

Portrait of Inequality 2012

Black Children in America

DEAR LORD
BE GOOD TO ME
THE SEAS IS SO
WIDE AND
MY BOAT IS
SO SMALL



Children's Defense Fund

CDF Mission Statement

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

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

CDF began in 1973 and is a private, nonprofit organization supported by foundation and corporate grants and individual donations.

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Black Children in America



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

Poverty

Poverty destroys childhood and can destroy children. In 2011, 16.1 million children – more than one in five – were poor.¹

- Black children are over three times as likely to be poor (38.8 percent) as White children (12.5 percent).²
- Black children are nearly three-and-a-half times as likely as White children to live in extreme poverty.³ Extreme poverty is defined as half of the poverty level or less (\$11,511 for a family of four in 2011).⁴
- The 4.3 million Black children living in poverty in 2011 represented an increase of 675,000 poor Black children since 2002.⁵
- Black children under five are the poorest group of children after young American Indian children.⁶ Over 42 percent of young Black children are poor compared to 15.0 percent of young White children. Young Black children are three-and-a-half times as likely as White children to live in extreme poverty.⁷
- More than two-thirds of Black children born poor will be persistently poor for at least half of their childhoods. Black children are seven times more likely than White children to be persistently poor.⁸
- Sixty-six percent of Black children born between 1985 and 2000 were raised in neighborhoods with a poverty rate of at least 20 percent, compared to only six percent of White children.⁹

Family Structure & Income

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

Family Structure

- Sixty percent of poor Black families with children have at least one working family member.¹⁰
- Thirty-eight percent of Black children live with two parents, compared to 77 percent of White children.¹¹
- Fifty-one percent of Black children live with only their mother. Black children are more than three times as likely to live with their mother only as are White children.¹²
- Black children are more than two-and-a-half times as likely as White children to live with neither parent. Almost five percent of Black children live with grandparents, and just under two percent of Black children live with other relatives.¹³

- Black children are more than twice as likely as White children to be in foster care.¹⁴
- Black children are over six times as likely as White children to have a parent in prison.¹⁵

Births to Unmarried Mothers and Teens

- Black babies were two-and-a-half times as likely as White babies to be born to an unmarried mother in 2010.¹⁶
- Black babies were more than twice as likely as White babies to be born to a teen mother in 2010.¹⁷

Income

- Black families with children have a median income that is half that of White families. In 2011 the median income for Black families with children was \$35,538, compared to \$72,029 for White families.¹⁸
- The median income for a Black female-headed household with one or more children and without a husband present was \$21,728, less than \$4,000 above the poverty level for a family of three.¹⁹ Almost half of Black female-headed families with children were poor.²⁰
- Almost two-thirds of Black children are raised in families in the bottom fifth of the income distribution compared to only 11 percent of White children.²¹

Health

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

Black Babies Are Born at a Disadvantage.

- Black babies are more than twice as likely to die before their first birthday as White babies.²² The Black infant mortality rate in 2009 was about the same as the White infant mortality rate in 1977.²³
- Black babies were more than twice as likely as White babies to be born to mothers who received late or no prenatal care in 18 of the 25 states for which data are available for 2009.²⁴
- A Black baby was almost twice as likely as a White or Hispanic baby to be born at low birthweight in 2010.²⁵ A child born at low birthweight is more likely to have health, behavioral, and learning problems down the road.²⁶

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

- Black children are slightly more likely than White children to be uninsured. One in nine Black children is uninsured, compared to one in 10 White children.²⁷
- More than one in six Black children has asthma.²⁸ When uncontrolled, asthma can affect a child's ability to learn and sleep, and require hospital treatment or visits to the emergency department.²⁹
- Black children and teens are more than one-and-a-half times as likely as White children and teens to be obese. Almost 40 percent of Black children and teens were overweight or obese in 2009-2010.³⁰

Early Childhood Development & School Readiness

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

Black Children Fall Behind Early On

- At nine months Black babies score lower on measures of cognitive development than White babies.³¹
- At 24 months the gap in cognitive development has more than tripled between Black babies and White babies.³²
- At age four Black children scored significantly behind White children in their proficiency in letter, number and shape recognition.³³

Too Many Black Children Enter School Behind

- Black infants and toddlers spend more time on average watching television daily, are less likely to have regular mealtimes and have far fewer books than White children.³⁴
- On average, Black children arrive at kindergarten and/or first grade with lower levels of school readiness than White children.³⁵

Education

A lack of a quality education contributes to the devastating *Cradle to Prison Pipeline*. The overrepresentation of poor and minority children in grade retention, out-of-school suspensions and special education have interacted with low teacher expectations to contribute to these children's discouragement, low self-esteem and disengagement from school. Poor Black children experience less-qualified teachers, inadequate education facilities and few resources. Black children experience too few Black teachers in the classroom. Only seven percent of public school teachers are Black,³⁶ and only two percent are Black males.³⁷

Retention, Suspension, Expulsion and Corporal Punishment

- Black children were 16 percent of sixth through eighth graders but 42 percent of students in those grades who were held back a year in 2009.³⁸
- Although Black students comprised only 18 percent of students in public schools in 2009, they represented:
 - 40 percent of all students who experienced corporal punishment;³⁹
 - 35 percent of all students who received one out-of-school suspension;⁴⁰
 - 46 percent of all students who received multiple out-of-school suspensions;⁴¹
 - 39 percent of all students expelled.⁴²

The Achievement Gap

- Black children continue to fall further and further behind as they progress through school:
 - In fourth grade 84 percent of Black public school students cannot read at grade level and 83 percent cannot do math at grade level;⁴³
 - In eighth grade 86 percent of Black public school students cannot read at grade level and 87 percent cannot do math at grade level;⁴⁴
 - Black students score the lowest of any racial/ethnic student group on the ACT and SAT college entrance exams.⁴⁵

Teacher Experience and School Curriculum

- Fifteen percent of teachers in schools with the most Black and Hispanic students are in their first or second year of teaching compared to eight percent of teachers in schools serving the fewest Black and Hispanic students.⁴⁶
- Black children are 19 percent of students in districts offering gifted and talented education programs but only 10 percent of students enrolled in those programs.⁴⁷
- Sixty-two percent of high schools serving the most Black and Hispanic students offer Algebra II compared to 82 percent of schools serving the fewest Black and Hispanic students.⁴⁸

High School Dropouts

- Sixty-four percent of Black students graduate from high school within four years of starting ninth grade compared to 82 percent of White students.⁴⁹
- Thirty-five percent of the nation's Black students in 2008 attended one of the 1,700 "dropout factories," high schools where less than 60 percent of the freshman class graduate in four years; only eight percent of the nation's White students attended such schools.⁵⁰

College or Prison?

- Black males age 18 and over in 2008 represented only five percent of the total college student population, but 36 percent of the total prison population.⁵¹
- Thirty-eight percent of Black young adults 18 to 24 were enrolled in institutions of higher education in 2010, compared to 43 percent of White young adults.⁵²

Job Status & Income of Young Adults

The recession has created an extremely difficult labor market for all youth, but minority youth face the harshest impact. Black college graduates compared to other college graduates, for example, have the highest unemployment rate⁵³ and the highest levels of education loan debt.⁵⁴ These facts bode ill for Black wealth creation.

Employment and Unemployment

- As of September 2012 one in four Black young adults ages 16 to 24 was unemployed. Five years ago, before the recession, about one in five was unemployed.⁵⁵
- An average of nearly half of Black high school graduates ages 17 to 20 were unemployed from April 2011 to March 2012, the highest unemployment rate of any racial/ethnic group.
- In the same time period, the unemployment rate for young Black college graduates ages 21 to 24 averaged 10.8 percent, compared to 8.7 percent for their White peers.⁵⁶
- The unemployment rate for Black males age 20 and over (13.5 percent) was more than twice as high as the unemployment rate for White males (6.2 percent) in September 2012.⁵⁷
- An analysis of 2008 data found that the employment rate among Black male dropouts (excluding those in jail or prison) was 42 percent; this rate fell to 26 percent when inmates were included in the population count.⁵⁸

Income

- Black males ages 25 to 64 are more likely to have a lower income than White males with similar educational backgrounds. In 2011, the gap in median earnings between Black and White males with some high school education but no diploma was approximately \$9,700. The gap between Black and White males with master's degrees was approximately \$23,500.⁵⁹

- In 2011, White high school graduates ages 25 to 64 earned an average of \$31,497, compared to \$25,102 for Black graduates. For those with a bachelor's degree or higher, the median earnings were \$56,557 for White graduates and \$47,289 for Black graduates.⁶⁰
- Black families experience more downward mobility and less upward mobility than White families. Across all income levels, Black children are less likely than White children to have higher incomes than their parents.⁶¹
- More than half of Black children raised in the bottom fifth of the income distribution stay there as adults compared to a third of White children raised in the bottom fifth.⁶²

Wealth & Asset Development

All parents and caregivers aspire to support their children and assist them in doing better in life than previous generations did. But the future outlook for many is bleak.

- Fifty-seven percent of Black children are raised in households in the bottom fifth of the wealth distribution compared to 14 percent of White children.⁶³
- The average wealth of White households was 20 times that of Black households in 2009. This is the largest gap observed since these data were first published a quarter century ago.⁶⁴
- The recession hit Black households particularly hard, with the average wealth for this group dropping by 53 percent from 2005 to 2009. The average wealth for White households dropped just 16 percent.⁶⁵
- The typical Black household had a net worth (assets minus debts) of \$5,677 in 2009 compared to \$113,149 for White households. Black households were more than twice as likely as White households to have zero or negative net worth, with over a third of Black households in this situation.⁶⁶
- Minority households are more than twice as likely as White households to be “asset poor,” meaning that a household does not have enough net worth to live at the poverty level for three months in the absence of income. In 2009, 44 percent of minority households were asset poor compared to 20 percent of White households.⁶⁷
- Black homeowners were almost twice as likely to be affected by the housing crisis as White households. Almost a quarter of all Black borrowers with a mortgage that started between 2004 and 2008 had lost their home to foreclosure by early 2011 or were seriously delinquent, meaning that they were 60 days or more late in their payments or were in the process of foreclosure.⁶⁸

Violence

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

Child Abuse and Neglect

- Black children have the highest rate of abuse and neglect.⁶⁹ In 2010, 28.1 percent of deaths from child maltreatment were Black children.⁷⁰
- More than one in five victims of child abuse and neglect in 2010 were Black.⁷¹

Gun Violence

- While the annual number of firearm deaths of White children and teens *decreased* by 44 percent between 1979 and 2009, the deaths of Black children and teens *increased* by 30 percent.⁷²
- Forty-three percent of all children and youth killed by firearms in 2009 were Black. Black males ages 15 to 19 were more than eight times as likely as White males and more than two-and-a-half times as likely as Hispanic males in the same age group to be killed in a firearm homicide in 2009.⁷³
- Over 90 percent of firearm deaths of Black children and teens in 2009 were homicides (1,092) and six percent were suicides; among White children and teens just under half of all firearm deaths in 2009 were homicides (730) and 46 percent were suicides.⁷⁴
- The number of Black children and teens killed by gunfire from 1979 to 2009 is nearly 13 times the number of Black men, women and children of all ages lynched between 1882 and 1968.⁷⁵

Involvement in the Juvenile & Adult Criminal Justice Systems

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

Juvenile Arrests and Incarceration

- In 2009, Black children were more than twice as likely as White children to be arrested. From ages 10-17 a Black youth was more than five times as likely as a White youth to be arrested for a violent crime.⁷⁶
- Black children are less likely than White or Hispanic teens to abuse drugs or alcohol,⁷⁷ but Black children are over one and a half times as likely as White children to be arrested for drug offenses⁷⁸ and more than three times as likely to be in secure residential placements for these offenses.⁷⁹
- Nationally, Black youth are more than four-and-a-half times as likely as White youth to be detained in a juvenile correctional facility. About two-thirds of them are detained for non-violent offenses.⁸⁰
- In 2009, Black children constituted 15.1 percent of the overall child population.⁸¹ They constituted:
 - 31 percent of all juvenile arrests.⁸²
 - 25 percent of all juvenile arrests for drug abuse violations.⁸³
 - 51 percent of all juvenile arrests for violent offenses.⁸⁴
- On June 25, 2012, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that juveniles could not be subject to mandatory life sentences without the possibility of parole. Of the approximately 2,500 juveniles across the nation serving life sentences, the Supreme Court decision could change the sentences of more than 2,000 of them.⁸⁵ A 2009 study found that 56 percent of juveniles serving life sentences without parole were Black.⁸⁶ In 17 states, more than 60 percent of juveniles serving life sentences without parole were Black. For example:
 - In Alabama, it was 84 percent (75 of 89).
 - In Maryland, 79 percent (15 of 19).
 - In South Carolina, 79 percent (11 of 14).⁸⁷

Adult Incarceration

- Black males born in 2001 are more than five times as likely as White males to be incarcerated some time in their lifetime. This gap is even larger for females, with Black females born in 2001 more than six times as likely as their White peers to be incarcerated at some point.⁸⁸
- One in 12 working-age Black men was in prison or jail in 2008, compared to one in 87 working-age White men.⁸⁹
- One in 10 Black men ages 30 through 34 were held in state or federal prison or jail in 2010, compared to one in 61 White men that same age.⁹⁰
- Black adult men were incarcerated in state and federal facilities at over six times the rate of White adult men in 2010, and Black adult women were incarcerated at more than two-and-a-half times the rate of White adult women.⁹¹

Global Comparisons of U.S. Incarceration

- The U.S. has five percent of the world's population, but 25 percent of the world's prison inmate population.⁹²
- In 2008, 2.3 million or one in 100 adults in America were behind bars.⁹³
- The rate of incarceration in the U.S. climbed from 221⁹⁴ to 743⁹⁵ per 100,000 from 1980 to 2009. This is more than a 300 percent increase.
- The U.S. houses more inmates than all European nations combined.⁹⁶

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- Black children are over three times as likely to be poor as White children.
- While the annual number of firearm deaths of White children and teens decreased by 44 percent between 1979 and 2009, the deaths of Black children and teens increased by 30 percent. Forty-three percent of all children and youth killed by firearms in 2009 were Black.
- Black males born in 2001 are more than five times as likely as White males to be incarcerated some time in their lifetime. This gap is even larger for females, with Black females born in 2001 more than six times as likely as their White peers to be incarcerated at some point.

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