to America's national security comes from no enemy without but from our failure to invest in and educate all of our nation's children. Every 11 seconds of the school day a child drops out. A majority of children in all racial and income groups and almost 80 percent and more of Black and Hispanic children in public schools cannot read or do math at grade level in fourth, eighth, or 12<sup>th</sup> grade—if they have not already dropped out. Any nation that is failing to prepare all of its children for productive work and life needs to correct course—now. And all of us—parents, educators, community, religious and political leaders—need to be part of the solution and not part of the problem. God did not make two classes of children. Every single child needs and deserves a quality education.

**Lesson Two: We are all in the same boat.** Many Americans may not like or think they have any self interest in assuring a fair playing field for other people's children—especially poor and minority children, but Black, Hispanic and other children of color will constitute a majority in 2019. Isn't it better to have them supporting the Social Security and Medicare systems and making sure a productive workforce is in place, rather than for us to be supporting them in costly ineffective prisons? Our states are spending three times more on average per prisoner than per public school student. I can't think of a dumber investment policy. We need a paradigm change from punishment to prevention and early intervention.

**Lesson Three: Plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the Ark.** Tomorrow is today and children have only one childhood. They need to be healthy *now*. They need quality early childhood experiences *now*. They need first-rate schools with first-rate teachers and stimulating high quality out of school time programs *now*. And they need to know that there is a good-paying job after college in their future. We must resist our quick fix, quarterly profit driven culture and invest in the future.

**Lesson Four: Don't listen to the critics and naysayers.** Just get on with the job that needs to be done to educate our children. If you don't want to be criticized, don't say anything, do anything, or be anything. Stand up and fight for children, all of them.

**Lesson Five: For safety's sake, travel in pairs.** Better still, travel in groups able to make a ruckus loud enough to be heard. We have got to stop those who are rhetorically hijacking Dr. King's and America's dream but subverting his call to end the poverty, excessive militarism and excessive individualism that's killing the dreams and hopes of millions of children. How can we justify massive tax giveaways to the richest two percent and continue tax loopholes for wealthy corporations at a time when 15.5 million children are languishing in poverty?

**Lesson Six: Remember that the Ark was built by amateurs; the Titanic by professionals.** We must all use our citizen power, and vote to wrest our ship of state from that small group of experts and powerful corporate leaders who recklessly jeopardized all of our lives for personal gain. Use your own power to make a difference.

**Final Lesson: Build your future, build our children's future and our nation's future on high ground.** Let's leave our nation and world better than we found it—more just, more hopeful, more peaceful, more productive, and more unified. This may be the first time in our history when our children and grandchildren will be worse off than their parents and grandparents. We must correct course with urgency and do whatever is necessary to get them to safe harbor.

We have pushed so many of our children into the tumultuous sea of life in small and leaky boats without survival gear and compass. I hope God will forgive us and help our children to forgive us. I hope we will work together with urgency to build the transforming movement required to give all of our children the anchors of faith and love, the rudder of hope, the sails of health and education, and the paddles of family and community, to keep them safe and strong when life's sea gets rough.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marian Wright Edelman" with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Marian Wright Edelman

# An Overview of the *State of America's Children 2011*

## The Need for a Level Playing Field for All Children

CDF's *State of America's Children 2011* paints a devastating portrait of childhood across the country. With unemployment, housing foreclosures and hunger still at historically high levels, children's well-being is in great jeopardy. Children today are our poorest age group. Child poverty increased by almost 10 percent between 2008 and 2009, which was the largest single year increase since data were first collected. As the country struggles to climb out of the recession, our children are falling further behind.

Looking at data<sup>1</sup> across children's needs in child poverty, family structure, family income, child health, child nutrition, early childhood development, education, child abuse and neglect, juvenile justice and gun violence shows millions of children from birth through the teen years at risk of getting caught in the Cradle to Prison Pipeline crisis at the intersection of race and poverty that threatens the futures of poor children of color across our nation. Black children are facing the worse crisis since slavery, and in many areas, Hispanic and American Indian children are not far behind.

Particularly striking is the fact that children of color in America who now constitute almost 45 percent of all children will be the majority of children in 2019—just eight years from now. We will be counting on them as the economic drivers of the future, who will be raising their own families, assisting their parents and investing in the economy and in Social Security to keep us all thriving. Yet nearly 80 percent or more of Black and Hispanic public school students cannot read or do math at grade level in fourth, eighth and 12<sup>th</sup> grades, sentencing them to social and economic death in this globalizing competitive economy. We must level the playing field and invest in education now so all children can achieve to ensure a solid economic future for all of us and for our nation.

### Children of Color Desperately Need Help

*State of America's Children 2011* tells us that children of color are behind on virtually every measure of child well-being. They face multiple risks that put them in grave danger of entering the pipeline to prison rather than the pipeline to college, productive employment and successful futures. Children of color are at increased risk of:

#### ***Being born at low birth weight and with late or no prenatal care***

- Babies of Black mothers are almost twice as likely as babies of White mothers to be born at low birthweight.
- Black babies are more than twice as likely to die before their first birthday as White babies.
- Black and Hispanic babies are more than twice as likely as White babies to be born to mothers who received late or no prenatal care in almost half the states.

#### ***Living in poverty and extreme poverty***

- More than one in three Black, one in three Hispanic and one in 10 White children live in poverty (\$22,050 for a family of four).
- For children under age five, 41.9 percent of Black, 35 percent of Hispanic and almost 15 percent of White children are poor.
- More than one in six Black and one in seven Hispanic children live in extreme poverty—at half the poverty level or below. One in 20 White children lives in extreme poverty.

#### ***Lacking family stability***

- Fewer than 40 percent of Black children live with two parents.
- Almost one in two Black children and more than one in four Hispanic children live with their mother only, compared with fewer than one in five White children.

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<sup>1</sup> Generally the data presented are the latest available at this time from official government sources – most frequently 2009, sometimes 2010, and some earlier.

- Black children are more than twice as likely as White children and almost twice as likely as Hispanic children to live with neither parent.
- Black children are more than seven times as likely and Hispanic children more than two and a half times as likely as White children to have a parent in prison.

### ***Greater health risks***

- Black and American Indian babies are more than twice as likely to be born to teen mothers as White babies.
- Black and Hispanic children are almost three times as likely to be in poor or only fair health as White children and are more likely to have an unmet medical need due to cost than White children.
- More than one in three children in low-income families is overweight or obese. Black teens are 26 percent and Hispanic teens 32 percent more likely than White teens to be overweight or obese.

### ***Lacking a quality education***

- Nearly 80 percent or more of Black and Hispanic public school students in the fourth, eighth and 12<sup>th</sup> grades are unable to read or do math at grade level compared to 50 percent or more of White children.
- Black students are more than three times as likely as White or Asian/Pacific Islander students and more than twice as likely as Hispanic students to be suspended from school.
- Thirty-five percent of Black and 29 percent of Hispanic high school students attend the more than 1,600 “dropout factories” across the country where 60 percent or fewer of the students in any given ninth grade class will graduate in four years with a regular diploma.
- The averaged graduation rate for Black and Hispanic students is just over 60 percent, in contrast with 81 percent for White and 91 percent for Asian/Pacific Islander students. The 20-plus percentage point spread in graduation rates between Black and White students exists in 13 states.

### ***Being stuck in foster care, without permanent families***

- Black children are overrepresented in foster care – they represent 30 percent of children in foster care, double the percent of the child population who are Black.
- Black children stay in foster care longer than White children.

### ***Ending up in the juvenile justice system***

- Youth of color make up approximately two-thirds of youth in the juvenile justice system.
- Black youth are over three times more likely than all other groups to be arrested for a violent crime.
- The number of girls arrested has grown by 50 percent since 1980; American Indian girls are four times and Black girls three times more likely to be incarcerated than White girls.
- Black youth make up 62 percent of those prosecuted in adult court, but only 17 percent of the overall youth population.

### ***Being caught in the college completion gap***

- The Black-White gap in college completion persists and the Hispanic-White college completion gap is even greater.

### ***Being unemployed***

- In 2010, four out of 10 Black and three out of 10 Hispanic teens ages 16 to 19 were unemployed.
- The youth jobless rate for teens 16 to 19 in July 2010 was higher than at any time in the past five decades.

### ***Killed by guns***

- More Black than White children and teens were killed by firearms in 2007. Black children and teens were more likely to be victims of homicide and White children and teens were more likely to be victims of suicide.

- Black males 15 to 19 are more than five times as likely as White males and more than twice as likely as Hispanic and American Indian males to be killed by firearms.
- From 1979 to 2007, the annual number of firearm deaths of Black children and teens *increased* by 61 percent; the number for White children and teens *decreased* by 54 percent

The multiple risks facing children of color are cause for great concern by us all, especially considering our responsibility as a nation to raise a next generation that can care not only for themselves and their own families but also our seniors of tomorrow. While today there are almost twice as many children as seniors, by 2040 that gap will close. There will be 94 million children and 81 million seniors. Our children's success in education and employment will be essential if we are to keep society functioning, businesses running, adults teaching and health care professionals serving everyone's needs. Today's children will care for all of us tomorrow.

We must take extraordinary steps to address the crisis today—the worst since slavery—so we will have a generation who can succeed in life and support our nation's future. We do not have a moment to lose. Children have only one childhood and that is today.

## **Children Need Help Now**

We know that poverty impairs children's emotional, intellectual and physical development and ends up costing our nation billions of dollars in lost productivity and increased health care costs. We know how to end child poverty and give each child a fair start. We know how to give children a healthy start and to keep them well-nourished. We know how to give children a head start to make them ready for school and help them flourish when given a quality education. We know how to prevent child abuse and neglect, keep children safely out of foster care, find permanent families for children in foster care and keep children out of the juvenile justice system. To paraphrase what our mothers and grandmothers taught us, if you knew better, you should do better. Instead, we have not invested as we should and urgently need to improve in each of the following areas. *State of America's Children 2011* reports:

### ***Income Gaps***

- Wide gaps in income persist. Since the late 1970's the incomes of the bottom 90 percent has essentially stagnated while the incomes of the top one percent have soared.
- In 2008, the income share for the richest 10 percent of U.S. households was 48.23 percent, just slightly below its 2007 record high level of 49.74 percent. The average income for the bottom 90 percent of households in 2008 was at its lowest level in more than a decade. The one year income drop for this group in 2007-2008 was its largest since 1938.
- In 2009, the income of married-couple families with children was three times higher than that of female householders for families of all races.

### ***Lack of income supports***

- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits in 2009 were less than half the 1970 real dollar amount in nearly two thirds of the states.
- In 2008, 79 percent of child support cases had court orders, but collections were made in only 57 percent of child support cases.
- Tens of millions of children, working families and individuals benefited from the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit in the 2008 tax year, but many more could in the future if eligibility were expanded.

### ***Lack of health coverage***

- While Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) insure one in three children and more than half of all low income children in America, one in eight Black children and one in six Hispanic children are still uninsured. Two-thirds of the more than eight million uninsured children are eligible for coverage in Medicaid or CHIP but are not enrolled largely due to state-imposed barriers that differ across states.

- While 34 states made improvements to children’s health coverage in 2010, only six states provided for express lane eligibility for Medicaid and/or CHIP and one-third of the states still did not provide 12-month continuous eligibility to help children enroll and stay enrolled in health coverage.
- Hispanic children are 76 percent more likely and Black children 50 percent more likely than White children to have an unmet medical need due to cost.

***Lack of nutritional supports***

- While an average of 15.6 million children a month received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits in 2009, more than one in 10 households has limited access to food in the vast majority of states.
- Only one in nine low income children who eats a free or reduced price school lunch during the school year is reached by the Summer Food Service Program.

***Lack of support for quality early childhood programs***

- The annual cost of center-based child care for a four-year-old is more than the annual in-state tuition at a public four-year college in 33 states and the District of Columbia.
- A family must have an income that is below 175 percent of the poverty level (\$32,043 for a family of four) to receive a public child care subsidy in 18 states and the District of Columbia.
- In more than one in three states, only 10 or fewer hours of training a year is required for child care center directors and teachers.
- Most states exceed the recommended maximum child-staff ratios for pre-school aged children in licensed centers. The infant-staff ratios in center-based care are 5:1 or higher in 15 states.
- In nearly half the states, small family child care homes are not required to be licensed until five or more children are in the home, and in 35 states providers in licensed homes do not have to have a high school diploma.
- Only 13.8 percent of three-year-olds and 38.9 percent of four-year-olds were in state funded pre-kindergarten programs, Head Start or early intervention/special education in 2008-2009.

***Lack of access to quality education for every child***

- Only 10 states require by statute that all school districts offer full-day kindergarten. Forty-four states and the District of Columbia require half-day programs that leave children a half step behind as they enter first grade.
- While the number of “dropout factories” and the proportion of students of color who attend them have been reduced, there are still 1,634 dropout factories—at least one in every state. Seventy percent of them are concentrated in just 12 states.
- The United States spends almost two-and-a-half times as much per prisoner as per public school pupil.

***Lack of supports for abused and neglected children***

- Following a pattern of recent years, about 40 percent of children who were abused or neglected in 2009 received no services following the investigation of their maltreatment and many more received far fewer services than they need.
- In the majority of states, at least one-third of the children in foster care between one and two years experience three or more placements. The median length of stay in foster care for a child is over 12 months in 31 states.
- An estimated 114,000 children are in foster care waiting to be adopted.
- More than 29,000 youth aged out of foster care at 18 or older in 2009 without being returned home, adopted or placed permanently with relatives. Researchers report these children are at increased risk of not graduating from high school or enrolling in college and being unemployed, incarcerated or homeless. In most states the majority of these children entered foster care when they were older than 12.

### ***Lack of progress in reforming the juvenile justice system***

- States are working to divert youth charged with status offenses, such as curfew violations, running away, truancy offenses and incorrigibility, to community-based programs to prevent their entry into the juvenile justice system—but progress in many states is slow.
- About two-thirds of youth in residential placement are there for status offenses, probation violations and other technical violations, drug crimes, or property and public order offenses. Just over one-third are there for crimes against persons.
- Approximately 250,000 children are prosecuted, sentenced or incarcerated as adults each year in the United States. About 10,000 children are held in adult jails and prisons on any given night, two thirds of them while they are awaiting trial, despite high risk for sexual abuse and other harms.

### ***Lack of sufficient progress in ending gun violence***

- Since 1979, gun violence has ended the lives of 110,645 children and teens in America.
- There are more than 280 million privately owned firearms in the U.S., which is the equivalent of nine firearms for every 10 men, women and children in this country.
- In 2007 alone, 3,042 children and teens died from gunfire in the United States—eight every day—as a result of homicide, suicide or accidental shooting. Almost six times as many teens suffered non-fatal gun injuries, which have serious physical and emotional consequences that frequently go untreated.

## **Conclusion**

The portrait of continuing and worsening racial and income inequality is clear as we look at the state of America's children today. Rather than moving forward, we are moving backwards. Programs and services that we know can help children thrive—Medicaid and CHIP (the Children's Health Insurance Program), the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant, WIC (the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children), SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), Early Head Start and Head Start, the Child Care and Development Block Grant, the Title I Education Program for Disadvantaged Children, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act programs, Pell Grants, the Social Services Block Grant and others are threatened with federal cuts or program changes that will unravel the safety net for poor and low income children. These cuts will come on top of deep cuts in state funding for early childhood development, K-12 education and higher education, mental health and other specialized treatment for children and parents, and services and staff for children and youth in foster care and in the juvenile justice system. Families too have become more fragile as jobs are lost, unemployment compensation has been reduced, public assistance and public health programs restrict access, housing foreclosures continue and affordable housing becomes scarcer.

- We must invest in our children and their families. This means keeping key priorities for children front and center:
- End child poverty;
- Ensure every child and pregnant woman access to affordable, comprehensive health and mental health coverage and services;
- Provide high quality early childhood development programs for all;
- Ensure every child can read at grade level by the fourth grade and guarantee quality education through high school graduation;
- Protect children from abuse and neglect and connect them to caring permanent families; and
- Stop the criminalization of children at increasingly younger ages, reduce the detention and incarceration of children and invest in prevention and early intervention strategies.

We must reclaim our country, our core values and our spiritual foundation in order for our children to thrive and protect our nation's economic future.