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The Status of the Children

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¹⁴ the violent and the lazy. The clear impression created is that all inner-city, disadvantaged, Black youth are alike: unmotivated, underachieving, violent, disruptive and lacking in interest in matters educational. Poor parents of disadvantaged Black youth are portrayed as uneducated, discouraged and unable to cope with or to discipline and inspire their children.

The tragedy is that these individuals—students, parents, administrators in disadvantaged urban and city schools—become scapegoats, the victims of a prevailing stereotype and mythology which consigns all of them to the educational trash heap. It is an additional, unnecessary, and cruel burden placed on the shoulders of poor, Black and minority children.

With the exception of the historically Black institutions of higher education, the two-year colleges have done more than any others to increase access to higher education for minority students. Well over 40 percent of all Black students enrolled in higher education are in two-year colleges. The reasons for this overrepresentation in two-year institutions are obvious: they are located in areas where Black and other minority Americans are concentrated, admissions standards are lower, and, because most are commuter institutions, they cost less to attend than four-year residential institutions.

Black Americans attending predominantly white colleges and universities continue to face problems because of their race. Significant numbers of Black students on a predominately white campus continue to cause concern among white faculty and students. In 1980, there were serious racial incidents at several of the eastern, elitist institutions of higher education. The incidents included threats and assaults on Black students and the burning of a cross in front of a house where a number of Black students lived.

Because Black Americans have historically educated their children in the public schools, the decline in the quality of public education, the erosion of support for public education, and the recent attempts to further undermine public schools through such means as tuition tax credits and anti-busing legislation must be viewed as frontal attacks on a primary means of upward mobility for Black Americans. It is imperative, therefore, that Black Americans understand the consequences of these assaults. During the 1980s, it is likely that the trend toward more conservative attitudes as illustrated during the recent presidential election will be reflected in the development of more conservative public policies.

It is not too much of an exaggeration to say that the survival of Black people is at stake. Black Americans must no longer depend solely upon the schools to provide children and youth with the skills and knowledge necessary to contend with a political, economic and social milieu which is not only unsympathetic, but may very well be hostile in many respects. Black organizations of all kinds must begin to institute programs which provide skills, knowledge, and support for Black youth. Black youth must be politicized by making them aware of the history of struggle. Educational forums of all kinds must be a staple of Black communities throughout the country in order that the youth may be instilled with a sense of pride that only history can provide, especially when that history is conveyed by those who were a part of the struggle for equality and human dignity.

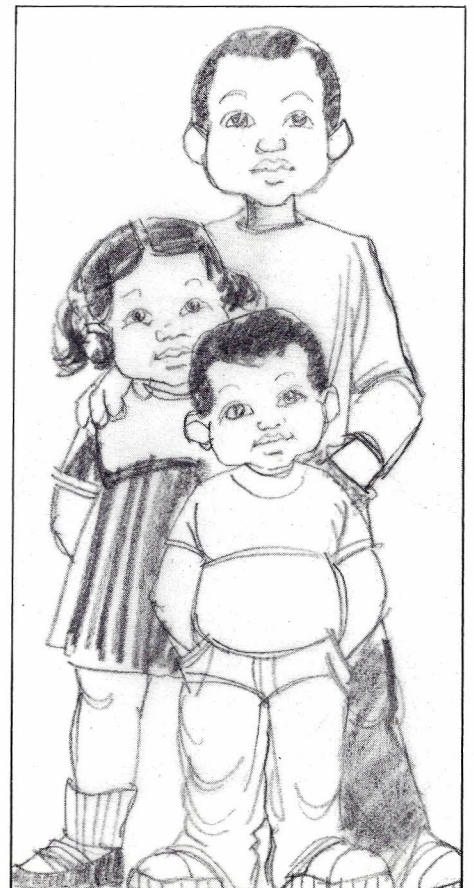
It seems clear that in 1981 Black Americans must return to a period in history when we relied more heavily on our own inner strengths and resources for survival and for the education of our children and youth. We must draw upon our past experience and look to ourselves for our educational and political survival, while, at the same time, mak-

ing sure that those who are officially charged with such responsibilities are held accountable. Because there is power in our numbers, all Black Americans must realize the necessity for understanding and participating at all levels and in all areas of the educational and political process. □

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The Status of Children

By Marian Wright Edelman



Twenty-seven years after *Brown v. the Board of Education*, most Black children still have not gained the opportunities that most white children take for granted. In some areas the gap between Black and white children's chances for success has actually widened rather than narrowed in the past decade.

Today, 47 out of every 100 Black babies are born into poverty, compared to fewer than one in eight white babies. Despite the continuing and increasing poverty of Blacks, many whites are turning their backs on and resisting efforts to ensure equal opportunities for Black children. Although a Black child still has a one in three chance of attending a racially isolated school, an anti-busing amendment that would make it even harder to achieve school desegregation was approved by the 96th Congress but later vetoed by President Carter.

Twice as many Black as white women lack prenatal care at almost every stage of pregnancy. This imbalance persists despite high correlations between lack of prenatal care and infant mortality and illness. Black mothers die in childbirth three times as often as white mothers. Of those who survive, one in 40 must then watch her baby die in the first year of life.

Growing up, Black children are more likely to be sick because they are more likely to be poor. One out of seven Black children under the age of 15 lacks a regular source of health care. Partly as a result, Black children, aged one to four, die of heart disease 100 percent more often than white children, and die from accidents 50 percent more often than white children. New tuberculosis cases occur five times as often among Blacks as among white children.

Less than half of all Black children live with both parents; the majority live within single-parent families or with other relatives. Black children are more likely than white children to live with-
out or away from any family and are dis-

proportionately represented in institutions that typically serve the young (e.g., children's homes, psychiatric facilities) where twice as many non-whites as whites have no families at all.

Once a Black child enters public school he or she is twice as likely as a white child to be held back a grade, three times as likely to be placed in classes for the educable mentally retarded, and twice as likely to be suspended from school. Often these problems stem from and/or are reinforced by the low expectations and negative attitudes many education officials hold for Black children. Black children, in turn, often internalize these expectations and label themselves as failures. The current national atmosphere, if combined with weakened federal enforcement of civil rights, may encourage a revival of overt negative attitudes and acts against Black children in some public schools.

Poverty is the most persistent and pressing problem facing Black children today. Their poverty rate is about four times higher than that of white children. In 1979, the median family income of Black children was almost exactly half that of white children.

Although in 1977 there were more white children and families than Black children and families on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), a far higher proportion of all Black families and children were on AFDC. Almost 41 percent of all Black children are AFDC recipients.

Four out of every 10 Black children, compared to one out of eight white children, depend upon the income of their mother. Because the Black mother faces discrimination both as a Black and as a woman, she is the lowest paid and most unemployed worker in the nation. Black women heading families are three times more likely to be unemployed today than they were at the beginning of the 1970s. Thus two out of every three Black children in female-headed families live in poverty. Only two out of five

white children living in female-headed families live in poverty.

A disproportionate number of children who need care—children of working and single parents, children born to teen-aged parents, children born into poverty, children at risk of abuse, neglect or institutionalization, and children with special needs who could benefit from preschool programs—are Black.

Three out of five Black children attending pre-schools do so full time; three out of four white children attending pre-schools do so only part time. Although one in every four Black three-year-olds attends pre-school full time, less than one in every 14 white three-year-olds does.

Two-parent Black families often earn too much to qualify for federally subsidized child care but too little to pay for private child care. As a result, relatives often care for their children. One study found that the Black extended family alone accounts for 40 percent of the Black need for child care.

Approximately 40 percent of the children enrolled in centers that receive federal subsidies are Black. More than 40 percent of all Black three to five-year-old children are in public day care programs, while less than 30 percent of all white three to five-year-olds are in such programs. Indications of similar disparities can be found in Head Start, WIN, and Title XX of the Social Security Act.

Black children lack a regular source of health care twice as often as do white children. Four out of every 10 Black children under age 15 depend upon hospital emergency rooms, out-patient clinics, or unknown sources for primary medical care. More than eight out of every 10 white children receive care from private doctors in individual or group practice. For every Black child who has private hospital or surgical insurance, another does not. Only one white child in five lacks such insurance.

Medicaid's Early and Periodic Screen-

¹⁶ ing, Diagnosis and Treatment program (EPSDT) serves only about one-fourth of all eligible children. Major and systematic efforts must be expended within the Black community, and through health delivery institutions, to ensure that families are aware of, and take advantage of, the benefits available under this existing program. At present, in many states, outreach and other support services to enable parents and children to know about the use of this and other federal and state programs are poor.

More than one out of every five Black 14 to 17 year-olds from low-income families are not enrolled in school; among all Black children between the ages of 14 and 17, one in six is out of school.

Black children are disproportionately placed in classes for the educable mentally retarded (EMR). One Black child in 30 is placed in these classes. A white child is twice as likely to be placed in a class for gifted students.

One out of every 16 Black public school students (from kindergarten through grade 12) was corporally punished in 1977-1978; one in 13 was suspended from school. These are more than twice the rates for white students. One Black family in four reports that it has had at least one child suspended from school; one in 14 that it has had at least one child expelled from school. Among Black families with incomes of \$20,000 or more per year, almost one in five reported having had at least one child suspended. Clearly, suspensions are not just a problem of low-income Black families.

Many Black children are not being adequately taught and are therefore not learning. Too many Black youth are leaving school—drop-outs and graduates—unable to read, write, or compute well enough to get a job. Some 13 percent of all 17-year-olds are functionally illiterate, unable to do basic reading, writing or counting; unable to understand want ads, fill out job applications or get the

right change for a purchase at the supermarket.

Contrary to the stereotype, many Black youth do want to work, although they may be discouraged by the poor prospects of finding a job. A recent study of youth unemployment in New York State found that 20 percent of the more than 3,000 youth surveyed were "super youth" who worked full time and also went to school or trained for future employment. These "super youth" were predominantly from minority groups—Native Americans, Orientals, Hispanics, and Blacks.

Too many Black youth, even those who stay in school, know very little about how to look for a job or what an employer expects. Many employers fail to recruit inner-city youth, while publicly funded vocational education and employment services seldom reach the most disadvantaged youth. When they do, they often track Black youth into less desirable professions. For example, Black public secondary school students are overrepresented in vocational education programs like consumer education, home economics, and homemaking, but are underrepresented in technical and modern industrial arts programs.

Recent Black college graduates are almost three times as likely to be unemployed as recent white college graduates. More than one out of every five recent Black high school graduates is unemployed. Thus while a Black youth who graduates from high school has about the same chance of going on to college as does a white youth, neither completing high school nor completing college provides a Black youth with the same chances that a white youth has in the labor market. College attendance rates for Blacks improved over the past decade; unemployment rates worsened.

Black children are more than twice as likely as white children to be inadequately housed. Inadequate housing means a dwelling unit lacking one or more of the following: plumbing, kitch-

en, sewage system, heating (except in the South), access to toilets, or physical or electrical maintenance to a degree that threatens health or safety. Millions of Black children live in housing projects and neighborhoods where they do not feel safe.

Racial discrimination in housing against families with children strongly contributes to the number of Black children living in inadequate housing.

Several local studies have found that "no-children" policies are most prevalent in white areas of cities. Thus the restrictions tend to perpetuate segregated school systems.

Black children are overrepresented among the more than 500,000 children growing up in foster homes, group homes and other institutions, and Black and other minority children are particularly vulnerable to public neglect once placed out of their homes.

Nonwhite children are placed in facilities for homeless, retarded, handicapped, and emotionally disturbed children at rates about 40 percent greater than white children. Black children live apart from relatives, in foster homes and in informal group quarters, at about three times the rate of white children.

For the first time, federal reimbursement will be available for preventive services to families and for adoption subsidies. However, unless sound regulations are developed and implemented and adequate funding to implement the new legislation is appropriated, the new law will not work.

Nonwhite males 15 to 19 years-old, are almost six times as likely to be murdered as white males of the same age; nonwhite females 15 to 19 years-old are over four times as likely to be murdered as white females. Shockingly, the murder rate among nonwhite preschoolers one to four years old, is higher than the murder rate among white teenagers.

More than half of all arrests of Black teenagers, compared with more than one-third of all arrests of white teen-

agers, are for violent or property crimes.

Whether a child is the victim of a crime or arrested for a crime, the impact of the event can permanently change his image of himself and his world. We must concentrate our efforts on preventive programs that lessen the probability that children will grow up feeling unsafe or alienated, with negative views of themselves and the society in which they live.

In the 1980s, Black children and families must become a major focus of Black communities, political leaders and policymakers for moral as well as practical reasons. Public and private sector policies must build on the considerable strengths of Black families and enable them, to the extent possible, to stay together and become more self-sufficient. At present, too many programs and policies undermine families' and children's well-being.

Every American child is entitled to a fair chance. Millions of Black children are not getting theirs. That so many Black families have helped their children survive and succeed despite the hurdles of employment, poor health care, and nutrition is a tribute to their strength and persistence. □