I hereby submit two (2) copies of my thesis, **The Evolution of the African American Family** for inclusion into the AUM Library. One copy will be bound and placed in the circulating collection; the remaining copy will be retained as a preservation copy. I hereby give the library permission to store, preserve, and make accessible a digital copy of my theses within the context of an institutional repository. I further give permission for the library to catalog and to make available to researchers the images of my theses, without restriction. I also give permission to the Library to make copies of this thesis for preservation purposes.

Ruby R. Thomas   4/30/2014

Ruby R. Thomas   Date

Barbara E. Hightower   4/30/2014

Barbara E. Hightower/ Dean of the AUM Library   Date

THE EVOLUTION OF THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN FAMILY

A Thesis

presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School

at Auburn Montgomery

In Partial Fulfillment

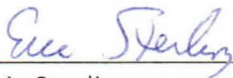of the Requirements for the Degree
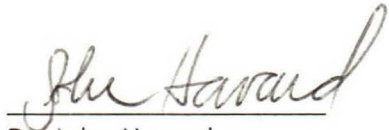
Master of Liberal Arts

by

Ruby R. Thomas

Spring 2014

Approved by

Dr. Eric Sterling
Thesis Director

Dr. John Havard
Second Reader

Dr. Matthew Ragland
Associate Provost

THE EVOLUTION OF THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN FAMILY

A Thesis

presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School

at Auburn Montgomery

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Liberal Arts

---

by

Ruby R. Thomas

Dr. Eric Sterling, Thesis Supervisor

Spring 2014

Other things might change us, but we start and end with

family—Anthony Brandt[1]

Introduction

With the enormous amount of literature written on the African-American family,

one might ask whether scholars have studied it enough. Prior research analyzes the

African- American family in a pass/fail system. It is my contention that the African-

American family does not easily fit into this either/or category—because it is complex,

diverse, and ever evolving. One must look at the African-American family through the

lens of what it has done. The African- American family, despite tragedy and separation,

has managed to survive and evolve within the community. Through observation,

research, and analysis I have concluded that the African- American family is not

broken—not incapable of repair, not raising terrible citizens, and not lacking overall

value to society. I contend that the African- American family is fragmented—it has

problems; it is not perfect; however, it still functions as a unit of socialization.

Furthermore, African Americans are wholly capable of "fixing" family issues. The

African-American family faces problems that confront many other American families—

poverty, divorce, teenage pregnancy, and absentee fathers. More unique to the African-

American experience is that there is no sense of culture or heritage. African Americans

---

[1] " Anthony Brandt Quote" Accessed: 14 January 2010,
http://thinkexist.com/quotes/with/keyword/family/

know little of their past. Again, the partial integration into the mainstream society is partially to blame for this historical and cultural amnesia.

The glorified "baby mama," absentee father, and lost children exist within the African-American community because of this historical and cultural amnesia. It is not mainstream America's fault that African Americans have disregarded their culture, heritage, and pride in exchange for the love of money and its perception in society. African Americans must focus on education and economic opportunities to change the family perspective.

Regardless of ethnicity, most Americans do not live in traditional families—the US Bureau of the Census in 2008 defines a family as any two or more related people living in the same household. A traditional family would consist of two parents and a child or children. The sparse existence of traditional families, over seventy percent of newborns are born out of wedlock,[2] is especially true for African Americans. African-American families are historically viewed as single-parent families dominated by the matriarch. In reality, black families are marked by complex intergroupings between location, shared values, affiliations, and blood ties which strengthen family identities.[3] However, African Americans no longer have a distinct cultural group, but are now a part of diverse popular culture-- a result of desegregation and the blending of different cultures. Through this cultural amalgamation, African Americans have lost much of their

---

[2] L.M. Casper "America's Families and Living Arrangements: Population Characteristics. United States Census Bureau, 2000
[3] Walter R. Allen, "African American Family Life in Societal Context: Crisis and Hope" *Sociological Forum* 10, no 4 (Dec 1995) 569

self-value, self-love, and pride to assimilate into popular culture. As a result, African

Americans do not value their image. Larry Leach, a professor of Journalism and

Communication at Chabot College, notes that groups look to the media to tell them

their role in society.[4] The African-American image is often depicted as lazy, unemployed,

criminal, athletic or deviant. Reverend Jesse Jackson remarked in 1985 that the news

media often portrays blacks as less intelligent than they are.[5] These images have an

effect on the African-American family and how it is portrayed.

The slave family is essential to understanding the essence of the black family

through the generations. The common perception is that all slave families were

separated or broken in one way or another, preventing slaves from forming what

modern Americans consider a true family. However, this perception is not entirely

accurate. The slave family was the ultimate unit of survival. Slaves also formed extended

families complete with "play" cousins, aunties, uncles, etc. to fill in the gaps of missing

mothers, fathers, and siblings. The slave family often endured and taught essential

values, which have provided much of the foundation for the African-American family

today.

The effects of slavery—absent fathers, extended or imaginary familial

connections, and forced migration--still pervade the African-American family today. This

paper will argue that the African-American family was a strong, stable unit through

---

[4] Larry Leach "African American Groups in the Media." *California Tomorrow*, Accessed : 17 February 2014, http://californiatomorrow.org/media/images.pdf

[5] Larry Leach "African American Groups in the Media." *California Tomorrow*, Accessed : 17 February 2014, http://californiatomorrow.org/media/images.pdf

enslavement, emancipation, and the Jim Crow era (1890s-1960s); with the integration of African Americans fully into the larger society, the African-American family begins to change dramatically. African-American families have become susceptible to losing their identity and blending in with a larger society. African Americans are now Americans who are black. In fact, studies show that many dislike the words "African American." Today's African Americans do not identify with Africa; they are Americans. This frequently happens within immigrant groups that strive to assimilate into mainstream society. The fragmentation of the modern African-American family is therefore not the result of government paternalism or a matriarchal system, but it simply reflects the general trends in family relations within the United States—increasing divorce, single-parent homes, and teenage pregnancies. The African-American family still exists—it is spiritual, adjusts to external pressures, and creates a social helping system within the black community.

The state of the African-American family is reflected in the statistical record. Between 1980 and 1990, the proportion of all black families that were headed by single parents grew from fifty-two percent to sixty-five percent.[6] Today that number sits at about sixty percent. Of that, African-American females headed 90.1 percent of single parent households. This is a remarkable increase from 1960 when black women headed one quarter of households.[7] As a result, "the monolithic stereotype of a black family

---

[6] L.M. Casper, "America's Families and Living Arrangements: Population Characteristics. United States Census Bureau, 2000
[7] Andrew Hacker, "Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal" (Scribner: New York, 2003) 74

headed by a single mother with numerous children living in a roach infested tenement"

emerged and became a familiar stereotype, writes sociologist Walter Allen.[8]

According to the Economic Policy Institute, half of the jobs in the United States

pay less than $34,000 (what is required to live comfortably with children).[9] The rise in

single-parent homes means more families must depend on only one earner. The

dependence on one earner results in more variations in wages. A closer look at African-

American families reveals that those living in female-headed households are

disproportionately poor. Single-mother households were overwhelmingly poorer than

single-father households.[10] Moreover, in 2008, nearly half of households headed by

African-American females were living in poverty.[11] Most of those in poverty, like their

white counterparts, rely on some sort of government assistance.

Another major issue within the African-American family is absentee fathers.

American society no longer emphasizes marriage and commitment as it did in decades

past. Popular television shows today almost glorify single mothers or strong powerful

mothers on television more than ever before— *Teen Mom, Girlfriends, Baby Daddy*, for

example. These shows all depict single mothers; some show women choosing to be

single mothers. More and more females, black and white, are having children out of

---

[8] Walter R. Allen, "African American Family Life in Societal Context: Crisis and Hope" *Sociological Forum,* 10, no 4 (Dec 1995) 569

[9] Sylvia Gimenez, ed. " Why Poverty Persists" *Journal of Housing and Community Development,* 70, no 2 (2013)6-9

[10] "Income, Expenditures, Poverty, and Wealth" *US Census Bureau Statistical Brief of the United States, 2012.* Accessed 17 February 2014, http://census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0716.pdf

[11] Linda. L. McCreary, "Dimensions of Family Functioning: Perspectives of Low Income African American Single Parent families." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66, no 3. (Aug 1966) 691

wedlock, either by choice or circumstance; they are deciding to raise those children without the father. These trends would be catastrophic for the future of the African-American family if not for extended kinship networks within the African-American community. Grandparents are a major factor in the modern black family. For example, in 1998, 1.4 million African-American children, or just over twelve percent, lived with their grandparents.

The issue over the vitality of the African-American family is a complicated one. My overall argument is that while there are a variety of family forms within the African-American family-- mirrors the American family across all racial and ethnic groups. Divorce, single parenthood, and teenage pregnancies are issues in ALL ethnic and racial groups, not just among African Americans. Those issues, moreover, did not arise to a significant degree until after desegregation within the African-American community. This paper will address how desegregation has shattered, not broken, the African-American family. The paper will be organized as follows: Chapter 1 will discuss the scholarly debate concerning the African-American family. Chapter 2 will discuss the obstacles and strengths of the African-American family during slavery. Chapter 3 explores the African-American family in freedom. Lastly, Chapter 4 explores the issues and strengths of the African-American family today; it will also signal what is needed to strengthen the African-American family. Using census data, scholarly literature, and personal experiences within the educational and welfare systems, the African-American family will be highlighted through slavery, emancipation, and in present day society.

Chapter 1

Historians Debate the Issue

African Americans and sociologists have debated the African-American family since the early 1900s. Early scholars debated over the influence of Africa on the African-American family. Some said that Africa had no impact; others cited that Africa had a tremendous impact. Once it was accepted that Africa's influence on the African-American family was far reaching, historians began questioning the existence of the African-American family. Did African Americans have a functioning family unit? Was the African-American family a unit of socialization? Today the question remains regarding what is wrong with the African-American family.

The sociologist E. Franklin Frazier was a pioneer in the study of the African-American family in the 1940s and 1950s. His thesis while pursuing his masters in sociology at Howard University was entitled *Negro Life in Chicago*. Frazier examines the black family through many phases. Frazier examines several factors affecting the African-American family throughout his works. He often notes that several ideas regarding the African-American family are exaggerated. Concerning black fathers, Franklin notes that most urban and rural blacks lived in father-present households in 1880.[12] Frazier's most influential publication, *The Negro Family in the United States*,

---

[12] E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro American Family in the United States* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939) 35

published in 1939, argued that social historical factors such as slavery, white

intimidation, "black flight," and disruptions greatly affected the health of the African-

American family.[13] At the time he wrote his study, Frazier admitted that black families

were losing their internal cohesion. Frazier also maintained that African Americans were

culturally Americans without any traces of their African past. In essence, the African-

American family mirrored the American family. There were little to no traces of Africa—

the kin network that was brought from Africa was gone. These internal kinships that

connected Africans for generations were replaced with relationships contrived on the

American plantation. In short, slavery was so devastating in America that it destroyed all

the African elements among black Americans. More importantly to the family, Frazier

argued that the inherent instability of slavery had severely reduced the ability of men to

play the traditionally masculine family roles in American society. Frazier found that after

emancipation, poor urban black families still suffered disproportionately from broken

families and desertion.   Frazier looked closely at black quality of life, and his research

uncovered some social problems within the family that were not easily seen.[14] Family

desertion has been one of the inescapable consequences of the urbanization of the

black population. Family structure was weakened when the unit was broken. Men were

leaving their families to find better jobs, new opportunities, new adventures, and

military service. Some of these men had every intention of coming back to their families

when they left. However, the draw of the city proved fatal to family ties. In Northern

---

[13] E. Franklin Frazier, *The Free Negro Family* (Nashville: The Fisk University Press, 1932.)
[14] E. Franklin Frazier, *The Free Negro Family* (Nashville: The Fisk University Press, 1932.)

cities with a total population of 100,000 or more, from 10 to 30 percent of black families were headed by females.[15] The lack of help made it hard for females in this situation to earn a living; it limited the type of lifestyle the family could enjoy because women had to satisfy financial and caregiving roles. On the other hand, Frazier suggested that the growing number of black professionals and black men employed in heavy industry after World War I would help to stabilize African-American families along traditional lines.

Although Frazier is a very influential scholar in terms of the African-American family, some of his arguments are flawed. Frazier's argument that no traces of the African past exists within the African-American family is extreme. While African Americans are assimilated to society, one cannot erase cultural ties. African Americans still hold some ties to Africa—dance, music, etc. However, Frazier's argument concerning social historical factors is absolutely true. Yet Frazier does not examine the socioeconomic status and education as factors hindering the growth of the African-American family. While Frazier did not discuss income in detail in *The Negro Family in the United States,* he did note the tendency on the part of the higher occupational class to move toward the fringe of the black community and fit into the general pattern of the larger society.[16] The black middle class of the 1920s and 1930s was more educated. They were college educated and/or sent their children to college. Spousal ties were

---

[15] E. Franklin Frazier, *The Free Negro Family.* (Nashville: The Fisk University Press, 1932.)
[16] E. Franklin Frazier, *The Free Negro Family.* (Nashville: The Fisk University Press, 1932.)

stronger, and men were responsible for taking care of the formal needs of the family while women maintained the home and took care of the children.

The anthropologist Melville Herskovits argued in his seminal 1914 book *The Myth of the Negro Past* that African culture was influential in America particularly in regard to music, dance, speech, worship, and funeral practices.[17] He believed that American culture was influenced by African culture. Herskovits made several pilgrimages to Africa—Ghana, Suriname, and Nigeria-- that heavily influenced his work. Herskovits therefore believed that African Americans were not fully assimilated into American culture.[18] Herskovits' theories very much relied on the fact that culture was a learned tendency, as well as the idea of cultural relativism, the view that no culture is superior to any other culture when comparing systems of morality, law, politics, etc. Cultural relativism is the philosophical notion that all cultural beliefs are equally valid and that truth itself is contingent upon the cultural environment. Those who hold to cultural relativism believe that religious, ethical, aesthetic, and political beliefs are completely relative to the individual within a cultural identity.[19] Herskovits' theory impacted the understanding of the African-American family in slavery and in freedom. Herskovits is considered a pioneer in the study of the African-American family.

While Herskovits' theory was groundbreaking at the time, it holds less relevance today. Yes, African-American dance, music, and worship still hold roots to prior African

---

[17] E. Franklin Frazier, *The Free Negro Family* (Nashville: The Fisk University Press, 1932.)
[18] Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990)
[19] "Cultural Relativism- Illogical Standard," Accessed January 2013 http://cultural-relativism.com/

customs; however, African Americans today are fully assimilated into American society.

In fact, African Americans are now influencers of culture-- music, etiquette, religious

worship, speech, hospitality and even modern feminism; these influences have been

called "White Africanisms." Culture has shown that African Americans have always been

influencers of white culture and diet.

W.E.B. Dubois, the co-founder of the National Association for the Advancement

of Colored People, is also an influential scholar in terms of the African-American family.

Dubois' *The Negro American Family* is a study of the formation, home, and economic

organization of the black family. Dubois does acknowledge that slavery had an impact

on the African-American family. His works were more of a compilation of Census Bureau

and Bureau of Labor statistics. Dubois' works focus on the need for the black elite, the

talented tenth, to excel in America. Although Dubois has done a tremendous service for

the African-American community, his theories often leave out many within the black

community. His "Talented Tenth" neglects nearly all in the community. Nevertheless, his

correlation of the extended family network within the African-American family and the

system of clan and tribes within Africa is genius.[20] In *The Philadelphia Negro*, Dubois

spoke of the concept of the monogamist home as being new to blacks[21] Cohabitation

was a common practice in the absence of legal marriage. The number of single-parent

households was increasing, and children were growing up without fathers. Furthermore,

children lacked adequate supervision. Children were socialized in the street and not in

---

[20] W.E.B. Dubois, *The Negro American Family* (Cambridge; The M.I.T. Press, 1970) 9
[21] W.E.B. Dubois, *The Philadelphia Negro* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996)

the home. Moreover, when men were not able to find jobs that paid enough to support a family, women had to go out and find work. Dubois described how women were sometimes forced to go far from their homes to find work. As a result, children were left alone while women worked long hours—those children had a tendency to get into trouble. This mischief often involved the destruction of property. These factors contributed to landlords charging higher rents. Tenants became reluctant to take in boarders because some male lodgers took inappropriate actions with female children who had been left at home alone. There were also reports of husbands taking advantage of female lodgers who might rent from a boarding family.

It is impossible to complete a historical analysis of research on the African-American family without including *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, written in 1965 by sociologist and Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel P. Moynihan. The Moynihan Report was a misguided attempt to blame the inept black man for the disparities between white and black without taking into account societal forces that influenced blacks in general and the family specifically. *The Negro Family,* a Labor Department publication, paints a bleak picture of African-American family life. The report falsely asserts that African-American children are raised in primarily matriarchal homes without any male influence. As such, "Given the strains of the disorganized and matrifocal family life in which so many Negro youth come of age, the Armed Forces are a dramatic and desperately needed change: a world away from women, a world run by strong men of unquestioned authority, where discipline, if harsh, is nonetheless orderly

and predictable, and where rewards, if limited, are granted on the basis of performance."[22] It highlighted what Moynihan called the steady corrosion of the Negro family over the past generation. The report documented matriarchy, illegitimacy, and increasing welfare take-up among lower-class black families. It further remarks that all problems within the Negro community are the result of the crumbling Negro-American family.

> The fundamental problem, in which this is most clearly the case, is that of family structure. The evidence — not final, but powerfully persuasive — is that the Negro family in the urban ghettos is crumbling. A middle class group has managed to save itself, but for vast numbers of the unskilled, poorly educated city working class the fabric of conventional social relationships has all but disintegrated. There are indications that the situation may have been arrested in the past few years, but the general post war trend is unmistakable. So long as this situation persists, the cycle of poverty and disadvantage will continue to repeat itself.[23]

---

[22] U.S. United States Department of Labor, Office of Policy Planning and Research, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, open-file report, U.S. Geological Survey (Washington, DC, 1965).

[23] U.S. United States Department of Labor, Office of Policy Planning and Research, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, open-file report, U.S. Geological Survey (Washington, DC, 1965).

The Moynihan Report concedes that family is the chief socializing agent. However, it states that the Negro family is the link of the Negro community. In essence, the report states that the Negro family is responsible for the predicament of the Negro community, which is bleak:

> The Negro situation is commonly perceived by whites in terms of the visible manifestation of discrimination and poverty, in part because Negro protest is directed against such obstacles, and in part, no doubt, because these are facts which involve the actions and attitudes of the white community as well. It is more difficult, however, for whites to perceive the effect that three centuries of exploitation have had on the fabric of Negro society itself. Here the consequences of the historic injustices done to Negro Americans are silent and hidden from view. But here is where the true injury has occurred: unless this damage is repaired, all the effort to end discrimination and poverty and injustice will come to little.[24]

The Moynihan Report has come under considerable scrutiny from scholars, feminists, African-American activists, and even federal officials. William Ryan remarks

---

[24] U.S. United States Department of Labor, Office of Policy Planning and Research, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, open-file report, U.S. Geological Survey (Washington, DC, 1965).

that the report "draws dangerously inexact conclusions from weak and insufficient data."[25] The Moynihan Report blamed the Negro family, its ineptness and instability, for all the problems plaguing the African-American individual. The federal government needed to avoid a calamity and ultimately swept the report under the rug. Many politicians distanced themselves from the report's findings in an effort to reduce scandal within their office.[26] Despite several inaccuracies within the report, it was very influential in American politics. The data within the report helped launch the war on poverty and create the modern welfare state. The War on Poverty programs of the 1960s and 1970s have been heavily scrutinized since their inception.[27] While programs such as Head Start, Job Corp, and Family Planning were very successful, the War on Poverty creates issues such as a dependence on social service agents. Judith Russell asserts that the War on Poverty created instances of institutional racism; lawmakers were torn on actually helping poor people and maintaining a political edge.[28]

Herman Gutman is another influential scholar in the field of the African-American family. Gutman was also a scholar of labor history. His *Slavery and the Numbers Game* focused on the cost analysis aspect of slavery. It also concluded that slaves had not fully assimilated to the white work ethic. Gutman's *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* is a detailed study of family life in the United States.

---

[25] William Ryan, "Savage Discovery : The Moynihan Report" *Nation* 2012, no 17 (Nov 1985) 380
[26] William Ryan, "Savage Discovery : The Moynihan Report" *Nation* 2012, no 17 (Nov 1985) 380
[27] Linda Reese & Patricia Loughlin, ed. *Main Street Oklahoma: Stories of Twentieth Century America* (Oklahoma City: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013) 204
[28] Judith Russell, *Economics, Bureaucracy and Race: How Keynesians Misguided the War on Poverty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004) 138

Gutman examined census records, diaries, and other financial records to examine the impact of slavery on the African-American family. Gutman asserts that despite slavery, the African-American family remained largely intact. He also states that most times the "slave mentality" endured within the African-American community as it relates to family. That is to say the extended family networks and adaptability of the family existed beyond slavery, and even persist today. The arrangements and network adopted during slavery were the basis of the African-American family after the Civil War. [29] He further ascertains that after Emancipation slaves renewed their marriages and created stable two-parent families. [30] Gutman also provides information supporting the idea that the African-American family remained intact during the first wave of migration to the North. Gutman argues that not until the 1930s and 1940s do some elements of the African-American family begin collapsing. Gutman further notes that chain migration often took place. In chain migration, the dominant male would relocate, and once settled, he would send for the rest of the family. [31]

Gutman's ideas are closer to mine. That is, while slavery and migration did separate the black family, the black family adapted. The extended family network of grandmothers, uncles, cousins, etc. still existed. However, Gutman believed the black family showed signs of deterioration in the 1930s and 1940s; I maintain that it was not

---

[29] Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage Books, 1928) 3

[30] Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage Books, 1928) 9

[31] Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage Books, 1928) 434

until the 1970s that the African-American family showed signs of distress. It is during this time of integration, assimilation, and acceptance that African-American families started to weaken. Whites and blacks are losing the two-parent home. Teenage pregnancies are increasing in occurrence and acceptance.

Sara McLanahan is another sociologist who focused on the family dynamic. While McLanahan did not specifically focus on the African-American family, her work concerning single-parent families is amazing. McLanahan was a pioneer in the analysis of statistics concerning single-parent homes. Her 1986 *Single Mothers and Their Children: A New American Dilemma* judged single-parent homes based on income, school performance, and teen pregnancy. The analysis found that those children reared in single-parent homes often fare worse than those raised in two-parent homes. McLanahan often found that single-parent homes encompassed a mother and her children. This information led McLanahan to define a fragile family as a family formed by unmarried parents. The word "family" is intended to highlight the fact that unmarried couples with children are indeed families, while the word "fragile" is intended to highlight the fact that these relationships are fragile economically and socially.[32] She also found that women often earned less in comparison to men.[33] McLanahan spends significant time highlighting the differences and disparities among those families with a

---

[32] "The Instability of 'Fragile Families' is Sara McLanahan's Research Focus: Cause for Common Concern," Journal and Courier. (Jan 2013), http://www.jconline.com/article/20130126/NEWS/301260042/The-instability-fragile-families-Sara-McLanahan-s-research-focus

[33] Sara McLanahan, "Family Structure and the Reproduction of Poverty." *The Journal of Sociology* 90, no.4 (1985)

parent with little to no education, specifically a high school diploma. McLanahan

correlates the decline in real wages and the ever-increasing educational requirements

from employers as another factor in fragile families. She has also researched the impact

of absentee fathers on the family in *Fathers under Fire: The Revolution in Child Support

Enforcement.* McLanahan in a sense released the new Moynihan Report. Her statistics

support Moynihan's assertions during the 1960s.

Robert B. Hill, one of many sociologists to highlight the strengths of the African-

American family, acknowledges the issue of single-parent households in the African-

American community. He also acknowledges the existence of poverty within many

African-American households. But Hill says black families -- including many low-income

ones headed by single women -- often have strengths that are seldom noticed: strong

kinship bonds, strong work ethic or orientation, adaptability of family roles, high

achievement orientation, and a religious ethic.[34] Hill denotes that these five strengths

are adaptations necessary for survival and sufficiency. Hill also notes that the strengths

of black families are not very different from the strengths of white families.[35] But we

should not immediately equate single-parent families with 'broken' and two-parent

families with 'intact.' Many single-parent families function well. Hill was among the first

scholars to focus on what's right with the black family. In 1972, as director of research

---

[34] William Katz and New York National Center for Research and Information on Equal Education
Opportunity, *The Strengths of Black Families*, by Robert Hill: A Review. (*May 1973*)
[35] William Katz and New York National Center for Research and Information on Equal Education
Opportunity, *The Strengths of Black Families*, by Robert Hill: A Review. (*May 1973*)

for the National Urban League, he published *The Strengths of Black Families*. Hill states

it is necessary to look at the strengths of African-American families to create a program

that will properly aid African-American families.[36] Hill highlights, successfully and

correctly, that too much focus has been given to the inaccuracies, fallacies, and

weaknesses of African-American families.

Joanna and Elmer Martin also highlight what is right with the African-American

community. Their 1985 work *The Helping Tradition in the Black Family and Community*

details what African Americans have done for themselves, their community, and society.

It details the helping tradition through history--in slavery, Reconstruction, urban

America, and the social work profession. The book highlights extended kinships,

religious consciousness, mutual aid, social class cooperation, male-female equality, and

prosocial behavior in children all as part of the helping tradition.[37] I will expand on

Joanna and Elmer Martin's work to demonstrate what is right with the African-American

family. Spiritual orientation, kin networks, and a social helping community within

African-American society have enabled the African-American family to survive.

Many previous scholars have looked at the African-American family trying to

ascertain what is wrong with it-- whether it functions. Those scholars who do

acknowledge the good often focus on several factors. Among them are real or fictional

---

[36] William Katz and New York National Center for Research and Information on Equal Education
Opportunity, *The Strengths of Black Families, by Robert Hill: A Review. (May 1973)*
[37] Andrew Billingsley, "The Helping Tradition in the Black Family and Community" *Social Work* 31, no 6
(November 1986) 483

extended family relationships, religious strength, and adaptability of family roles. The family support system is essential to the health of the African-American family. Through observation, research, and analysis I have concluded that the African-American family is not broken, contrary to what many have stated. African-American families continue to produce quality, productive citizens who add value to society. Currently as a teacher and previously as a social worker, I was daily confronted with the African-American family and its dynamic. In America we focus on the individual-- these are MY children. However, throughout history African Americans have truly used the village system, where every adult was involved in the rearing of children. Children were expected to learn and listen to parents, teachers, and any adult within the black community. Furthermore, the African-American urge to depend on the modern welfare system, which does more harm than good, is also a major issue within our society. However, the problem of the African-American family mirrors the problems of all racial or ethnic families-- they are the problems of American families.

African-American families are marked by complex intergroupings between location, shared values, affiliations, and blood ties.[38] African Americans no longer have a distinct cultural group; they are now a part of popular culture. Through desegregation, African Americans gained access to corridors and opportunities previously closed to those of color. Prior to segregation, facilities were separate and unequal. However, African Americans fully controlled their depiction and portrayal within the community.

---

[38] Walter R. Allen, "African American Family Life in Societal Context: Crisis and Hope" *Sociological Forum* 10, no 4 (Dec 1995) 569

The problems that face African-American society today are a result of the pressure of assimilating and meshing with mainstream society and socioeconomic status. African Americans are fully integrated into American society; however, many African Americans occupy the lowest levels of the socioeconomic ladder. Overall, the African-American family is a fully functional unit. Concerns such as single-parent households, absentee fathers, and teenage pregnancy plague African-American families. Despite these problems, the African-American family has succeeded as a socializing agent through hundreds of years and continues to function.

Chapter 2

Slave Families

> The slave population, as you remark, "has had vast influence on the past, and may affect the future destinies of America, to an extent which human wisdom can neither foresee nor control—
> Timothy Pickering[39]

To understand the importance and the essence of slave families, one must understand the importance of the institution of slavery to the South. Africans began being transported to the Americas during the 1600s. Enslavement of Africans was not as harsh or cruel in the beginning; slaves were usually treated as indentured servants and emancipated after completion of a specified amount of service. However, as technology grew and rebellion among landless former indentured servants spread, the colonists began to rely more heavily on slavery.[40] The South was heavily dependent on agriculture. The climate and fertility of the soil made agriculture more sensible in the South than in the North.[41] Moreover the crops that were grown in the South—tobacco, cotton, rice, and sugar-- were very labor intensive and required many hands to produce a successful harvest. Whites in the planter class, those who generally owned more than 100 acres of land and more than 20 slaves, required substantial amounts of help to farm

---

[39] Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth Century America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995)

[40] Darlene Clark Hine, William C. Hine, and Stanley Harrold, *The African American Odyssey*, 4 (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hill, 2010)4

[41] Darlene Clark Hine, William C. Hine, and Stanley Harrold, *The African American Odyssey*, 4 (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hill, 2010)2

these crops. In this context, plantations or the presence of a large planter class,

although still a minority, were emerging throughout the Chesapeake Area and spread to

the Lower South. By 1860, the planters had grown to include 384,750 people within the

planter class, and they owned over two million slaves.[42] Africans were deemed perfect

for this type of labor because the climate was comparable to that in Africa and blacks

were seen as inferior to whites. Consequently, blacks needed constant supervision and

guidance to lead a Christian life[43]Whites capitalized on the existing slave trade market

that existed in Africa and the Middle East and began importing slaves to the Western

Hemisphere.[44]

The United States had need for both male and female slaves. Males performed

the laborious fieldwork while females helped in the field and performed domestic

duties. Consequently, the United States possessed more of a balanced sex ratio than

the planter class in the Caribbean and Brazilian areas.[45] This balanced sex ratio made the

presence of families more logical. Although the conditions for families were favorable in

the United States, the presence of families varied from plantation to plantation. Frances

Hunter notes, "The family life of the Negro was regulated by the planter, who, in return

---

[42] Frances L. Hunter, "Slave Society on the Southern Plantation" *The Journal of Negro History* 7, no.1 (Jan 1922) 2

[43] Darlene Clark Hine, William C. Hine, and Stanley Harrold, *The African American Odyssey*,4 (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hill, 2010)25

[44] Darlene Clark Hine, William C. Hine, and Stanley Harrold, *The African American Odyssey*,4 (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hill, 2010)30

[45] Keith Krawczynski, "Family Life" (lecture, Auburn Montgomery, Montgomery, AL, October 12, 2010)

for the service of the slave, provided him with food, clothing, shelter, and all the

necessities of life.[46]"

The issue of slave families is an essential one to understanding the essence of

the black family through generations. The common perception is that all families were

separated or broken in one way or another and that slaves could not form what today is

considered a true family. However, that is not entirely accurate. Although hundreds,

sometimes thousands of miles often separated slave families, many kept in contact and

formed functional familial units. W.E.B. Dubois notes that slaves lacked "legal marriage,

legal family, and legal control over children as essential factors" of their families.[47]

Nevertheless, often the slave family was the ultimate unit of survival. Slaves formed

extended families complete with "play" cousins, aunties, uncles, etc. to fill in the gaps of

missing mothers or fathers. This practice is a carryover from Africa. The traditional

African family was comprised of many nuclear families (mother, children, and husband).

The African families at times shared a common parent, usually the father. Households in

patrilineal societies were composed of younger unmarried sisters, aging parents, and

other children.[48] The recognition of families was dependent on many things—

benevolence of masters and region, among many others. Family helps to form

individuals. It is a part of who a person is and sometimes helps to shape what a person

becomes. Slaves desired to form families, and even though they could be torn apart at a

---

[46] Frances L. Hunter, " Slave Society on the Southern Plantation" *The Journal of Negro History* 7, no.1 (Jan 1922) 6

[47] E. Franklin Frazier, "The Negro Slave Family" *The Journal of Negro History* 15 (Apr 1930) 198

[48] Mwizenge Tembo "The Traditional African Family." Accessed Apr 2013 http://people.bridgewater.edu/~mtembo/menu/articles/TraditionalAfricanFamily.shtml

moment's notice, slave families were at the core of the slave community. Although

resting on unstable foundations and always at risk, the family protected slaves from the

dehumanizing, demoralizing, and demeaning rigors of slavery. Slave families were

valuable to the master and the slave. Plantation owners encouraged slaves to

reproduce, because it yielded free sources of labor. In fact, Thomas Jefferson

commented that he considered "a [slave] woman who brings [gives birth to] a child

every two years as more profitable than the best man on the farm."[49] To ward off the

paternity issue, a slave child took the legal status of his/her mother. Consequently, an

illegitimate child produced between the master and a slave would be a slave.

Slaves also benefited from forming families. Slaves who married and had

children received a cabin, more food, and often more respect among the other slaves.[50]

A man who was a husband and a father had a better sense of respect because he was

the "head" of his family. Rations of food and clothing were given to the father to give to

his family. Women received love from their children. To augment the sometimes

constant separation, all members of the plantation were considered family. Slaves

bonded around bond fires, at church services, and at other social gatherings. Family and

community gave slaves some sense of worth along with their religion. Families taught

discipline and instilled values and respect within children and adults. Furthermore,

families provided slaves with a support system to help them endure the horrors of

---

[49] Mwizenge Tembo "The Traditional African Family." Accessed Apr 2013
http://people.bridgewater.edu/~mtembo/menu/articles/TraditionalAfricanFamily.shtml
[50] Darlene Clark Hine, William C. Hine, and Stanley Harrold, *The African American Odyssey*,4 (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hill, 2010) 153

slavery. In *The Slave Community*, Loren Blassingame asserts, "Although it was weak, although it was frequently broken the family provided an important buffer, a refuge from the rigors of slavery."[51]

Slaves valued family and the institution of marriage. They respected each other, and often they created an extended family. In a world abounding with sexual exploitation-- physical and emotional abuse, separation, death, and inadequacies-- slaves held on to everything that gave them some semblance of humanity. Family provided encouragement and taught valuable life lessons to young slaves and old slaves alike. As Greene explains, "The loose kinship networks and the respect for marriage and family that the slaves demonstrated showed that, under trying and often dire circumstances, they had created ways to cope with the day to day realities of bondage."[52] No matter how disrespected a slave was in the white man's world, the slave was somebody of value within the slave family. Family is essential, and slaves realized it. Slaves used anything and everything they could to wage silent protests against the planter class. The strength and presence of a slave family undermined the white notion that slaves were inferior, inhumane, and incapable of forming relationships and doing things without the oversight of whites.

Extended slave families were more dominant in the Deep South, where it was more profitable to have slaves and the crops produced were more labor intensive. In

---

[51] Loren Schweninger, "A Slave Family in the Ante Bellum South" *The Journal of Negro History* 60, no. 1 (Jan 1975) 29
[52] Meg Greene, *History in Dispute* 13 (Dec 2005)

essence, slave families were the core of the slave community. Although there was no legal recognition and many challenges and difficulties to maintaining and preserving intact familial units existed, they often endured and taught essential values. From the slave family one gathers the essentials and roots of the African-American family today. Blassingame states "while the form of family life in the quarters differed radically from that among free Negroes and whites, this does not mean it failed to perform many of the traditional functions of the family."[53] The family served to insulate and protect.

---

[53] Meg Greene, *History in Dispute* 13 (Dec 2005)

Chapter 3

The African-American Family in Freedom

Separation had been the theme in the African-American slave family. Gutman

remarks that severe dislocations were associated with the physical transfer of hundreds

of thousands of Upper South slaves to the Lower South between 1790 and 1860, and

later to legal freedom in the rural and urban South and in the urban North prior to

1930.[54] The African-American family was a cohesive unit in terms of familial ties and

connections; however, the family was accustomed to long periods of separation. In fact,

legally they were not a family during the time of slavery. There was no legal recognition

of slave marriages because the law categorized slaves as property, not people.

Moreover, children belonged to their master but were in a sense loaned to the mother.

Masters did uphold a patriarchy; however, slaves recognized that they were property,

even though the man issued the rations for his family and was often respected as the

head of the slave household. Slave masters would not be forced to deal with the issue of

paternity, especially in the case of paternity by whites.

The African-American family began to gain strength as soon as the War Between

the States ensued. The war did separate families; however, there are also several

accounts of families fleeing plantations to reunite with loved ones. Wives and children

flocked to army camps in search of husbands and fathers serving in the military. Herbert

Gutman notes, "Negro women and children would come to bases out of desperation

---

[54] Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage Books,1928)350

and to see their husbands and fathers." [55] At Camp Nelson, in Kentucky, black soldiers

wrote letters for others soldiers who were illiterate. They were usually addressed to

family members.[56]

Emancipation provided a huge stimulus to African-American families because it

helped "to protect the slave family under law," according to Gutman.[57] The passage of

the Civil War amendments ending slavery and granting freedmen equal protection

under the law, at least on paper, helped to provide legal protection for African-

American marriages. Most times the "slave mentality" endured within the African-

American community as it relates to family. W.E.B. Dubois contends that the extended

family network was a carryover from the African system of clans and tribes.[58] The

distinctive domestic arrangements and "kin networks" that developed during slavery

were the basis of the African-American family after the Civil War.[59] African Americans,

therefore, were accustomed to operating in an extended family network. Most freed

men stayed with their wives, those they married when they were slaves. Men and

women even went off in pursuit of their domestic partners who were sold to different

plantations during slavery. Herbert Gutman notes that many slaves renewed their

marriages, which helped to create stable two-parent families.[60]

---

[55] Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage Books,1928) 365

[56] Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage Books,1928) 371

[57] Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage Books,1928) 9

[58] W.E.B. Dubois, *The Negro American Family (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1970)* 9

[59] Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage Books,1928) 3

[60] Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage Books,1928) 9

The households that emerged after Emancipation were solid two-parent households headed by the male. Male-dominated households were a carryover from slavery. Gutman notes that "at all times—and in all settings—the typical black household (always a lower class household) had in it two parents; it was not unorganized and disorganized."[61] In fact, several historians concur that the figures of father-absent households were extremely exaggerated. E. Franklin Frazier comments that most urban and rural blacks lived in father-present households in 1880.[62] Those fatherless households that did exist were most often the result of a father dying rather than a father leaving the household.[63]

In 1910, African Americans began to embark on the mass exodus from the South. Between 1910 and 1940, nearly two million African Americans made the trek north.[64] Demand for labor in industries such as coal, steel, and meatpacking served as an impetus for African-American migration. These industries and other war industries were booming, especially as the United States entered World War I.[65] Kurt Schlichting highlights the impact of the Great Migration on the city of Hartford, Connecticut in "Residential Segregation and the Beginning of the Great Migration of African Americans to Hartford, Connecticut." He remarks that from 1910 to 1920, Hartford's African-

---

[61] Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage Books,1928) 433

[62] E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro American Family in the United States (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939)*35

[63] E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro American Family in the United States (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939)*35

[64] Sarah Mathieu, "The African American Great Migration Reconsidered." *OAH Magazine of History* 23, no 4. (October 2009) 20

[65] J. Trent Alexander, "The Great Migration in Comparative Perspective." *Social Science History* 22 (1998) 70

American population grew from 1,745 to 4,567, which was an increase of one hundred forty-three percent. [66] Often, several families who left the rural South for Northern cities were forced to share living accommodations to afford rent. Every member of the household usually worked. Black women took jobs as domestics, laundresses, and in other female-dominated fields. Black men often worked in factories, as tenant farmers, or in whatever industry that would hire them. African-American children frequently took jobs as shoeshine boys/girls and other jobs to aid the families. Always, the black father was the dominant figure within the household.

The New Negro Movement, more commonly known as the Harlem Renaissance, is an effect of the Great Migration. The Harlem Renaissance was a cultural movement that began during the 1920s. It emphasized the African-American culture and significance. It marked a turning away from the old Negro, one who was servile and did not stand up for himself, to a new Negro, one who wished to uplift the community and had pride-- one who possessed an identity. The Harlem Renaissance spanned poetry, art, music, and intellectual thinking. It included artists such as Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, and Aaron Douglas. The New Negro Movement was very influential on the African-American family; it sought to highlight the good within African-American culture. Several poems and paintings depicted the African-American family.

---

[66] Kurt Schlichting, Peter Tucker and Richard Maise, "Residential Segregation and the Beginning of the Great Migration of African Americans to Hartford, Connecticut." *Historical Methods* 39,no 3. (Summer 2006)

It is during this time that African Americans also began creating and joining fraternal organizations that provided community aide. Marcus Garvey emphasized racial pride and African heritage. The African-American family was at the core of all African-American institutions and movements.

During the 1920s, the dynamic of the black family began to change. Families in the rural South maintained the same structure-- father-dominated households with wives and children helping to maintain the household dynamic. However, more and more blacks began migrating to the North in search of work. Economic conditions provided a stimulus for blacks to leave the rural South. Blacks often faced from Northern citizens the same pervasive racist attitudes that existed in the South . Chain migration was popular. One family member, usually the male, would relocate first in search for work and shelter. Once that family member was settled, he/she would send for the rest of the family.[67] African Americans formed communities in the North, often recreating their neighborhoods and organizations from the South—churches, restaurants, businesses, etc. Blacks were often utterly disappointed at the low wages, discrimination, and backbreaking work they were relegated to in the North. Housing discrimination was also a major issue for blacks. Exorbitant rents and less than desirable living conditions forced blacks to share living spaces with other families or take in boarders to make ends meet. Blacks often lived in undesirable neighborhoods without amenities such as trash

---

[67] Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage Books,1928) 434

collection and other necessities afforded to white neighborhoods. During the 1950s,

African Americans comprised approximately 12.36 percent of the population.[68] Nearly

half of the African-American population, 49.7 percent, were married and living with

their partner. Moreover, seventy-eight percent of African-American children were raised

in two-parent families.[69] The African-American family, though faced with rampant

racism and fighting for civil rights, was a stable commodity within the black community.

In fact, it was the backbone of the black community. Black families attended church

together, planned social functions, and helped their neighbors when they could. The

black family flourished from 1920-1950, as did the American family in general. Black

infant mortality and out of wedlock births decreased.[70] In fact, African-American

families were more stable than ever.

However, this aforementioned figure reflects the whole of the United States. In

the 1950s, eighty-eight percent of white children were raised in two-parent families.

The fifties was an era of conservatism in the United States. The country was recovering

from World War II and became engrossed in a war of philosophies with the Soviet

Union. American soldiers came home from the front lines, quickly married, and had

children. This was the beginning of the baby boomers era. This was the era of *I Love*

---

[68] "Black Americans: A Profile" *Bureau of the Census: Statistical Brief*. (March 1993)
<http://www.census.gov/apsd/www/statbrief/sb93_2.pdf>
[69] Black Americans: A Profile" *Bureau of the Census: Statistical Brief*. (March 1993)
<http://www.census.gov/apsd/www/statbrief/sb93_2.pdf>
[70] Andrew Billingsley, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Enduring Legacies of African American Families* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994) 20

Lucy, jazz, bebop, rock and roll, and the inauguration of the modern-day Civil Rights Movement.

Within the African-American community, blacks were pursuing legal action to ensure civil rights. More opportunities existed—desegregated armed forces, better job opportunities, and better housing options. Blacks were fearful of organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan and the White Citizen's Council. Often times the family was the only stable thing in the life of African Americans. The male usually headed the family. In fact, during the 1950s, seventy-five percent of African-American children were raised in two-parent families.[71]

---

[71] "Black Americans: A Profile" *Bureau of the Census: Statistical Brief.* (March 1993) <http://www.census.gov/apsd/www/statbrief/sb93_2.pdf>

Chapter 4

1960s- Present Day

In 1954, the historic Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education*

(Topeka) virtually ended legal segregation in the United States, and this decision

changed the United States forever. Ultimately, the African-American family and every

family in the United States for that matter has felt the effects of *Brown v. Board of*

Education (Topeka). The landmark court case would be a life-altering decision on

Americans, especially African Americans. *Brown v. Board of Education (Topeka)* opened

previously closed doors. African Americans now have access to more education,

opportunities and experiences as a result of the landmark Supreme Court decision.

> Segregation of white and colored children in public schools
>
> has a detrimental effect upon the colored children. The
>
> impact is greater when it has the sanction of the law; for
>
> the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as
>
> denoting the inferiority of the Negro group. A sense of
>
> inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn.
>
> Segregation with the sanction of law, therefore, has a
>
> tendency to [retard] the educational and mental
>
> development of negro children and to deprive them of
>
> some of the benefits they would receive in a racial[ly]

integrated school…." "We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal…. segregation [in public education] is a denial of the equal protection of the laws."[72]

By 1968, most states had complied with the decisions "with all deliberate speed" that resulted from the *Brown II* decision in 1955. Blacks were no longer faced with legal segregation. However, a system of de facto segregation emerged, whereby whites would create all white neighborhoods—in essence creating all white schools and other facilities.

Black families continued to remain a staple within the black communities during the 1960s and early 1970s. Around the late 1970s and early 1980s, a sense of competition emerged within the United States. Blacks and Americans in general were trying to succeed in the corporate world. We were no longer an agricultural society—we were a society centered on the corporate and service industries. As a result, Americans started having fewer children and marrying later in life. The advent of the feminist movement shifted women's focus from the home and to the workplace. The number of children born per woman during reproductive years has declined from almost 3.2 in

---

[72] Pearson Education Inc. "Brown vs. Board of Education Topeka (1954)" Information Please, Accessed Dec 2013 "http://www.infoplease.com/us/supreme-court/cases/ar04.html#ixzz1LJXPiamj

1920 to 2.16 in 2000.[73] Moreover, fewer Americans are getting married. In 1970, 78.6

percent of American adults aged 20-54 were married; in 2008, that number had

dropped to 57.2 percent. [74] The rate of teenage pregnancies also increased during this

time. In 1972 there were 95.1 births of girls aged 15 to 19 per 1,000. By 1990, that

number had grown to 116.9 girls out of every 1,000, a nearly 80 percent increase.[75] By

the mid- 1980s, it had become clear that patterns in family formation in the United

States had undergone dramatic changes. The divorce rate had nearly tripled, the

percentage of children living in single-parent homes had doubled, and being married by

25 was no longer the norm.[76] The United States was showing an increase in single-

parent homes during this period. There were even higher increases in single-parent

homes within the black community due to socioeconomic reasons. Between 1980 and

1990, the proportion of all black families that were headed by single parents grew from

fifty-two percent to sixty-five percent.[77] Today that number sits at about sixty percent.

Of that, African-American females headed 90.1 percent. In 1992, sixty-four percent of

---

[73] "Black Americans: A Profile" *Bureau of the Census: Statistical Brief.* (March 1993)
<http://www.census.gov/apsd/www/statbrief/sb93_2.pdf>
[74] "Index Shows Marriage Health Decline" North Carolina Family Policy Council, 2009. Accessed July 2009.
<http://www.ncfpc.org/stories/091007s1.html>
[75] "US Teenage Pregnancies, Births, and Abortions: National and State Trends and Trends by Race and
Ethnicity." January 2010. Gutmacher Institute. Accessed Nov 2010. < http://guttmacher.org>
[76] Belinda Tucker, ed. *The Decline in Marriage Among African Americans: Causes, Consequences and
Policy* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1995) 45
[77] L.M. Casper, "America's Families and Living Arrangements: Population Characteristics. United States
Census Bureau, 2000

African-American children resided in single-parent households.[78] Seventy-two percent

of African-American children are raised in single-parent households.[79]
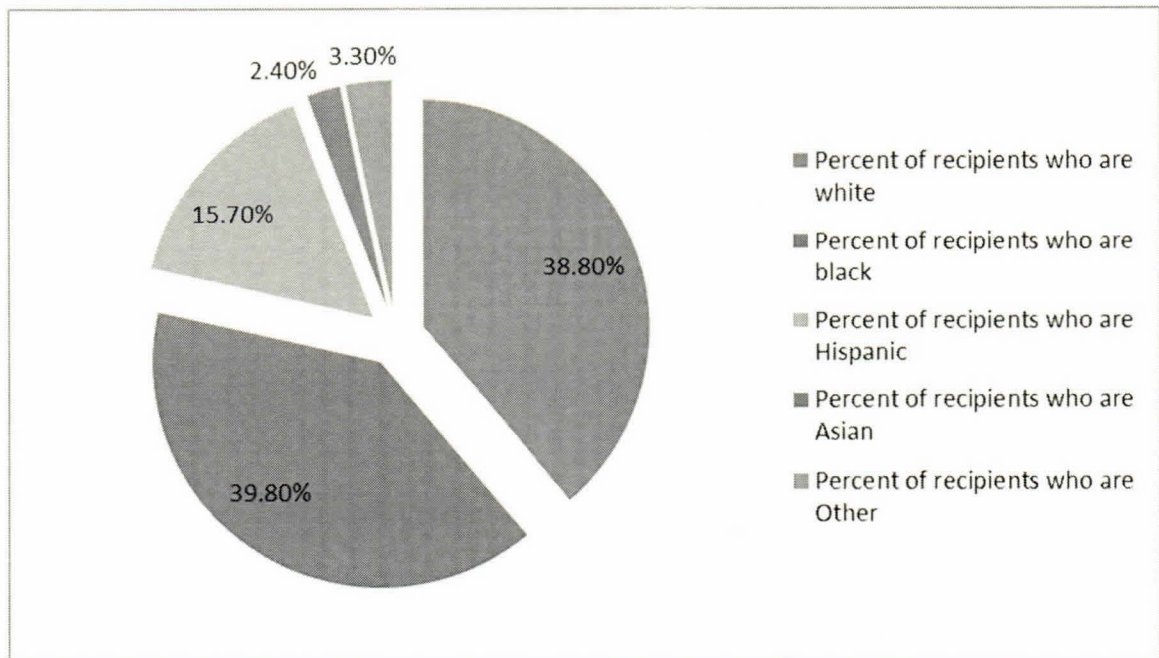
Welfare

A closer look into the single-parent families within the African-American

community reveals that single parents are more likely to be disproportionately poor. In

2001, nearly half of households headed by African-American females were living in

poverty.[80] Most of those in poverty rely on some sort of government assistance—food

stamps, welfare, Women's Infants Children (WIC), etc. The welfare system encourages

single-parent families. Women have fewer "strings attached" when they apply

separately. Furthermore, the welfare system mandates that women place non-custodial

fathers on child support, which does not encourage family reconnection, just financial

responsibility.

---

[78] Walter R. Allen, "African American Family Life in Societal Context: Crisis and Hope" *Sociological Forum* 10, no 4 (Dec 1995) 574
[79] Newsone For Black America, "72 Percent of Black Kids Raised by Single Parent, 25% Overall in US" Accessed Oct 2012 http://newsone.com/1195075/children-single-parents-u-s-american/
[80] Linda. L. McCreary, "Dimensions of Family Functioning: Perspectives of Low Income African American Single Parent families." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66, no 3. (Aug 1966) 691

Pie chart legend:
- Percent of recipients who are white
- Percent of recipients who are black
- Percent of recipients who are Hispanic
- Percent of recipients who are Asian
- Percent of recipients who are Other

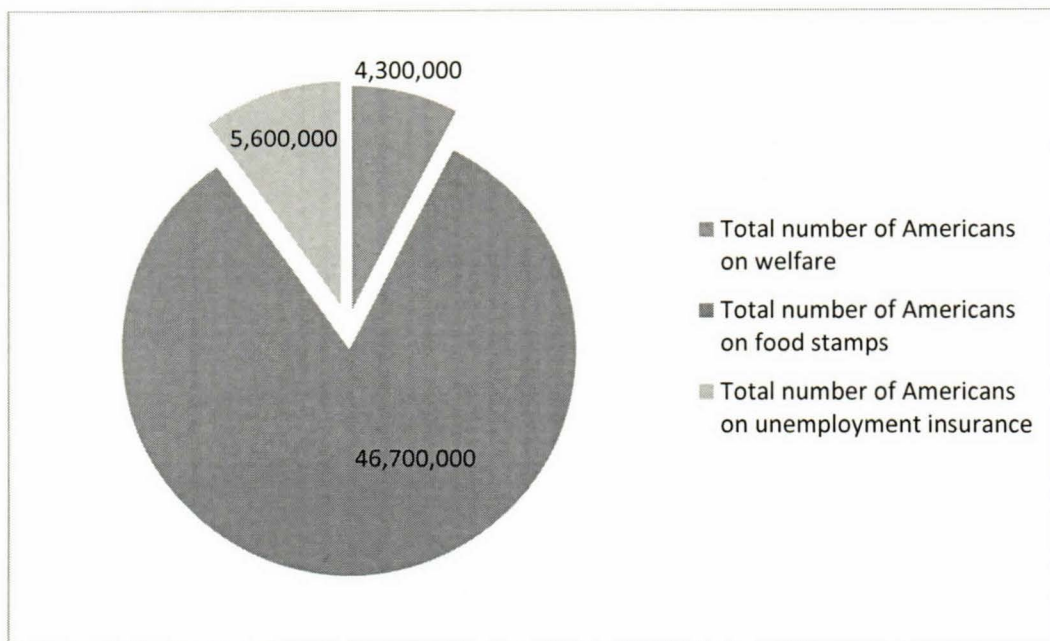Chart values: 2.40%, 3.30%, 15.70%, 38.80%, 39.80%

[81]

Welfare is the organized public or private social services for the assistance of

disadvantaged groups. Aid could include general welfare payments, health care through

Medicaid, food stamps, special payments for pregnant women and young mothers, and

federal and state housing benefits. The Welfare system in the United States began in the

1930s, during the Great Depression. Opponents of Welfare argue that it diminishes work

incentives.[82]

---

[81] Chart created from data gathered from "Welfare Statistics" US Department of Commerce, CATO Institute. Accessed Nov 2013. http://statisticbrain.com/welfare-statistics/
[82] "Welfare Statistics" US Department of Commerce, CATO Institute. Accessed Nov 2013. http://statisticbrain.com/welfare-statistics/

4,300,000

5,600,000

- Total number of Americans on welfare

- Total number of Americans on food stamps

- Total number of Americans on unemployment insurance

46,700,000

[83]

Working in the system, I developed an attitude that these government assistance programs were promoting and encouraging single-parent families. My experience is corroborated by several studies that have indicated that welfare causes blacks to choose family structures with single-parent households, mainly female-headed households because of the strong inducements presented in the form of a Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) check.[84] However, these studies have inherent flaws. William Darity Jr. asserts that female headship is the changing factor on welfare benefit levels. [85]Recent studies concern the lack of black males and their income as the

---

[83] Chart created from data gathered from "Welfare Statistics" US Department of Commerce, CATO Institute. Accessed Nov 2013. http://statisticbrain.com/welfare-statistics/

[84] William A. Darity and Samuel L. Myers, "Does Welfare Dependency Cause Female Headship? The Case of the Black Family." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 46,no 4 (November 1984) 766

[85] William Darity J, "Does Welfare Dependency Cause Female Headship? The Case of the Black Family" *Journal of Marriage and Family* 46,no 4 (Nov 1984)

basis for welfare dependency.[86] In fact, welfare dependency has declined due to changes in program structures since 1996 which required lifetime limits on welfare receipt.

The structure in itself is broken. Single mothers are encouraged to get a diploma, go to college, gain job readiness skills, and get a job. In exchange, their families receive welfare and food assistance. The mothers must put the fathers on child support. Once child support is obtained, the welfare assistance stops. Once the parent finds employment, his/her food assistance benefits are reduced. Many clients told me they did better financially on welfare. Some of my clients did not even know the father of their children. And many of the fathers had children in different households. Caseworkers were so overwhelmed with paperwork and red tape that no real help was given—just cash. No real education and budgeting is being taught, and the amount of assistance received goes up with each child. For some clients, this is an incentive to have more children. A single mother with one child receives $190 in Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) assistance monthly; the client also receives daycare, housing, and food assistance. However, if the client does not abide by the stipulations of the program—education, obtain a job, file for child support, etc. —their benefits are stripped away. These programs encourage the noncustodial parent to take financial responsibility for his/her children; however, there is no emphasis on developing

---

[86] William Darity J, "Does Welfare Dependency Cause Female Headship? The Case of the Black Family" *Journal of Marriage and Family* 46,no 4 (Nov 1984)

relationships with said children. There is also no talk about the importance of stable family relationships. As a caseworker, I also observed several instances of fraud. Female heads of households were living with the father of their child (ren); however, since two-parent families had more stipulations to receive welfare, the male figure was not listed in the household. The parents were not married, and technically, this practice was not against the law. Evidence shows that female-headed households are more likely to be overwhelmingly poor.[87] Female heads of household are the majority of long-term dependent welfare recipients.[88] However in Alabama, TANF recipients had sixty months of eligibility for the program. After their limit was reached, recipients could never apply for welfare. I witnessed women encouraging their teenage daughters, who were teen parents, to apply for the program once the elder female's eligibility limit was reached. The program did not contribute to the bettering of the client, mother or child. They obtained education, but it was useless. They attended several job readiness programs; however, they never applied the skills. Female-headed households are more likely to be affected by employment gaps resulting from pregnancy, job loss, or illness. Several of my clients had gaps in their employment history. Some clients had not worked in two to three years. Employment gaps significantly affect one's ability to obtain a job. As a result, the family was still suffering. There was no welfare, child support, etc. before the Great Depression; however, the type of welfare system that exists today was not

---

[87] William A. Darity and Samuel L. Myers "Does Welfare Dependency Cause Female Headship? The Case of the Black Family." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 46,no 4 (November 1984) 765

[88] William A. Darity and Samuel L. Myers "Does Welfare Dependency Cause Female Headship? The Case of the Black Family." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 46,no 4 (November 1984)767

prevalent until the 1960s and 1970s—post desegregation. Welfare dependency has

many causes. Among them are single parent families and job instability.[89] In fact,

welfare dependency reflects issues of African Americans as a whole, such as a lack of

male parents and out-of-wedlock births.

[90]
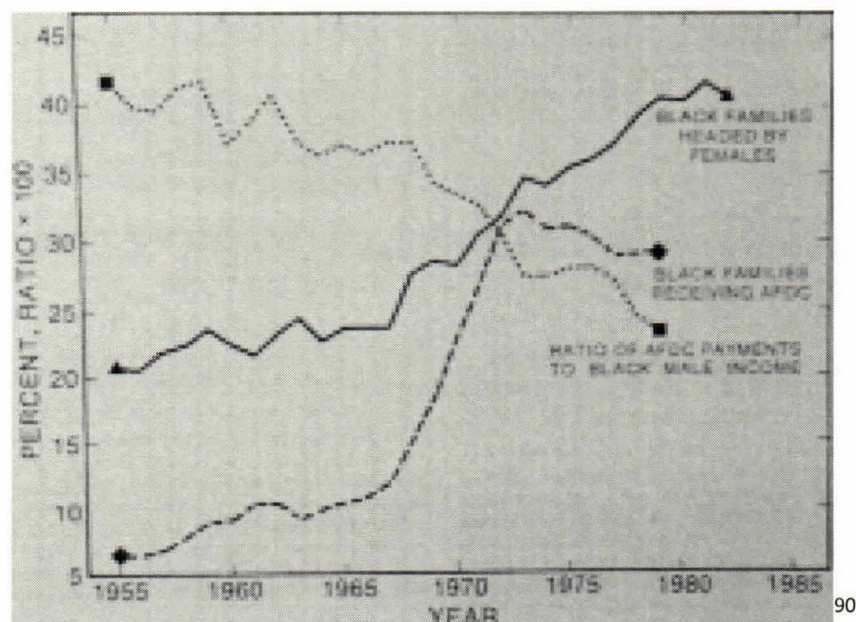
The above chart shows that female-headed households often earned more than

with a male present in the household. The fact that households on welfare have the

potential to earn more money than one in the workforce is an extreme cause for

females abusing the welfare system. Through TANF, food stamps, Family Guidance

(subsidized daycare), and other entitlement programs, one has the potential to earn

over $1000 per month—none taxed. While I was employed at Montgomery County

---

[89]William A. Darity and Samuel L. Myers "Does Welfare Dependency Cause Female Headship? The Case of the Black Family." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 46,no 4 (November 1984)
773
[90] William A. Darity and Samuel L. Myers "Does Welfare Dependency Cause Female Headship? The Case of the Black Family." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 46,no 4 (November 1984) 769

DHR, one of my clients had five children, three of whom received some form of

disability, and she received welfare for her other children. The client received over

$1800 per month, tax free.

Absentee Fathers

The overwhelming majority of female-dominated households lead one to

question –where are the fathers? Proverbs 17:6 states, "Children's children *are* the

crown of old men; and the glory of children *are* their fathers."[91] In today's society, there

are many children walking around without their glory. And some don't even know who

their father is.

It is impossible to address the issue of absentee fathers without discussing

incarcerated fathers. Many African-American men commit crimes to support their

families, drug trafficking for example. As previously mentioned, the employment

opportunities for people without a high school diploma are slim. Moreover, most of the

jobs available pay less than the "drug game." In 2004, thirty-four percent of African-

American male high school drop outs were behind bars.[92] During the 1980s and 1990s,

African Americans were referred to as "the race to incarcerate." The increase in African-

American men in prison, most for drug-related crimes, seriously hurt the family

structure.[93] Furthermore, there is no effort to rehabilitate prisoners once incarcerated,

---

[91] http://kingjbible.com/proverbs/17.htm

[92] Bruce Western and Christopher Wildeman, "The Black Family and Mass Incarceration." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 621 (Jan 2009) 225

[93] R. Robin Miller, " Various Implications of the 'Race to Incarcerate' on Incarcerated African American Men and Their Families," in *Impacts of Incarceration on the African American Family*, ed. Othello Harris and R. Robin Miller (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2003) 3

so many end up in jail or prison multiple times. The emphasis today is placed on law and

order. Furthermore, prisons are multi-million dollar ventures.[94] In 1994, President

Clinton's Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act earmarked 9.9 billion for

prison construction and added stricter sentences for felons.[95]Bruce Western states that

the prison boom has profound effects on family life. [96] It has been estimated that the

rate of incarceration for blacks is five times higher than the rate for whites.[97] Western

further notes that "high rates of joblessness and crime, and a flourishing street trade in

illegal drugs, combined with harsher criminal penalties and intensified urban policing

produces high incarceration rates among young unskilled men in inner cities."[98]

Furthermore, there is evidence that African-American males' sentences are

considerably longer than those of white men. This can be evidenced in the sentencing

disparity between crack and cocaine. Using the chart below, one can see the rate of

incarceration for African-American males is much higher than the rate of incarceration

for Caucasian males.

---

[94] Bruce Western and Christopher Wildeman, "The Black Family and Mass Incarceration." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 621 (Jan 2009)222

[95] Bruce Western and Christopher Wildeman, "The Black Family and Mass Incarceration." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 621 (Jan 2009223

[96] Bruce Western and Christopher Wildeman, "The Black Family and Mass Incarceration." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 621 (Jan 2009) 222

[97] Bureau of Justice Statistics. (1999). Washington D.C. U.S. Department of Justice.

[98] Bruce Western and Christopher Wildeman, "The Black Family and Mass Incarceration." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 621 (Jan 2009) 225

Incarceration rates per 100,000 US residents, 1990-2009
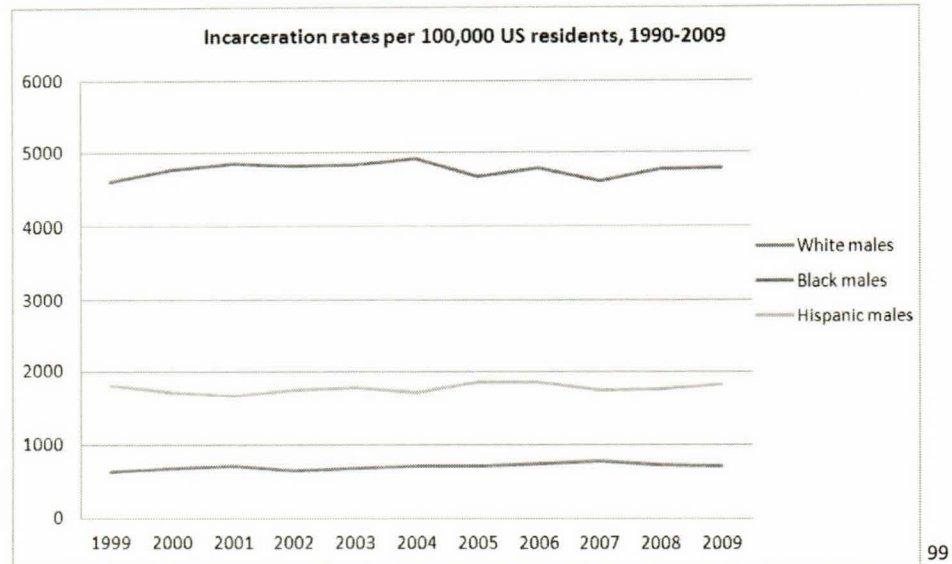
In 1990, African-American men (6% of the total population) comprised forty-

eight percent of all inmates in state correctional facilities.[100] Many of these incarcerated

men are fathers or father figures. Studies have shown that while these men are

incarcerated, they are more likely to experience marital disruption and no contact with

their children whatsoever.[101] Their counterparts experience financial problems, feelings

of isolation, and difficulty disciplining children.[102] The children are more likely to be

emotionally vulnerable during the father's imprisonment. Studies show that boys act

---

[99] http://thecurrentmoment.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/incarceration-rates.jpg Accessed Nov 2013.

[100] Anthony King, "The Impact of Incarceration on African American Families: Implications for Practice," in *Impacts of Incarceration on the African American Family*, ed. Othello Harris and R. Robin Miller (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2003) 168

[101] R. Robin Miller, "Various Implications of the 'Race to Incarcerate' on Incarcerated African American Men and Their Families," in *Impacts of Incarceration on the African American Family*, ed. Othello Harris and R. Robin Miller (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2003) 6

[102] R. Robin Miller, "Various Implications of the 'Race to Incarcerate' on Incarcerated African American Men and Their Families," in *Impacts of Incarceration on the African American Family*, ed. Othello Harris and R. Robin Miller (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2003)7

out more and are more likely to be incarcerated when their fathers are incarcerated.[103]

Low-income African-American women, men, and children are more likely have to cope with absent fathers due to incarceration and their return after release.

We Are Not the Same

The current generation faces a dramatically different political and racial landscape than previous generations. Many young people have grown up under the leadership of black mayors and political leaders. This generation has not been forced into legally segregated schools, and policies such as affirmative action have been the norm all of their lives. African Americans have never been so politically powerful or experienced such social and economic mobility. Ironically, during this same time, young people have also seen or directly experienced escalating rates of incarceration, HIV, AIDS, and violence.[104]This generation continues to live with residential segregation, public school failure, and racial discrimination. Fifty-four percent of black youth (ages 15-25) believe that African Americans received a poorer education than whites. [105]Forty-one percent of black youth believe that people judges them by what they own.[106] Amazingly, forty-six percent of black youth believe they must "act white" to get

[103] Anthony King, "The Impact of Incarceration on African American Families: Implications for Practice," in *Impacts of Incarceration on the African American Family*, ed. Othello Harris and R. Robin Miller (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2003) 171

[104] Black Youth Project. University of Chicago Center for the Study of the Attitudes and Behavior of Young Black Americans Research Summary (2007) Accessed Nov 2009, http:blackyouthproject.com

[105] Black Youth Project. University of Chicago Center for the Study of the Attitudes and Behavior of Young Black Americans Research Summary (2007) Accessed Nov 2009, http:blackyouthproject.com

[106] Black Youth Project. University of Chicago Center for the Study of the Attitudes and Behavior of Young Black Americans Research Summary (2007) Accessed Nov 2009, http:blackyouthproject.com

ahead.[107] The struggle of this generation can be summed up by a statement from a 23 year-old black female gathered during the Black Youth Project in 2007 in Chicago. She states:

> I think [young Blacks] are less [politically active]. I think when our grandparents were growing up they were fighting for something that everybody could visually see. And now we're fighting for things that are not as obvious. Racism was visual. You walked into a restroom it said 'NO BLACKS.' You could see that. Now the things we are fighting for, that we are trying to change are not as visual.[108]

A vast shift in culture and perception has occurred within the African-American community and America in general over the past forty years. People are no longer fighting overt racism or overt discrimination. Culture is more homogenous, and standards are more lax. In today's society, there exists a "baby daddy" syndrome. Now, I must admit I am a statistic. I was a single mother. However, my son has an intense connection with his father, although we are no longer together. I did not plan to be a single mother; I hope that no one does. The difference today is that single parenthood— baby mamas/baby daddies-- are the norm. There is no emphasis on marriage. Popular

---

[107] Black Youth Project. University of Chicago Center for the Study of the Attitudes and Behavior of Young Black Americans Research Summary (2007) Accessed Nov 2009, http:blackyouthproject.com
[108] Black Youth Project. University of Chicago Center for the Study of the Attitudes and Behavior of Young Black Americans Research Summary (2007)Accessed Nov 2009, http:blackyouthproject.com

culture and mainstream society do not emphasize marriage and families as they did in previous decades. Kay Hymowitz argues that underclass girls often *want* to have babies; they do not see it as a problem that they are young and unmarried. "They do not want to follow the middle-class life script that read: protracted adolescence, college, first job, marriage—and only then children. They do share the belief that children needed mature, educated mothers who would make their youngsters' development the center of their lives."[109] Most young women do not have the "normal" example in their home. As a teacher, I have heard my students say that they want to grow up with their children. My students believe that waiting until marriage, or even waiting until they are in their twenties, is too long. I have had baby showers in class. The outlook on teenage pregnancy has shifted tremendously. It is now acceptable. Television reflects societal norms and views. My parents watched *Leave it to Beaver* and *The Andy Griffith* Show. All showcased white, traditional families. Growing up I watched *The Cosby Show, Martin, A Different World,* and *Boy Meets World.* They all showcased two-parent families, people in college, or boyfriends and girlfriends not living together until marriage. Today, more television shows show single mothers or strong powerful mothers on television than ever before— *Teen Mom, Girlfriends, Baby Daddy*, etc. More and more black and white females are having children out of wedlock and either by choice or force are deciding to raise those children without the father. Where does this leave the African-American family?

---

[109] Kay Hymowitz. "The Black Family: 40 Years of Lies" City *Journal*. (Summer 2005)

What is Right with the African-American Family?

The African-American family has always been measured in comparison to the traditional family, which is a two-parent Euro-American family. However, the African-American family, like most modern families, does not measure up to the traditional fairytale ideal. The African-American family is normally measured or examined from the culturally deviant perspective. This perspective depicts units at variance with the standard units that are more inadequate and dysfunctional.[110]

Some research has indicated that black families may on the whole be more similar than dissimilar to American families in general and that the difference in family functioning and structure is a matter of socioeconomic status.[111]The issues plaguing the African-American family—adolescent parenting (education disparities), single-parent homes, and unemployment--all share socioeconomic issues as a factor. African Americans tend to be disproportionately poor.[112] Researchers must begin to measure African-American families through other means. Socioeconomic status heavily affects status, culture, family structure, and developmental stage.[113] Researchers at times do not take the socioeconomic status of modern families into account. African Americans

---

[110] Lois Bryant, "The Black Family as Portrayed in Introductory Marriage and Family Textbooks." *Family Relations,* (July 1998)

[111] Lois Bryant, "The Black Family as Portrayed in Introductory Marriage and Family Textbooks." *Family Relations,* (July 1998)

[112] Lois Bryant, "The Black Family as Portrayed in Introductory Marriage and Family Textbooks." *Family Relations,* (July 1998)

[113] Linda. L. McCreary, "Dimensions of Family Functioning: Perspectives of Low Income African American Single Parent families." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66, no 3. (Aug 1966) 691

have historically met the fundamental and expressive needs of their families differently than their Caucasian counterparts. [114]African Americans comprise twelve percent of the total population, and there are approximately 6.4 million black families within the United States. The African-American family functions best within the context of the extended family, real or figurative. The family has greater role flexibility among women and men. [115]

Influenced by economic changes, the role of the African-American father has changed. These patterns can also be seen in many modern families. It is increasingly more difficult for one parent to earn enough to maintain a living wage.[116] The majority of black children lived in a two-parent home until the 1970s. During that time, the recession hit African-American families hard. Mainstream families were affected a decade or two later. As a result, one can see that the standard of living began to plummet for all families involved. The current economy has forced those at the lower end of the occupational spectrum to encounter the most negative effect. This issue has always existed within the African-American community. The family has long depended on the extended network to allow both parents the opportunity to work. African-American fathers and father figures are diverse and influence the family dynamic. The stereotypical underemployed, angry, visitor (the perception is that African-American

---

[114] Sheila M. Littlejohn- Blake, "Understanding the Strengths of African American Families." *Journal of Black Studies*. (Jun 1993)

[115] Sheila M. Littlejohn- Blake, "Understanding the Strengths of African American Families." *Journal of Black Studies*. (Jun 1993)

[116] Hariette McAdoo, "The Dynamics of African American Fathers' Family Roles. *Michigan Family Review*, (Winter 1997)463

fathers rarely live with the children) to the family unit is generalized and inaccurate.

Joblessness among black men facilitated temporary separation to qualify the custodial

mothers for state aid. However, the black father still functions as a provider and within a

socializing role. [117]

African-American children are cared for by adults other than their parents while

the parents work. The National Institute for Child Health and Human Development

maintains that young children cared for by "helper" adults and their parents have

normal cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional development.[118] Children of middle

income African-American families mature at a rate comparable to "traditional"

families.[119] However, children of low-income African-American families mature much

faster than others. They assume major family responsibilities such as babysitting,

housekeeping, and even employment roles at an earlier age. [120] These children are

socialized to obtain the best of both worlds through survival techniques. African-

American families remain strong in times of adversity, and parents often exhaust their

resources to place their children into better economic and political structures.[121]

---

[117]Hariette McAdoo, "The Dynamics of African American Fathers' Family Roles. *Michigan Family Review*, (Winter 1997)463

[118] Hariette McAdoo, "The Dynamics of African American Fathers' Family Roles. *Michigan Family Review*, (Winter 1997) 462

[119] Sheila Littlejohn. "Understanding the Strengths of African American Families. " *Journal of Black Studies*, (June 1993) 463

[120] Sheila Littlejohn. "Understanding the Strengths of African American Families. " *Journal of Black Studies*, (June 1993) 463

[121] Sheila Littlejohn. "Understanding the Strengths of African American Families. " *Journal of Black Studies*, (June 1993) 464

The African-American family also has the ability and often an inclination to adopt others into the household or extended structured network.[122] The close relationship among members within the family provides economic and moral support that helps the African-American family adapt to everyday living and to times of crisis. [123] African-American families have adopted the extended family network in their culture. As a result, African-American families are disposed to call on relatives for help and to maintain a sense of mutual benefit.[124]

African-American households have an ability to expand or contract in response to pressures.[125] An informal social service network has existed within the African-American community since slavery. Children are informally adopted by relatives and friends when their parents are not capable of providing the children's basic needs.[126] The African-American family network helps itself on a variety of levels—emotionally, financially, and in all circumstances.[127] The family network is an informal daycare, foster care, and income supplement to single parents, widows, widowers, and those hard on their luck. The African-American family network provides stability and resilience in many children's lives.

---

[122] Sheila Littlejohn, "Understanding the Strengths of African American Families. " *Journal of Black Studies,* (June 1993) 462

[123] Sheila Littlejohn, "Understanding the Strengths of African American Families. " *Journal of Black Studies,* (June 1993) 462

[124] Sheila Littlejohn, "Understanding the Strengths of African American Families. " *Journal of Black Studies,* (June 1993) 462

[125] Sheila Littlejohn, "Understanding the Strengths of African American Families. " *Journal of Black Studies,* (June 1993) 462

[126] Sheila Littlejohn, "Understanding the Strengths of African American Families. " *Journal of Black Studies,* (June 1993) 462

[127] Sheila Littlejohn, "Understanding the Strengths of African American Families. " *Journal of Black Studies,* (June 1993) 462

African-American families must maintain what made them strong in the past—faith and value of heritage. The African-American family has always internalized spirituality.[128] Spirituality, whether in a church or not, is embedded with the African-American family fiber. Spiritual beliefs are a survival system for African Americans. Spirituality is the foundation of many people. Most black people will tell you they were "raised in the church," or their "big mama" dragged them to church. A system of core beliefs is the inner strength of the person.[129]

Conclusion

The high incidence among blacks of single parenthood and children residing without parents is not new. The pattern is clearly evident as far back as 1850 among free blacks. From 1880 through 1960, the percentage of black children with at least one absent parent was fairly stable and about two-and-one-half times greater than the percentage among whites. Recently, the percentages of both black children and white children with absent parents have risen dramatically.

The statistics seem utterly dismal and shocking. However, there are stable two-parent families that still exist. Grandparents are a major factor in families. In 1998, 1.4 million African-American children, or just over twelve percent, lived with their grandparents.[130] In addition, the extended family network comes into play. Uncles,

---

[128] Sheila Littlejohn, "Understanding the Strengths of African American Families." *Journal of Black Studies,* (June 1993) 461

[129] Sheila Littlejohn, "Understanding the Strengths of African American Families." *Journal of Black Studies,* (June 1993) 462

[130] Linda. L. McCreary, "Dimensions of Family Functioning: Perspectives of Low Income African American Single Parent families." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66, no 3. (Aug 1966) 691

brothers, cousins, and friends all play a part in helping to raise African-American children.

Ultimately, the figures are disturbing when it comes to African-American families. However, if one looks at the trends, figures among all ethnicities are declining when it comes to family life. For all the changes in fertility and mortality that Americans have experienced from the colonial period until today, there has been surprisingly little change in the structure of the family until the modern era (after desegregation). Until that point, there were subtle changes within the family; however, one could count on the traditional aspect of family—two parents, two children, and a dog. However, this essential social institution has changed profoundly since the 1970s. In fact, if one were to define the most original demographic feature in the recent period in the United States, it would be the changes that were occurring in both families and households for all sections of the national population.[131] The traditional American family has been undergoing overwhelming transformations for all ages, races, and ethnic groups. These include the number of adults who marry, the number of households that are formed by married people, the number of children who are conceived, and the economic role of mothers, the number of non-family households, and even the importance of marriage in accounting for total births.

The proportion of persons over 15 years of age who had never married reached historic levels in 2000 when a third of the men and a quarter of the women were listed

---

[131] Herbert Klein, "The Changing American Family." *Hoover Digest* (July 2004)

as never having married. The decline in marriage among whites is occurring at a slower

pace among whites than among blacks, but both are experiencing rising trends in

unmarried adults. By 2000, twenty-two percent of adult white women and forty-two

percent of adult black women had never married. This rise in the ratio of persons never

married is also reflected in historical changes in the relation between families and

households. Between 1970 and 2000 the percentage of marriage fell from eighty

percent to sixty percent, while the rate for African-American women fell from sixty

percent to thirty percent.[132] Non-family households had always existed as a small share

of the total households in the United States, usually made up of elderly persons with no

families left. But now they are formed by young adults, many of whom never married,

or by older persons who no longer reside with children. Also, the proportion of two-

parent households, even in family households with children, is on the decline, as single-

parent-plus-children households are on the rise. As late as 1960, at the height of the

Baby Boom, married families made up almost three-quarters of all households; but by

the census of 2000 they accounted for just fifty-three percent of households, a decline

that seems to have continued in the past few years. Non-family households now

account for thirty-one percent of households, and families headed by a single parent

with children account for the rest, making up to twenty-seven percent of all such

families with children. Black families experienced the fastest decline of dual-parent

---

[132] Bruce Western and Christopher Wildeman, "The Black Family and Mass Incarceration." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 621 (Jan 2009) 229

households; by the end of the twentieth century married couples with children

accounted for only four out of ten of all black family households with children. But no

group was immune to this rising trend of single-parent households.

Not only have traditional family households been on the decline, as a

consequence of the rise of single-person and childless-couple households, but even

women giving birth are now having far fewer children by spacing them further apart and

ending their fertility at earlier ages than ever before, which has brought fertility levels in

the United States to their lowest level in history.[133] Among all ethnic groups, it was only

the Hispanic women—who have a total fertility rate of 2.5 children—who are above the

replacement level:

> Although the U.S. fertility rate declined to the lowest level
>
> in history, single women now make up an increased
>
> percentage of those having children. The rapid and very
>
> recent rise in births outside marriage means that married
>
> women no longer are the exclusive arbiters of fertility.
>
> Whereas at mid-century such extramarital births were an
>
> insignificant phenomenon, accounting for only 4 percent
>
> of all births, by 2000 they accounted for a third of births,
>
> and that proportion is rising. Although all groups
>
> experienced this change, non-Hispanic whites experienced

---

[133] Todd Boyd, *African Americans and Popular Culture* .(Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2008)

a slower rise than all other groups. Although some have

thought this to be a temporary aberration in historic

patterns, the increasing illegitimacy rates in Europe

suggest that North America is following modern advanced

Western European trends.[134]

In the 1970s, when the issue began to be perceived by the public as one of major

concern, it was the teenagers who had the highest rates of births outside marriage, and

those births seemed to be rising at the time. But by the end of the century, older

women's rates of illegitimacy were highest and rising. The increase in teenage

pregnancies amongst white and blacks show that teenage pregnancy is an American

problem, not just an African-American problem. The factors influencing these trends

everywhere in the modern industrial world seem to be the same—late marriages,

women increasing their participation in the workforce and thus having higher incomes,

and changing beliefs in the importance and necessity of marriage.[135] These changes

seem to be affecting all Europe and North America at approximately the same time.

This trend is also echoed in the changing economic role of women even in dual-

parent households with children. The traditional family with a single male breadwinner

working alone to sustain the family is no longer the norm. By the end of the century,

only one in five married couples had just a single male breadwinner working outside the

---

[134] Herbert Klein, "The Changing American Family." *Hoover Digest* (July 2004)
[135] Herbert Klein, "The Changing American Family." *Hoover Digest* (July 2004)

home.[136] "Among married couples with children under six years of age, only thirty-six

percent had the mother staying at home with the children and not working, and in

families where women had given birth to a child during the previous year, the majority

of these mothers at the end of the year were working outside the home—more than

half of them in 2000 compared to just under one third in 1967."[137] Not only were more

women in the workforce—a ratio that was constantly on the rise through the second

half of the century, but by 2000, the vast majority of married mothers with young

children were working outside the home.

Clearly the American family, like all families in the Western industrial countries,

is now profoundly different from what it had been in the recorded past. It typically is a

household with few children, with both parents working, and with mothers producing

their children at ever older ages. At the same time, more adults than ever before are

living alone or with unmarried companions, and more women than ever before are

giving birth out of wedlock. African Americans must focus on education and economic

opportunities. People who have more education tend to stay married longer. Economic

opportunities would reduce the community of government programs such as welfare.

Power lies in the books and the dollar.

Recent trends have profoundly changed the American family and are unlikely to

be reversed any time soon. Minority group statistics are falling faster. Throughout the

---

[136] Herbert Klein, "The Changing American Family." *Hoover Digest* (July 2004)
[137] Herbert Klein, "The Changing American Family." *Hoover Digest* (July 2004)

decades, African Americans have focused less and less on family and more and more on

financial gain. African Americans have forgotten the struggles that went on in decades

past. Yes racism, discrimination, and prejudice still exist in today's society. However,

overall African Americans are fully assimilated in American society. African-American

music styles, food, and culture have become a part of pop culture. Today, hip hop is the

most powerful element of youth culture; white teenagers outnumber blacks as

purchasers of rap music; black-themed movies are regularly successful at the box office,

and black writers have been anthologized and canonized right alongside white

ones.[138]The loss of a distinct African-American culture created a loss of values. During

the Civil Rights era, African Americans fought and strived to go to school, to vote, and to

have other basic rights. Today, African Americans vote at the lowest levels and drop out

of school at the highest levels. African Americans have assimilated so far into society

that they have lost their sense of struggle. They have lost their sense of desire to be a

better people-- to uplift, to strive. Todd Boyd writes, "The Civil Rights era has now been

reduced to a series of mediated images. It could be Martin Luther King Jr. [...] or Black

people getting brutalized by Bull Conner."[139] My students do not understand that

someone fought and bled for them to come to school and be off task. Today's

generation is more influenced by Jay-Z than Martin Luther King, Jr. Boyd comments

"there is a profound difference between those who 'came up' before the civil rights

---

[138] Todd Boyd, *African Americans and Popular Culture* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2008) 115
[139] Todd Boyd, *The New H.N.I.C: The Death of Civil Rights and the Reign of Hip Hop* (New York: New York University Press, 2003) xxi

movement and those who 'came up' after."[140] Moreover, the "baby mama" and "baby

daddy" are valued while the wife and husband are not. Females are belittled to object

status and a standard of beauty is enforced upon them.[141] These atrocities-- high

divorce rates, out of wedlock childbirth, and incarceration-- pervade statistics in every

ethnic and racial group. The African-American family is not gone; it still thrives.

However, grandmothers are now thirty nine and are not the spouts of wisdom they

once were. The family structure has changed. However, the overall purpose of a family

guiding a child in the right direction, serving as a socializing agent, and nurturing and

caring for a child still exists within the African-American community.

---

[140] Todd Boyd, *The New H.N.I.C: The Death of Civil Rights and the Reign of Hip Hop* (New York: New York University Press, 2003)8

[141] Todd Boyd *The New H.N.I.C: The Death of Civil Rights and the Reign of Hip Hop* (New York: New York University Press, 2003) 73