



Portrait of Inequality 2011

Black Children in America

Children's Defense Fund

CDF Mission Statement

The Children's Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a *Healthy Start*, a *Head Start*, a *Fair Start*, a *Safe Start* and a *Moral Start* in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.

CDF provides a strong, effective and independent voice for *all* the children of America who cannot vote, lobby or speak for themselves. We pay particular attention to the needs of poor and minority children and those with disabilities. CDF educates the nation about the needs of children and encourages preventive investments before they get sick, drop out of school, get into trouble or suffer family breakdown.

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The economic crisis of the last three years has pushed Black children and youth deeper and deeper into an abyss of poverty, hunger, homelessness and despair. Black children and youth continue to face multiple risks from birth and throughout life that increase the danger of their becoming part of the Cradle to Prison Pipeline[®] crisis that leads to dead end lives.

Poverty

Poverty destroys childhood and can destroy children. In 2010, 16.4 million children – more than one in five – were poor.¹

- Black children are three times as likely to be poor (39.1%) as White children (12.4%).²
- Black children are nearly four times as likely as White children to live in extreme poverty³: half of the poverty level or less (\$11,157 for a family of four).
- The 4.4 million Black children (more than one in three) living in poverty in 2010 represented an increase of over 329,000 since 2009 and over 780,000 since 2000.⁴
- Black children under five are the poorest group: 45.5 percent of them are poor compared to 14.6 percent of White children.⁵ These young Black children are more than three times as likely as White children to live in extreme poverty.⁶
- Forty percent of Black children are born poor, compared to eight percent of White children. More than two-thirds of Black children born poor will be persistently poor for at least half of their childhoods. Black children are seven times more likely than White children to be persistently poor.⁷

Family Structure & Income

Poverty can fray family bonds. Children are left without family support systems and often face daunting challenges.

Family Structure

- Nearly 60 percent of poor Black families with children have at least one working family member.⁸
- Fewer than 40 percent of all Black children live with two parents, compared to about 75 percent of White children.⁹
- Fifty percent of Black children live with only their mother.¹⁰ Black children are almost three times as likely to live with their mother only as are White children.
- Black children are more than twice as likely as other children to live with neither parent.¹¹ About five percent of Black children live with grandparents and just over two percent live with other relatives.
- Black children are four times as likely as White children to be in foster care.¹²
- Black children are seven times as likely as White children to have a parent in prison.¹³

Births to Unmarried Mothers and Teens

- Over 70 percent of Black babies are born to unmarried mothers, more than twice the rate for White babies and higher than for any other racial or ethnic group.¹⁴
- Black babies are more than twice as likely as White babies to be born to a teen mother.¹⁵

Income

- Black families with children have median incomes almost half those of White families. In 2009 the median income for Black families with children was \$33,915 and \$61,775 for White families with children.¹⁶
- The median income for a Black female-headed household with one or more children and without a husband present was \$22,158, barely above the poverty level for a family of three.¹⁷ Almost half of Black female-headed households with children were poor.¹⁸

Health

Many of the health problems Black children face can be attributed to the effects of poverty. Poverty stacks the odds against children before birth and decreases their chance of being born healthy and at normal birthweight. Lack of prenatal care, low birthweight, poor health and being uninsured put young Black children at high risk of entering the *Cradle to Prison Pipeline*.

Black Babies are Born at a Disadvantage.

- Black babies are more than twice as likely to die before their first birthday as White babies. The Black infant mortality rate in 2007 was about the same as the White infant mortality rate thirty years earlier.¹⁹
- Infants born to Black mothers are almost twice as likely to be born at low birthweight as infants born to White mothers.²⁰
- Infants born to Black mothers are almost twice as likely to be born at low birthweight as infants born to White mothers. A child born at low birthweight is more likely to have health, behavioral, and learning problems down the road.²¹

Black Children are More Likely to be Uninsured and in Poorer Health.

- Black children are 63 percent more likely than White children to be uninsured. One in eight Black children is uninsured, compared to 1 in 14 White children.²²
- Uninsured Black children are 75 percent more likely than uninsured White children to have gone without needed medical care because of cost.²³
- More than one in five Black children has asthma. When uncontrolled, asthma can affect a child's ability to learn, play, sleep and require hospital treatment or visits to the emergency department.²⁴
- Black teens are 26 percent more likely than White teens to be overweight or obese. More than one in three Black children and teens are overweight or obese.²⁵

Early Childhood Development & School Readiness

Disparities in development and school readiness are very much evident in the early stages of children's development. Many of these disparities can be traced to low socioeconomic status which is highly connected to race and ethnicity and other demographic characteristics. Young Black children often score lower on measures of cognitive development and proficiency. They are at risk of being funneled into the prison pipeline early in life.

Black Children Fall Behind Early On

- At nine months Black babies score lower on measures of cognitive development than White babies.²⁶
- At 24 months the gap in cognitive development has more than tripled between Black babies and White babies.
- At 4-years-old Black children scored significantly behind White children in their proficiency in letter, number and shape recognition.²⁷

Too Many Black Children Enter School Behind

- Black children are enrolled in pre-kindergarten programs at a higher rate than White children, but the programs often are of lower quality.²⁸
- On average, Black children arrive at kindergarten and/or first grade with lower levels of school readiness than White children.²⁹
- Black children spend more time on average watching television daily, are less likely to have regular mealtimes and have far fewer books than White children.³⁰

Education

Many schools contribute to the devastating *Cradle to Prison Pipeline*. The overrepresentation of poor and minority children in grade retention, out-of-school suspensions and special education have interacted with low teacher expectations to contribute to these children's discouragement, low self esteem and disengagement from school. Poor Black children experience the least qualified teachers, worst education facilities and fewest resources. Black children experience too few Black teachers in the classroom. Only eight percent of public school teachers today are Black and only two percent are Black males.

Retention, Suspension, Expulsion and Corporal Punishment

- Black children are two and a half times as likely as White children to be held back or retained in school.³¹
- Although Black students comprised only 17 percent of students in public schools in 2006, they represented:
 - 35.6 percent of all students who experienced corporal punishment.
 - 37.4 percent of all students suspended.
 - 37.9 percent of all students expelled.³²

The Achievement Gap

- Black children continue to fall further and further behind as they progress through school:
 - In fourth grade 85 percent cannot read or do math at grade level.
 - In eighth grade 87 cannot read at grade level and 88 percent cannot do math at grade level.
 - In twelfth grade 84 percent of those Black students who have not dropped out of school cannot read at grade level and 94 percent cannot do math at grade level.³³

- Black students consistently score the lowest of any racial/ethnic student group on every section of both the SAT and the ACT college entrance exams.³⁴

Special Education Placement

- A Black child is only half as likely as a White child to be placed in a gifted and talented class.³⁵
- A Black child is more than one and a half times as likely as a White child to be placed in a class for students with emotional disturbances.³⁶
- A Black child is twice as likely as a White child to be placed in a class for students with mental retardation.³⁷

High School Dropouts

- Sixty percent of Black students graduate from high school on time compared to 80 percent of White students.³⁸
- Thirty-five percent of the nation's Black students in 2008 attended one of the 1,634 "dropout factories," high schools where less than 60 percent of the freshman class graduate in four years; only eight percent of the nation's White students attended such schools.³⁹

College or Prison?

- Black males age 18 and over in 2008 represented only five percent of the total college student population, but 36 percent of the total prison population.⁴⁰
- Thirty-two percent of Black young adults 18-24 are enrolled in institutions of higher education, compared to 44 percent of White young adults.⁴¹

Job Status & Income of Young Adults

The recession has created an extremely difficult labor market for all youth, but Black youth face the harshest impact. Black college graduates compared to other college graduates, for example, have the highest unemployment rates and the largest share of education loan debt. These facts bode ill for Black wealth creation.

Employment and Unemployment

- Black youth have the highest unemployment rate: nearly one in three Black high school graduates age 16 to 24 are unemployed. Before the recession began one in five of these high school graduates was unemployed.⁴²
- Black youth age 16 to 24 face the worst employment rates. In November 2010, only 43 percent of recent Black high school graduates and 73 percent of Black college graduates were working.⁴³
- The unemployment rate for Black males (29.8%) ages 20 – 24 was almost twice as high as the unemployment rate for White males (15.7%).⁴⁴
- The 2008 Current Population Survey estimates that the employment rate among Black male dropouts (excluding those in jail or prison) is 40 percent, however this rate falls to 25 percent when inmates are included in the population count.⁴⁵

Income

- Black males age 18 and over are more likely to have a lower income than White males with similar educational backgrounds. In 2006, the wage gap between Black and White males without a high school diploma was approximately \$5,000. The gap between Black and White males with master's degrees was \$20,000.⁴⁶

- In 2009, the median earnings for a White high school graduate was \$28,608 and \$24,804 for a Black graduate. For college graduates, the median earnings was \$52,120 for a White graduate and \$46,787 for a Black graduate.⁴⁷

Wealth & Asset Development

The opportunity to support one's children and then assist them to do better in life than the current generation is one to which all aspire. But the future outlook for many is bleak.

- Nearly half of Black households with children live in asset poverty, meaning they would be living below the poverty level within three months of losing their jobs or other income.⁴⁸
- In 2006, the median net worth of Black households with children was \$5,677; for Latino households with children it was \$6,325; for White households with children it was \$113,149.
- Black households with children hold an average of only five cents for every \$1 in assets held by White households with children.
- The foreclosure crisis has disproportionately impacted Black and Latino homeowners. Eleven percent of Black homeowners have already lost their homes to foreclosure or are now at imminent risk of foreclosure. In 2009, a home owned by a Black family was 76 percent more likely to go through foreclosure than a home owned by a White family.⁴⁹
- The Center for Responsible Lending estimates that between 2009 and 2012, \$193 billion will have been drained from Black communities due to the indirect losses in wealth that result from foreclosures on account of the depreciation to nearby properties.⁵⁰
- Blacks have a substantially higher rate of economic downward mobility than Whites. Almost half of Black children born to middle income parents fall to the bottom of the income distribution in adulthood, compared to just 16 percent of White children.⁵¹
- About a quarter of all Hispanic and about a quarter of Black households in 2009 had zero assets other than a vehicle, compared with only six percent of White households. These percentages have only slightly changed since 2005.⁵²

Violence

Family violence, gun violence and community violence threaten children's sense of security, hope and vision for the future. They push children deeper into the prison pipeline.

Child Abuse and Neglect and Foster Care

- Black children have the highest rates of abuse and neglect. In 2009, nearly 30 percent of deaths from child maltreatment were Black children.⁵³
- More than one in five victims of child abuse and neglect in 2009 were Black.⁵⁴
- Nationally the percent of Black children in foster care is twice their proportion in the child population.⁵⁵

Gun Violence

- While the annual number of firearm deaths of White children and teens *decreased* by 54 percent between 1979 and 2007, the deaths of Black children and teens *increased* by 61 percent.⁵⁶
- More than half of the males 15 to 19 killed by firearms in 2007 were Black. Black males were more than five times as likely as White youth and more than twice as likely as Hispanic youth to be killed by a firearm.⁵⁷

- Nearly 90 percent of firearm deaths of Black children and teens in 2007 were homicides (1,334) and six percent were suicides; among White children and teens just over half of all firearm deaths in 2007 were homicides (784) and 38 percent were suicides.⁵⁸
- The number of Black children and teens killed by gunfire since 1979 is more than 10 times the number of Black men, women and children of all ages lynched in American history.⁵⁹

Black Children's Exposure to Violence

- When parents were surveyed about their children's exposure to violence, Black children compared to White children were:
 - Two times more likely to witness domestic violence.
 - Three times more likely to be exposed to shooting, bombs, and riots.
 - Twenty times more likely to witness a murder.⁶⁰

Involvement in the Juvenile & Adult Criminal Justice Systems

Children of color, particularly Black children, are grossly overrepresented in the juvenile justice system. Involvement in the system is associated with poorer outcomes later in life in health, education and economic mobility. Young Black men without a high school diploma are incarcerated at very high rates, and for many, serving time in prison has become a "normal life event."

Juvenile Arrests and Incarceration

- Black children are twice as likely as White children to be arrested. At 10-17 a Black youth is five times as likely as a White youth to be arrested for a violent crime.⁶¹
- White, Black and Hispanic teens are equally likely to use drugs, but Black teens are almost twice as likely as White teens to be arrested for drug offenses and more than five times as likely to be in secure residential placements for these offenses.⁶²
- Nationally, Black youth are more than four times as likely as White youth to be detained in a juvenile correctional facility. About two-thirds of them are detained for non-violent offenses.
- In 2008, Blacks constituted 17 percent of the youth population (10-17). They constituted:
 - 31 percent of all juvenile arrests.
 - 26 percent of all juvenile arrests for drug abuse violations.
 - 52 percent of all juvenile arrests for violent offenses.⁶³
 - 58 percent of all juveniles sent to adult prisons.⁶⁴
- In 2010, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that juveniles could only be sentenced to life without parole for murder offenses. Of the approximately 2,500 juveniles across the nation serving life sentences, the Supreme Court decision changed the sentences of about 130 of them. Before the Supreme Court decision, a 2009 study of 17 states found that more than 60 percent of juveniles serving life sentences without parole were Black.⁶⁵ For example:
 - In Alabama, it was 84 percent (75 of 89).
 - In Maryland, 79 percent (15 of the 19).
 - In South Carolina, 79 percent (11 of the 14).
- The gender gap in incarceration is closing. In 1980 boys were four times as likely as girls to be incarcerated. In 2009 boys were twice as likely as girls to be incarcerated.
- Girls made up 15 percent of the population in residential placement in 2006, but 41 percent of the arrests for offenses such as running away, truancy, curfew violations, underage drinking and incorrigibility.⁶⁶

Adult Incarceration

- Black males born in 2001 are more than five times as likely as White males to be incarcerated some time in their lifetime.⁶⁷
- One in 12 working-age Black men was in prison or jail in 2008, compared to one in 87 working-age White men.⁶⁸
- One in nine (11.7%) Black males between ages 25 and 29 is in prison or jail.⁶⁹
- In 2008, Black adults were incarcerated in state and federal facilities at 6.5 times the rate of White adults.⁷⁰

Global Comparisons of U.S. Incarceration

- The U.S. has five percent of the world's population, but 25 percent of the world's prison inmate population.⁷¹
- In 2008, 2.3 million or 1 in 100 adults in America were behind bars.⁷²
- The rate of incarceration in the U.S. climbed from 221 to 762 per 100,000 from 1980 to 2008. This is more than a 300 percent increase.⁷³
- The U.S. houses more inmates than the top 35 European countries combined.⁷⁴

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