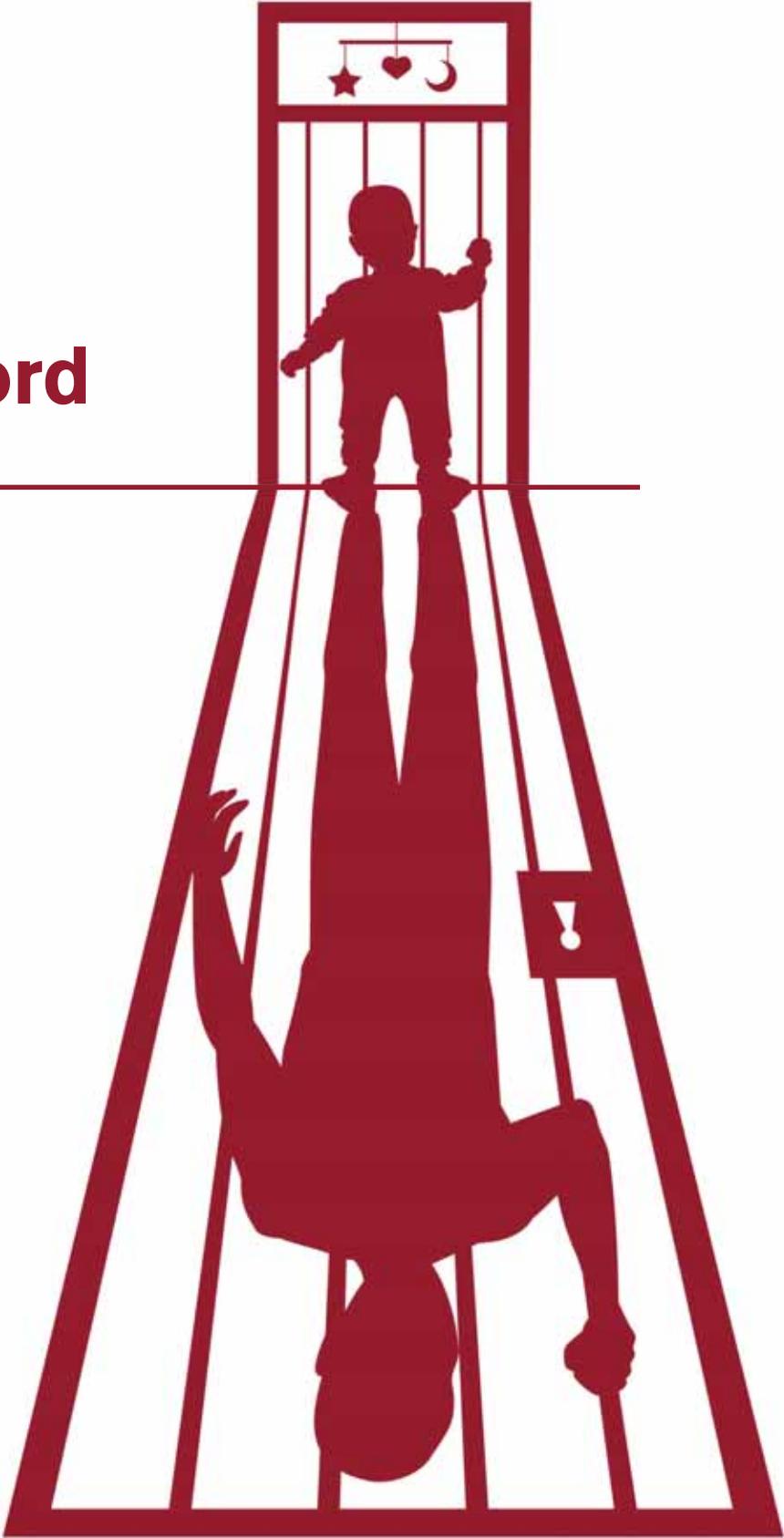


# Foreword

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# A Call to End Adult Hypocrisy, Neglect and Abandonment of Children and America's Cradle to Prison Pipeline

**T**his very painful report on America's Cradle to Prison Pipeline® crisis is a loud siren of alarm and *wake up call to action* to every parent, faith, community, public policy, political and cultural leader, child and family serving agency and citizen.

I am often asked “*What's wrong with our children?*” Children having children. Children killing children. Children killing others. Children killing themselves. Children roaming streets alone or in gangs all day and night. Children floating through life like driftwood on a beach. Children addicted to tobacco and alcohol and heroin and cocaine and pot, drinking and drugging themselves to death to escape reality. Children running away from home and being thrown away or abused and neglected by parents. Children being locked up in jails with adult criminal mentors or all alone. Children bubbling with rage and crushed by depression.

Well *adults* are what's wrong with our children. Parents letting children raise themselves or be raised by television or the Internet. Children being shaped by peers and gangs and foul mouth rappers instead of parents, grandparents and kin. Children roaming the streets because there's nobody at home or paying enough attention. Children going to drug houses that are always open instead of to school houses and church houses, mosques and temples that are too often closed. Children seeing adults take and sell drugs and be violent to each other and to them. Adults telling children one thing and doing another. Adults making promises we don't keep and preaching what we don't practice. Adults telling children to control themselves while slapping and spanking. Adults telling children to be honest while lying and cheating in our homes, offices and public life. Adults telling children not to be violent while marketing and glorifying violence and tolerating gun saturated war zones in communities all across our land. Adults telling children to be healthy while selling them junk food and addicting them to smoke and drink and careless sex.

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*Our “child and youth problem” is not a child and youth problem; it is a profound adult problem as our children do what they see us adults doing in our personal, professional and public lives.*

What's wrong with our children? We are what's wrong with our children. And I hope God will help us to repent, to open our eyes and ears and see and hear our children's cries for help and guidance, and act to save them *all—now!*

What must children feel when parents, kin, neighbors and cultural icons abuse drugs and engage in or condone violent behavior? What must children feel when those entrusted with caring for them in their homes, neighborhoods, schools and other institutions abuse and neglect them? How great must be their fear and anger when parents and relatives are snatched away from them by drugs and gun violence and incarceration. How scary it must be for a child to sleep in an unsafe shelter full of strangers with no place to call home. How angry and rejected a child or teen must feel when there is no loving, reliable person s/he can trust and who is being shunted from one family foster home or group home to another and from one school that suspends and expels him to another. How isolated and alone it must feel when no one sees or cares whether you're truant or home before dark or struggling to see the blackboard or have a learning disorder. What can children believe when important adults in their lives tell them in word and deed that they are not worth much and treat them as a burden rather than a gift, don't expect and help them to achieve, or abandon them altogether to raise themselves? What do children learn about right and wrong when they see corporate leaders being arrested for pillaging their corporations and the life blood of workers, seniors and stockholders? How can children trust political leaders who repeatedly promise to alleviate their poverty, to rebuild their flooded homes and schools, to ease their suffering and then leave them like debris *still waiting over two years later*, in a purgatory of hopelessness and uncertainty, for their nation to help them heal their monstrous losses and to prepare them for productive lives? Who can children believe when religious leaders, charged by their faith to protect and nurture them, abuse them instead? And who can rudderless children and youth look up to as s/heroes in a culture that permits violence and guns and prison and underachievement to be promoted as cool, almost as rites of passage, and bling as worth living, killing and dying for?

It is time for adults of every race and income group to break our silence about the pervasive breakdown of moral, family, community and national values, to place our children first in our lives, and to struggle to model the behavior we want our children to learn. Our "child and youth problem" is not a child and youth problem, it is a profound adult problem as our children do what they see us adults doing in our personal, professional and public lives. They seek our attention in negative ways when we provide them too few positive ways to communicate and to get the attention and love they need. And we choose to punish and lock them up rather than take the necessary, more cost-effective steps to prevent and intervene early to ensure them the healthy, head, safe, fair and moral start in life they need to reach successful adulthood.

## **Are We Part of the Problem or Solution?**

As parents, adults, citizens and leaders we must examine ourselves regularly to determine whether we are contributing to the crisis our children face or to the solutions they urgently need. And if we are not a part of the solution, we are a part of the

problem and need to do better. Our children don't need or expect us to be perfect. They do need and expect us to be honest, to admit and correct our mistakes, and to share our struggles about the meanings and responsibilities of faith, parenthood, citizenship and life. Before we can pull up the moral weeds of violence, materialism and greed in our society and world that are strangling so many of our children, we must pull up the moral weeds in our own homes, backyards, neighborhoods, institutions and public policies. So many children are confused about what is right and wrong because so many adults talk right and do wrong in our personal, professional and public lives.

## **The Cradle to Prison Pipeline and the Dangerous Intersection of Poverty and Race**

It's time for America to become America. The *Cradle to Prison Pipeline* crisis can be reduced to one simple fact: The United States of America is not a level playing field for all children and our nation does not value and protect all children's lives equally. As Connie Curry and Julia Cass report in Part II, countless children, especially poor children of color like baby Eric and Frankie, "already are in the Pipeline to Prison before taking a single step or uttering a word," and many youth in juvenile justice facilities never were in the pipeline to college or success. "They were not derailed from the right track; they never got on it."

So many poor babies in rich America enter the world with multiple strikes already against them: without prenatal care and at low birthweight; born to a teen, poor and poorly educated single mother and absent father. At crucial points in their development, from birth through adulthood, more risks and disadvantages cumulate and converge that make a successful transition to productive adulthood significantly less likely and involvement in the criminal justice system significantly more likely. Lack of access to health and mental health care; child abuse and neglect; lack of quality early childhood education to get ready for school; educational disadvantages resulting from failing schools that don't expect or help them achieve or detect and correct early problems that impede learning; zero tolerance school discipline policies and the arrest and criminalization of children at younger and younger ages for behaviors once handled by schools and community institutions; neighborhoods saturated with drugs and violence; a culture that glorifies excessive consumption, individualism, violence and triviality; rampant racial and economic disparities in child and youth serving systems; tougher sentencing guidelines; too few positive alternatives to the streets after school and in

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*We are guilty of many errors and many faults but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the fountain of life. Many of the things we need can wait. The child cannot. Right now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made, and his senses are being developed. To him we cannot answer "Tomorrow." His name is "Today."*

**—Gabriela Mistral, Chilean poet, educator, Nobel Laureate**

summer months; and too few positive role models and mentors in their homes, community, public and cultural life overwhelm and break apart fragile young lives with unbearable risks. Without significant interventions by families, community elders and institutions, and policy and political leaders to prevent and remove these multiple, accumulated obstacles, so many poor and minority youths are and will remain trapped in a trajectory that leads to marginalized lives, imprisonment and premature death.

The most dangerous place for a child to try to grow up in America is at the intersection of poverty and race. That a Black boy born in 2001 has a 1 in 3 chance and a Latino boy a 1 in 6 chance of going to prison in their lifetime is a national disaster and says to millions of our children and to the world that America's dream is not for all.

## **Key Immediate Action Steps to Protect and Rescue Children from the Cradle to Prison Pipeline**

I hope the sobering facts in this report will wake us up, lead each of us to conduct a personal, community and national audit and commit to do whatever is necessary for as long as it takes to stop the flow of children into the Pipeline, get as many out as early as possible, and reroute them to successful adulthood.

*The Pipeline is not an act of God or inevitable; it is a series of human choices at each stage of our children's development. We created it, we can change it. We know what to do. We can predict need. We can identify risk. We can prevent damage. We can target interventions. We can monitor progress. In so doing, we can guarantee returns on public investments and control costs to children and society. We can train professionals and create programs that heal and nurture. We can adapt and replicate strategies that work in communities across our nation and incorporate them in policy. We can restore hope and build on child strengths and resiliency. We can wrap buffers around our children's fragile places, bind up their wounds and prepare them with spiritual anchors inside to better weather the storms of life. We have the knowledge and the experience to do this. It is not impossible or futile as countless inspiring stories of children and youth beating the odds every day attest. What it takes is a critical mass of leaders and caring adults with the spiritual and political will to reach out and pull children at risk out of the Pipeline and *never* let go and who will make a mighty noise until those in power respond to our demands for just treatment for children. This will not happen unless we come together and do the hard work to build a movement to save all our children and nation's soul. *Beginning right now we can:**

**1. Name and change the Pipeline and work together, recognizing that children do not come in pieces but in families and communities and are profoundly affected by the norms, priorities, policies and values of our nation and culture.** I and my CDF colleagues have convened and participated in many meetings and discussions and best practices institutes over the past three years since this effort began. There are many wonderful people engaging in effective efforts all across our land addressing a piece of the Pipeline, some described in this report. Our challenge is to connect all the pieces, understand the whole Pipeline while breaking it down into manageable pieces for action, always seeing how each piece affects the

whole child. Our siloed organizational, governmental, policy and funding streams must comprehensively address the whole child from birth through the transition to adulthood in the real context of their lives responding to all of the major forces that help shape them. False either-ors between personal, family, community and societal responsibility for children need to stop. All of these child shaping forces must collaborate and *put the child's healthy development at the center of our decision making*. Children's needs are too often lost or are beside the point as too many adults use rather than serve children for their own professional, organizational, profit-making and private self interests.

**2. Call and work for a fundamental paradigm shift in child policy and practice away from the too frequent first choice of punishment and incarceration to prevention and early intervention and sustained child investment.** The only thing our rich nation will guarantee every child is a jail or detention cell after s/he gets into trouble, fails in school, becomes a child parent or explodes in rage from undiagnosed and untreated health and mental health, neglect and abuse problems.

**3. We must begin early by ensuring every child a healthy start through guaranteed comprehensive health and mental health coverage and coverage of pregnant women wherever they live in America.** Children and pregnant women cannot wait until health coverage for all is debated and enacted. A child has only one birth and childhood. That children are dying from tooth abscesses and from conditions exacerbated by bureaucratic barriers and bungling is a national disgrace. That our President and Congress refuse to invest enough money to provide *all* nine million uninsured children the health care they would not deny a single one of their own children for a single day, and that taxpayers provide them, should be an urgent issue in 2008 and until a *national* child health and mental health safety net is in place. The lottery of birth should not dictate child survival.

**4. Ensure quality Early Head Start, Head Start, child care and preschool to get every child ready for school.** High quality early childhood programs help children do better in school, avoid special education and stay out of trouble. Yet only 50 percent of children eligible for Head Start get it.

**5. Link every child to a permanent, caring family member or adult mentor who can keep them on track and get them back on track if and when they stray.** The fabric of community must be rewoven to catch falling children until our torn family fabric can be repaired. We must bring to scale promising practices that engage and enrich children during out-of-school time and encourage more minority youths to see teaching and child advocacy as urgent callings. *And every adult who works with children in our education, health care, child welfare and juvenile justice systems should love and respect children or go do something else.* The most important mentors in children's lives are those they come into regular contact with. We must be mindful of what we are teaching through our action and inaction.

**6. Make sure every child can read by 4<sup>th</sup> grade and can graduate from school able to succeed at work and in life. An ethic of achievement and high expectations for every child must be created in every home, congregation,**

### **community and school and in our culture and public policies and practices.**

Turn off the television and pick up the books. Make reading cool and fun. That only 14 percent of Black, 17 percent of Latino and 42 percent of White 4<sup>th</sup> graders are reading at grade level, and 11.8 percent of Black and 23.8 percent of Latino 16- to 24-year-olds have dropped out before graduating from high school imperils America's internal stability, future and competitiveness and sentences illiterate children to social and economic death. No external enemy poses as great a threat to America's security as our millions of unhealthy, uneducated, angry children who will fill our prisons rather than bolster our economy. This ethic must begin in the early years. While parents are the frontline of responsibility for children, you can't teach what you do not know and no one raises a child alone. Research shows that children of welfare mothers when compared with children of more affluent educated parents have an enormous parent-child word interaction gap by age 3. Yet Early Head Start reaches only 3 percent of eligible children during this crucial period of brain development.

### **7. Commit to helping the richest nation on earth end the child and family poverty that drives so much of the Pipeline process and the racial disparities faced by Black, Latino and American Indian children who are disproportionately poor.**

It is not right, sensible or necessary to have 13 million poor children in a \$13.3 trillion economy. No other industrialized nation permits such high rates of child poverty. Benjamin Franklin said a long time ago that the best family policy is a good job. A majority of poor children live in working households, yet private sector and government policies do not ensure that work pays enough to escape poverty and get health care. Parents need a range of work and income supports to make ends meet including expanded and refundable earned income tax and child tax credits and minimum wage laws adjusted for inflation. They also need access to education and training to improve themselves including at least the chance to attend a community college.

### **8. Dramatically decrease the number of children who enter the child welfare and juvenile and criminal justice systems, stop detaining children in adult jails, and reduce the racial disparities in these and other child serving systems.**

Children need strong and loving families and communities who work together to keep children safely at home whenever possible: to be moved out of foster care promptly and into permanent caring families, and to be helped not to reenter care unnecessarily or get shunted from child welfare to the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Measures to prevent teen pregnancy, provide quality parent-child home visiting programs, comprehensive and quality community family support programs to prevent neglect and abuse, and comprehensive family-based substance abuse treatment to keep children out of the child welfare system are critical.

### **9. Confront America's deadly, historic romance with guns and violence and stress more nonviolent values and conflict resolution in all aspects of American life.**

Since 1968 when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Senator Robert Kennedy were assassinated, more than 1.1 million Americans have been killed by guns; another 724,000 have died by other violent means. The majority have been White. This is more internal deaths than American combat deaths in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Since 1979 over 100,000 children have been killed by guns. We also must

stand for common sense gun control and against excessive violence in the media and entertainment industry. We must also challenge negative cultural messages inside and outside our communities and families that spread toxic racial and gender stereotypes which divide rather than unite us. It is time to provide a counter vision in word and deed to help our children redefine what constitutes success in life.

## CDF's Next Steps

This CDF report is the beginning of a national and community crusade to engage families, youth, community leaders and institutions and those in power in every sector in the development of healthy, educated children. It will be supplemented by:

- Community toolkits for various target groups;
- A moving video presentation of the Pipeline and one positive alternative vision—the CDF Freedom Schools® program—for house party, congregational and community discussion and action;
- Annual child and gun violence reports, *Protect Children, Not Guns*, to track the killing of children and call for effective gun control measures and nonviolent conflict resolution training;
- Continuing publication of annual National Observances of Children's Sabbaths® manuals for congregations of all faiths to lift up the needs of children in prayer, worship, service and action each October;
- How-to kits to conduct Beat the Odds® celebrations of the strengths of our children and provide college scholarships and leadership opportunities to youths who surmount devastating odds. *Beat the Odds* programs need to take place in communities across the country to highlight and reward achievement and combat stereotypes about at-risk young people who many wrongly write off as beyond salvation;
- How-to manuals for conducting jail and detention Child Watch® visits in communities to experience firsthand the suffering of children in the Pipeline and what can be done;
- Annual *Cradle to Prison Pipeline* Best Practices and Leadership Training Institutes at CDF Haley Farm and ongoing information about best practices across sectors;
- Connecting and convening our country's best and most effective women, community and faith leaders, service providers, policy makers and other concerned adults to share ideas and monitor progress about ways to break up the Pipeline at the community, state and national levels;
- Conducting spiritual retreats at Haley Farm to connect, renew, inform and motivate our leaders working for children;

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*Over 60,000 children have had a summer CDF Freedom Schools® reading and service enrichment experience sponsored by community institutions and taught by college mentor servant-leaders. About one-third of these young teachers are Black males who grew up in the children's communities and are giving back.*

- Training a critical mass of servant-leaders across faith, race, income and discipline—especially young people—to empower them to stand up for themselves and providing them ongoing structures for service and advocacy including Freedom Schools; and
- Implementing several long-term pilot community projects to begin to dismantle the Pipeline in states with CDF offices and where a critical mass of key stakeholders are ready and willing to come to the table for united and sustained action.

We have models to build on thanks to the quiet and persistent sowing and nurturing of seeds by many through the Black Community Crusade for Children (BCCC) over the past 15 years. Over 12,000 young servant-leaders have been trained at CDF Haley Farm; hundreds of children have gone on to college through *Beat the Odds* scholarships and are giving back; over 60,000 children have had a summer Freedom Schools reading and service enrichment experience sponsored by community institutions and taught by college mentor servant-leaders. About one-third of these young teachers are Black males who grew up in the children’s communities and are giving back. A safe haven for discussion of sound old and new ideas and strategies will continue at Haley Farm, which helped incubate a number of promising practices. These have included the Harlem Children’s Zone under Geoff Canada’s wonderful leadership and the CDF-Southern Regional Office’s advocacy and Southern Rural Black Women’s Initiative empowerment efforts under Oleta Fitzgerald’s fine leadership and various youth leadership development models. At Haley Farm we connect the Joshua generation leaders with Moses generation leaders from the Civil Rights Movement. Young people need to know their history and how children and youth helped change America and can do so again. And the annual Samuel DeWitt Proctor Institute for Child Advocacy Ministry each third week in July at Haley Farm will continue to bring hundreds of faith leaders together with young people to examine how the religious community can regain its prophetic voice for justice for the young and poor.

But no single or few organizations can tackle this looming national catastrophe alone. The neglect, underachievement and abandonment of our children manifested in the Cradle to Prison Pipeline must become the agenda not only for the Black and Latino communities but for the entire nation for the next decade. New voices for new choices that protect all our children’s well-being must be the litmus test for all our actions and votes as we stand up to those in our homes, communities, schools, neighborhoods, political and cultural life who hurt children. The longer term policy vision in Chapter 1 can and must be achieved by 2015 but it will require focused and insistent demands from a critical mass of leaders and citizens until all the components for healthy child development are in place.

## **How This Report Is Organized**

Chapter 1 of Part I provides an overview of the major factors behind the Pipeline through stories and statistics and longer term policy goals. Chapter 2 shows the faces of children in the Pipeline through 30-year veteran *Time* Magazine photographer Steve Liss’s moving photographs. Part II shares Julia Cass’s and Connie Curry’s

case studies describing how the Pipeline affects children on the ground in Mississippi and Ohio at one point in time. They believe that saving children like baby Eric and others, whose families you will meet, is complex yet possible and that while growing a child to successful adulthood is not silver bullet proof—and obviously not all children can or will be rescued—many can be saved. Part III calls for the hard work and persistence needed to build a transforming movement to finish the work begun by the Civil Rights Movement and Dr. King’s Poor People’s Campaign to put the social and economic foundations beneath all children and families. Part IV-Appendices includes brief descriptions of some promising approaches to help keep children out of the Pipeline, research tables and selected state-by-state data of key child indicators.

## Dedication

This report is dedicated to Miz Mae Bertha Carter and her husband Matthew who wanted a better life for their younger children which they believed required a good education. They challenged Mississippi’s sham “freedom of choice” desegregation plans by applying to enroll their children in “White” Drew, Sunflower County, Mississippi, public schools, home of powerful segregationist Senator Jim Eastland. I was privileged to be their attorney and watched with awe and humility as their family courageously withstood violence, eviction, daily harassment and abuse. The younger Carter children, with their parents’ unwavering love and support, weathered the daily cruelties in school and community, graduated from high school and college, and became professionals contributing much to our nation. Connie Curry describes the heroic struggle of Miz Mae Bertha and her family in an inspiring book, *Silver Rights*. When Connie told me that Miz Mae Bertha’s grandson, Lorenzo, was in Parchman Prison in Mississippi, it reignited my determination to sound the alarm against the growing re-segregation, incarceration and miseducation of Black children and youth, especially young Black males, that threaten to undo the hard earned racial and social progress of the Civil Rights Movement, disempower the Black community and stain our nation’s future. Lorenzo’s story and that of other young Black males in the Pipeline are shared in Curry’s investigative case study of Mississippi in Part II.

History teaches if racial apartheid happened before, it can happen again unless we are vigilant and address now the huge disparities Black and Latino and other poor children of color face. It’s time for a new generation of Miz Mae Bertha Carters to stand up and be counted and to do whatever is necessary to assure our children the better life for which she and so many sacrificed and died. I hope you will be one of them.



Marian Wright Edelman  
President, Children’s Defense Fund

## A Parent, Community and National Audit

- If we are not supporting a child we brought into the world as a father or mother with attention, time, love, discipline, money and the teaching of values, then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution to the family breakdown today that is leaving so many children at risk.
- If we are abusing tobacco, alcohol, cocaine or other drugs while telling our children not to, then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution in our overly addicted society.
- If we have guns in our home and rely on them to feel safe and powerful, and don't stand up to those who market guns to our children and to those who kill our children, or glamorize violence as fun, entertaining or normal, then we are part of the problem rather than the solution in the chronic war of American against American and family member against family member that is tearing us apart.
- If we tell our daughters not to engage in premature and irresponsible sex and not to have children before they are prepared to parent and support them, and do not tell our sons the same thing, we are a part of the problem rather than the solution to teen pregnancy and out-of-wedlock births so many decry.
- If we profess to be people of faith but believe that the Sermon on the Mount, the Ten Commandments, the Koran, or whatever religious or core beliefs we hold, pertain only to one-day practice but not to Monday through Saturday home, professional and political life, then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution to the spiritual famine and breakdown in community plaguing America today.
- If we tell, snicker, or wink at racial, gender, religious or ethnic jokes or engage in or acquiesce in any practices intended to diminish rather than enhance other human beings, then we are contributing to the proliferating voices of racial and ethnic division and intolerance staining our land again. Let's not repeat the worst lessons of our past but prepare our children for the future in a globalizing world that is majority non-White and poor.
- If we think being American is about how much we can get rather than about how much we can give and share to help all our children get a healthy, fair and safe start in life, then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution.

## Are We Part of the Problem or Solution?

- If we think it's somebody else's responsibility to teach our children values, respect, good manners, work and healthy habits, then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution to parental neglect today.
- If we or our organizations are spending more money on alcohol and entertainment than on scholarships, books, tutoring, rites of passage and mentoring programs for youths, then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution to ensuring positive visions and alternatives for children in our increasingly coarse culture.
- If we'd rather talk the talk than walk the walk to the voting booths, school board meetings, political forums, and congregation and community meetings to organize community and political support for effective programs for our children, then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution.
- If our children of any color think that being smart and studying hard is acting White rather than acting Black or Latino and don't know about the many great Black and Latino as well as White achievers who overcame every obstacle to succeed, then we are a part of the problem rather than a part of the solution to poor self image and racial stereotyping.
- If we are not voting and holding political leaders accountable for investing relative pennies in children's health care, early Head Start and education, and permanent families for abused and neglected children, while investing pounds in the military budget and protecting welfare for rich farmers, corporate executives and powerful special interests, then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution to the growing gap between rich and poor.
- If we think corrupt and unaccountable political, corporate and media leaders of any race who neglect and prey on our children and communities for self interest should not be held accountable, then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution to pervasive cynicism and apathy.
- And if we think we have ours and don't owe any time or money or effort to help children left behind, out of sight and out of mind in prison, then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution to the fraying social fabric and violence and inequality that drives the Pipeline that threatens all Americans and the very meaning and soul of America.