

The Moynihan Report Revisited



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with Kenneth Braswell, Elaine Sorensen,
and Margery Austin Turner

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The Moynihan Report Revisited

Few pieces of social science research have stirred as much controversy or had as great an impact as 1965's *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. The U.S. Department of Labor report, more commonly referred to as the Moynihan report after its author, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, focused on the deep roots of black poverty in the United States. Moynihan argued that the decline of the black nuclear family would significantly impede blacks' progress toward economic and social equality. Over the ensuing decades, the report has been hailed by some as prophetic and derided by others as a classic example of blaming the victim. To this day, scholars and advocates concerned about poverty and economic opportunity continue to revisit the issues raised in the Moynihan report.

At the time of the report's release, Moynihan, a Ph.D. sociologist, was assistant secretary for policy planning and research at the U.S. Department of Labor. He would go on to serve as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and as a four-term senator from New York. Written during the height of the Civil Rights movement and the beginning of the War on Poverty, the report focused on the economic prospects of blacks and the need for government action to improve the situation. Although Moynihan described a "tangle of pathologies"—from disintegrating families to poor educational outcomes, weak job prospects, concentrated neighborhood poverty, dysfunctional communities, and crime—that would create a self-perpetuating cycle of deprivation, hardship, and inequality, he saw the breakdown of the nuclear family as the fundamental source of weakness in the black community. Moynihan argued that high nonmarital birth rates among blacks and the large share of black children raised in female-headed households created a matriarchal society that undermined the role of black men. Because of diminished authority within the family, black men would abdicate their responsibilities as husbands, fathers, and providers, and the pattern would repeat from one generation to the next.

Whether the weakening of the black nuclear family is the primary cause of racial disparities in economic outcomes or a response to discrimination, social inequalities, and limited opportunities has been the focus of much social science research, and that debate

will likely rage on for years to come. Although there is no agreement on the primary causes of poverty and racial disparities, these persistent inequalities have roots that go beyond differences in the structures of black and other families. The evidence clearly documents that American blacks still suffer from the intersecting disadvantages that Moynihan called a “tangle of pathologies,” with each negative factor reinforcing the others.

This report revisits Moynihan’s analysis and examines the state of black families today, some five decades after Moynihan’s work. In addition to gauging how the circumstances of black families have changed over time, it compares them with other racial and ethnic groups. Although social progress has opened the doors of opportunity to many talented members of the black community, large socioeconomic gaps between blacks and whites remain. Black poverty rates and unemployment rates are considerably higher than those of whites, and black children are more likely than white children to reside in single-parent households. Indeed, the high rates of single parenting that Moynihan identified in the 1960s have only grown higher since, but they have done so for all racial and ethnic groups.

This report goes on to explore some factors that may be responsible for the limited, halting progress of black families, including how the criminal justice system disproportionately impedes the economic and social opportunities of black men. The report concludes with suggestions for improving the circumstances of black families and reducing racial disparities.

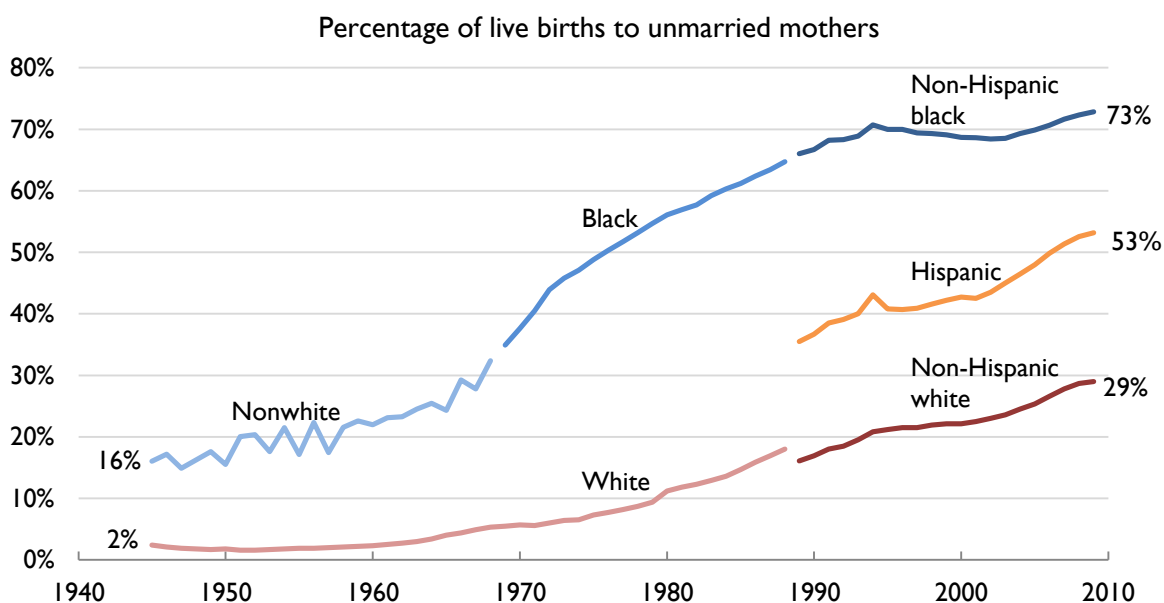
[Moynihan] had a very patriarchal view of the world, so the flip hand side of his argument was that African American families ... [were] headed by females and there is something inherently wrong with that.
—Dr. Ronald Mincy, Columbia University

Black Families Then and Now

The Moynihan report argued that the black family, “battered and harassed by discrimination, . . . is the fundamental source of the weakness of the Negro community.” More specifically, Moynihan viewed the large disparity between the shares of black and white children born into and raised in single-parent households and the disparity in black and white marriage rates as the key factors impeding black economic progress and social equality.

Over the past five decades, the statistics that so alarmed Moynihan in the 1960s have only grown worse, not only for blacks, but for whites and Hispanics as well. Today, the share of white children born outside marriage is about the same as the share of black children born outside marriage in Moynihan’s day. The percentage of black children born to unmarried mothers, in comparison, tripled between the early 1960s and 2009, remaining far higher than the percentage of white children born to unmarried mothers (figure 1).¹

Figure 1. More Children across Racial Groups Are Born Outside Marriage Now Than in the 1960s



Sources: Authors’ calculations, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Vital Statistics of the United States, 2003. Volume I, Natality* (Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics, 2003), and “VitalStats,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed July 2012, <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/vitalstats.htm>.

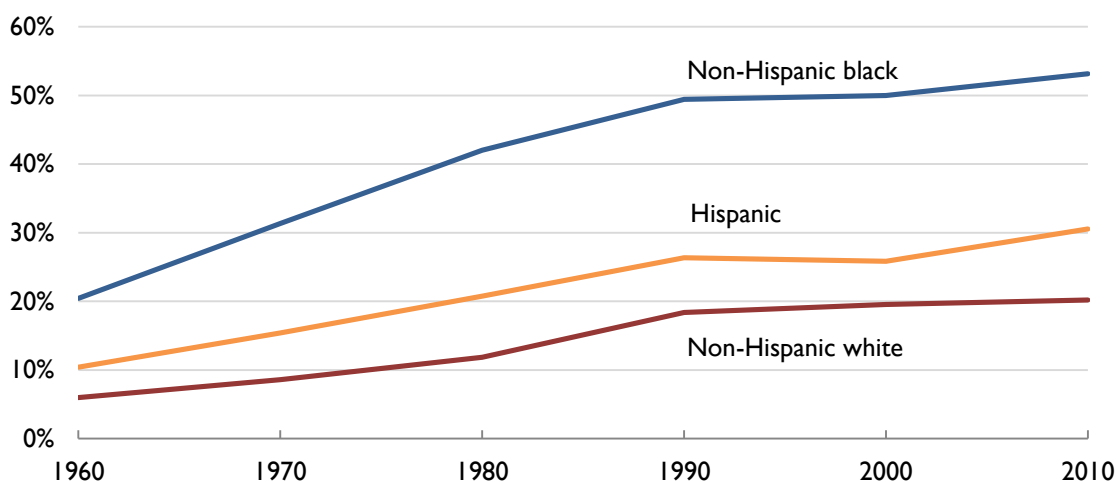
Notes: Before 1980, the race shown is the child’s; from 1980 onward, the race shown is the mother’s. Marital status is estimated before 1980.

In the early 1960s, about 20 percent of black children were born to unmarried mothers, compared with 2 to 3 percent of white children. By 2009, nearly three-quarters of black births and three-tenths of white births occurred outside marriage. Hispanics fell between whites and blacks and followed the same rising trend (historical data on Hispanics are more limited).

The share of children living with their mothers but not their fathers rose in concert with the rise in nonmarital births (figure 2).

In 1960, 20 percent of black children lived with their mothers but not their fathers; by 2010, 53 percent of all black children lived in such families. The share of white children living with their mothers but not their fathers climbed from 6 percent in 1960 to 20 percent in 2010. Again, Hispanics followed the same trend and fell between whites and blacks. The bulk of the increase in the share of kids in “mother, no father” families occurred by 1990; the growth has largely moderated over the past two decades.

Figure 2. More Children Live without Their Fathers Now Than in the 1960s



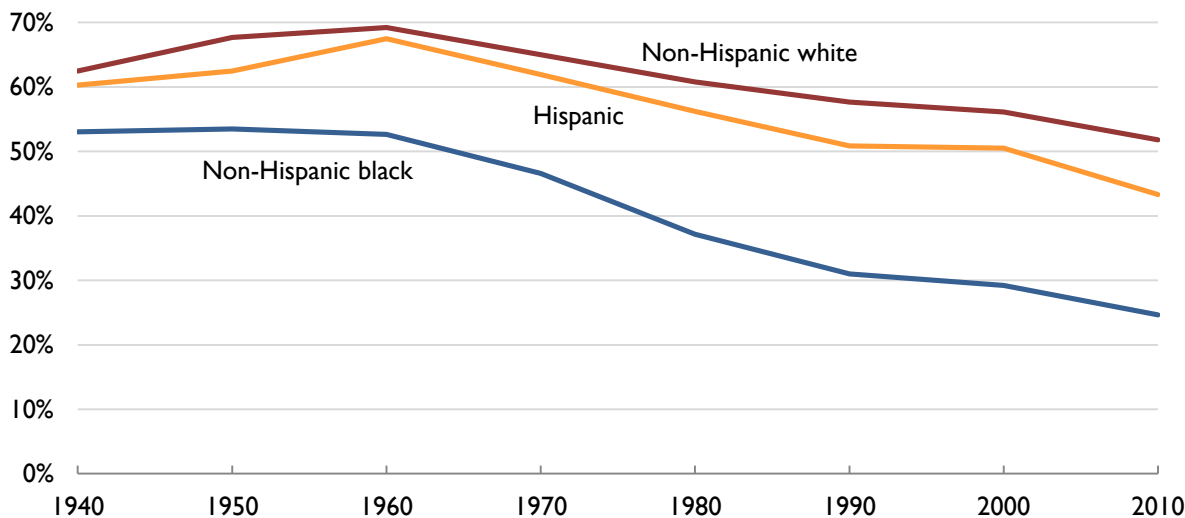
Source: Authors' analysis of Integrated Public Use Microdata Series data (see Ruggles et al. 2010).

Note: Percentages shown are of children living with their biological mothers and without their biological fathers.

The past five decades have also seen a marked retreat from marriage (figure 3). In 1960, just over one-half of all black women were married and living with their husbands, compared with over two-thirds of white and Hispanic women. By 2010, only one-quarter of black women, two-fifths of Hispanic women, and one-half of white women lived with their spouses.

These demographic trends are stunning. Five decades after Moynihan’s work, white families exhibit the same rates of nonmarital childbearing and single parenting as black families did in the 1960s when Moynihan sounded his alarm. Meanwhile, the disintegration of the black nuclear family continued apace. That the decline of traditional families occurred across racial and ethnic groups indicates that factors driving the decline do not lie solely within the black community but in the larger social and economic context. Nevertheless, the consequences of these trends in family structure may be felt disproportionately among blacks as black children are far more likely to be born into and raised in father-absent families than are white children.

Figure 3. Share of Women Who Are Married Has Been Declining since the 1960s



Source: Authors’ analysis of Integrated Public Use Microdata Series data (see Ruggles et al. 2010).
Note: Percentages shown are of women age 18 and older who are married and living with their spouse.

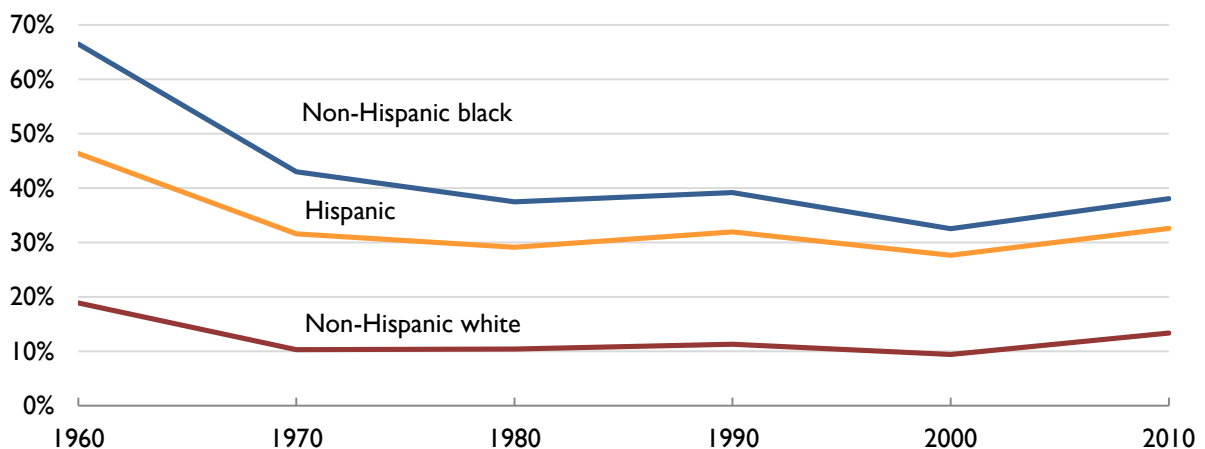
Single Parenthood and Perpetuating the Cycle of Poverty

Single-parent, female-headed families are far more likely to be poor than other families. In 2010, about 9 percent of married-couple families with children had incomes below the federal poverty level, which was about \$22,000 for a family of four.² In contrast, over 40 percent of single-mother families with children were in poverty. Because black children are far more likely to reside in single-mother families, their poverty rates far exceed those of white children.

In 2010 as the United States reeled from the effects of the Great Recession, nearly 40 percent of black children lived in poverty compared with about 13 percent of white children and 33 percent of Hispanic children (figure 4).

Poverty rates for children from all three groups were somewhat higher in 2010 than they had been a decade earlier but right in line with where they had been in 1980 and 1990. Child poverty rates showed marked improvements during the 1960s; they fell from 67 to 43 percent for blacks, from 46 to 32 percent for Hispanics, and from 19 to 10 percent for whites.

Figure 4. Child Poverty Rates Declined Markedly in the 1960s but Have Varied in a Narrow Band Since



Source: Authors' analysis of Integrated Public Use Microdata Series data (see Ruggles et al. 2010).

Although living in poverty as a child does not condemn children to a lifetime of poverty, it is associated with a host of problems that significantly increases the chances for hardships as an adult. For example, children raised in poverty are more likely to drop out of high school than other children. Although 92 percent of children who never experience poverty earn high school degrees, only 70 percent of those who are born into poverty and 63 percent of those who spend at least half their childhoods in poverty graduate from high school (Ratcliffe and McKernan 2012). Similarly, only 4 percent of girls who never experience poverty have nonmarital births as teenagers compared with 26 percent who are born into poor families and 37 percent of those who spend half their childhoods in poverty. Failing to complete high school and having a nonmarital birth as a teenager significantly increase the likelihood of material hardship as an adult. Thus, the large differences in childhood poverty across racial and ethnic groups suggest that without some societal level change or intervention, the cycle of poverty will continue to reinforce those gaps, to the detriment of black families.

I think it is true when the economy is stronger every group does better, but some groups do better than others. It's unfortunate that all groups don't succeed equally or together, but the reasons for that lagging performance by various groups at different times are hard to fathom and to figure out. I think it's a challenge for our country.
—Robert Doar, Commissioner, NYC Human Resources Administration

Why Have the Gaps Persisted, or Even Increased?

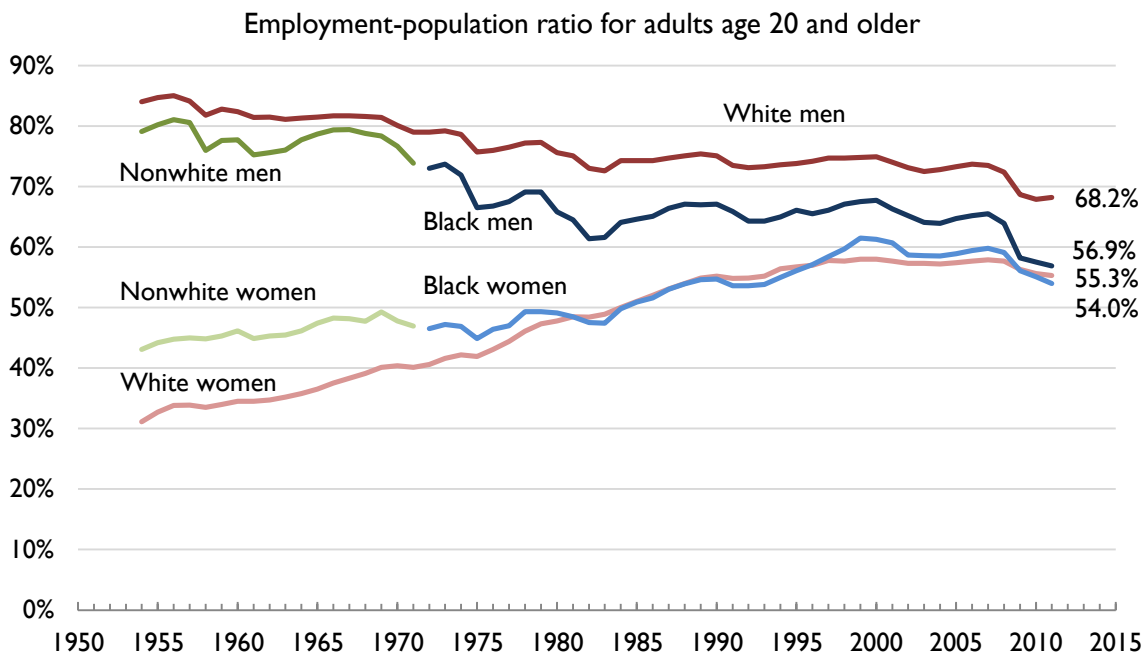
These persistent economic and social inequalities have roots that go beyond differences in the family structures of black and other families. Indeed, other facets of Moynihan’s “tangle of pathologies” undercut and undermine progress for blacks. These factors include challenges in the labor market and educational system, residential segregation and concentrated poverty, and the disproportionate impact of the criminal justice system on black men and families.

The Labor Market

Men, regardless of race and ethnicity, are working far less today than in the past (figure 5). In the mid-1960s, about 80 percent of men were employed. Employment rates for men dropped during the 1970s and early 1980s, stabilized from the mid-1980s until about 2000, then began declining again. By 2010, 68 percent of white men and 57 percent of black men were employed.

In contrast, the employment-to-population ratio for women increased from the mid-1960s through 2000 before falling off slightly to around 55 percent during the Great Recession. In the

Figure 5. Black-White Employment Gap Has Increased for Men, Disappeared for Women



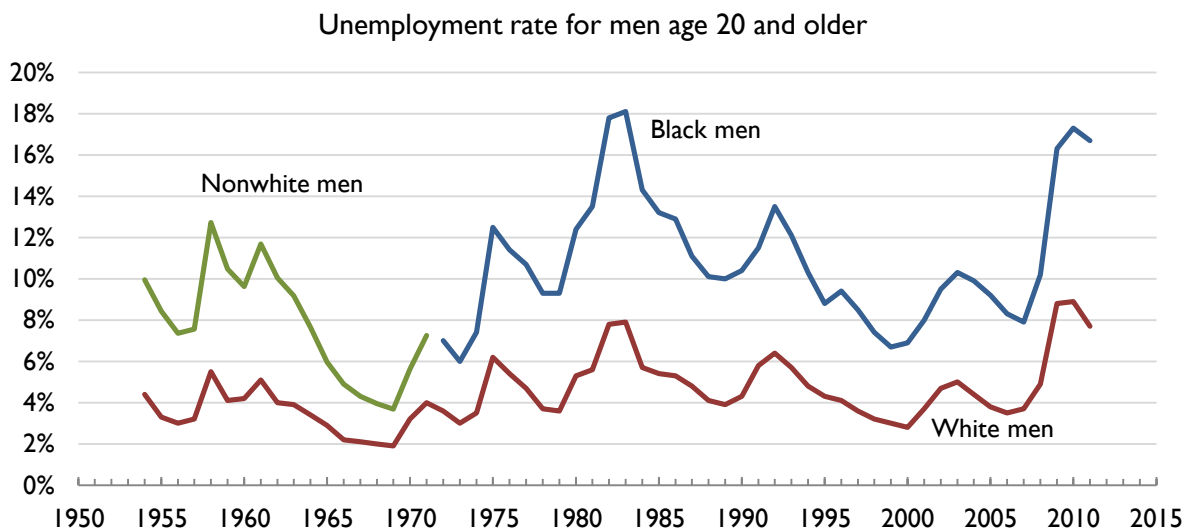
Sources: Authors’ calculations and labor force statistics from the Current Population Survey, downloaded July 2012 from <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/srgate>.

1960s, nonwhite women worked at much higher rates than white women. From the mid-1980s on, however, the employment rates for black and white women were fairly similar.

Declining male employment rates accompanied by higher female employment rates could be both a cause and effect of the decline in marriage rates. With greater economic opportunities, women may be less inclined to marry, especially when more potential marriage partners are struggling in the labor market. Alternatively, because marriage rates are declining, more women may be compelled to work to support themselves and their children. Beyond the economic rationale, societal changes in attitudes about women’s capabilities, aspirations, gender roles, and legal rights also contributed to the rise in women’s employment.

The disparities in employment rates between black and white men are largely a result of unemployment rather than differences in labor force participation. The unemployment rate, which measures the share of those individuals who want to work but cannot find jobs, rises and falls with the overall health of the economy. Although the rates for black and white men have moved in concert for decades, the unemployment rate for black men remains persistently higher than the rate for white men (figure 6).

Figure 6. Unemployment Rate for Black Men Remains Persistently High

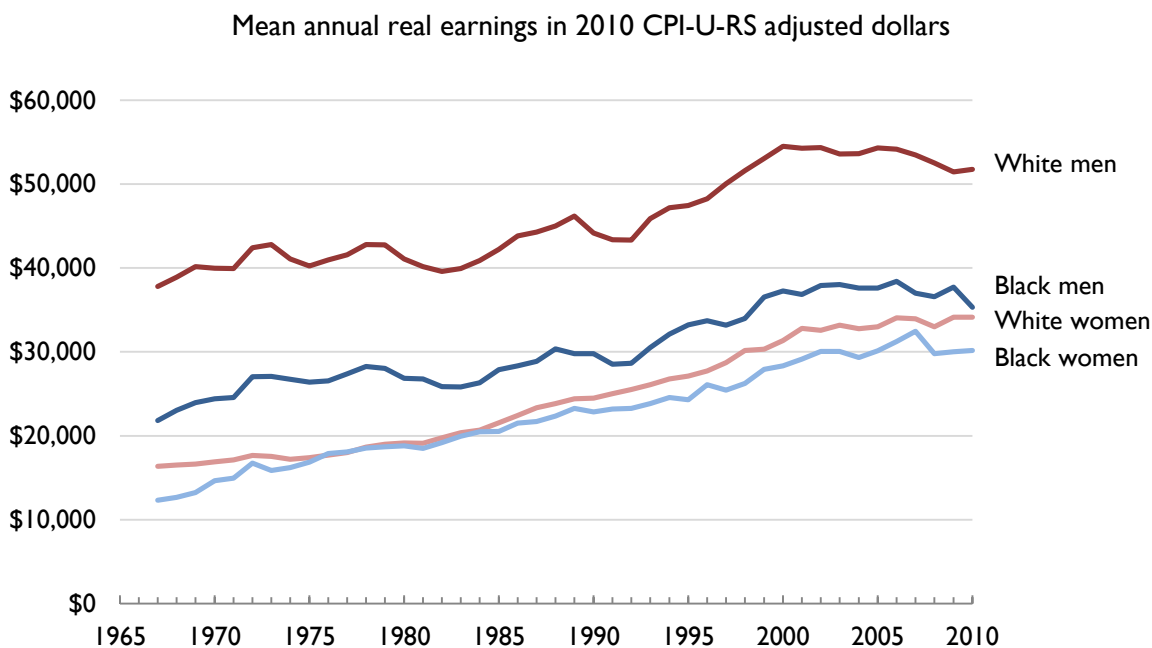


Sources: Authors’ calculations and labor force statistics from the Current Population Survey, downloaded July 2012 from <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/srgate>.

In 2011, the unemployment rate for black men was more than twice that for white men, 16.7 percent compared with 7.7 percent. If enough black men found jobs to bring the black male unemployment rate down to the level of white men, the black male employment-population ratio would reach 64 percent, very close to the white male employment rate of 68 percent (authors' calculations).

Even among those who are working, earnings are appreciably higher for white men than for black men and women in general (figure 7). After adjusting for inflation, mean annual earnings for white men in the mid-1960s hovered around \$40,000, and mean annual earnings for black men were in the mid- to low \$20,000 range. The ensuing decades brought slow real earnings growth for men with somewhat faster growth for women. By 2010, white men earned an average of about \$52,000 a year while black men and white women earned about \$35,000 and black women earned \$30,000. Just as in the case of employment, the gap in earnings between white and black men remained wide while black women closed some of the gap with black men.

Figure 7. Black Men and Women Earn Less Than White Men and Women



Source: "Table P-42. Work Experience—Workers by Mean Earnings and Sex," U.S. Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/historical/people/>.

Notes: Includes workers age 14 and older from 1967 to 1979 and age 15 and older beginning in 1980. Pre-1989 estimates are civilian workers only. 2002 and later estimates exclude individuals reporting more than one race.

The Education System

Education is a gateway to economic opportunity, and blacks have made considerable progress since 1960. During the past 15 years, average high school completion rates have been above 85 percent for young black and white adults regardless of gender (figure 8). In addition, blacks are much more likely to complete college today than 40 years ago (figure 9).

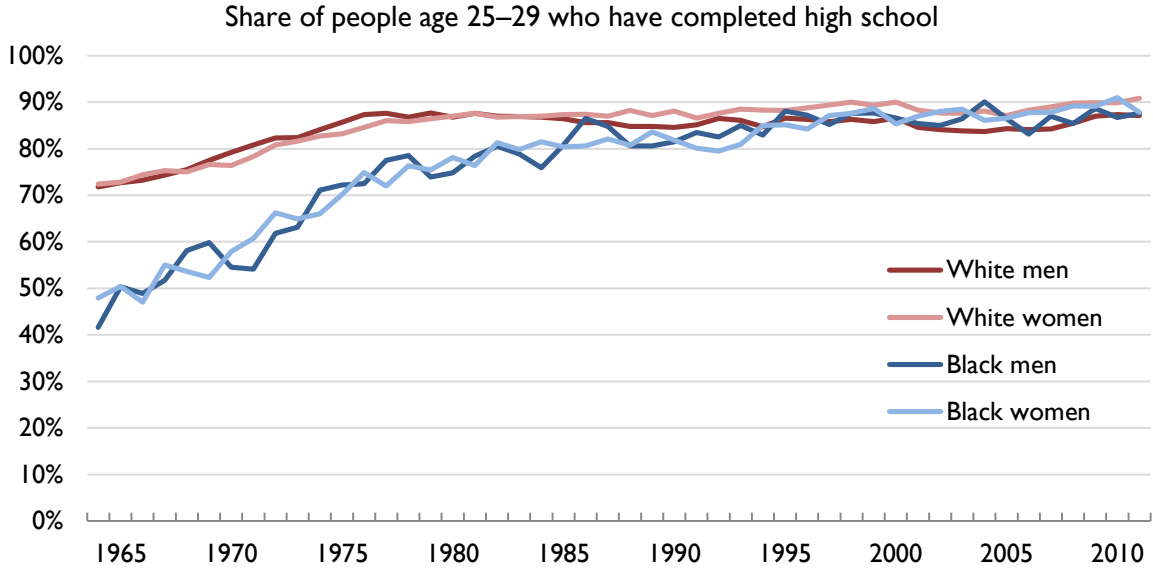
Despite this considerable progress, however, blacks—and black men in particular—are less likely to complete postsecondary degree programs than their white counterparts. Fewer than two in ten black men age 25 to 29 have college degrees compared with almost three in ten white men.

Figure 9 also shows that black women are more likely to complete college than black men, and that gender differences hold true for whites. That represents a significant shift over the past and has implications for trends in employment

and earnings by gender. The improving labor market status for women relative to men likely influences individuals' decisions about family structure and fertility.

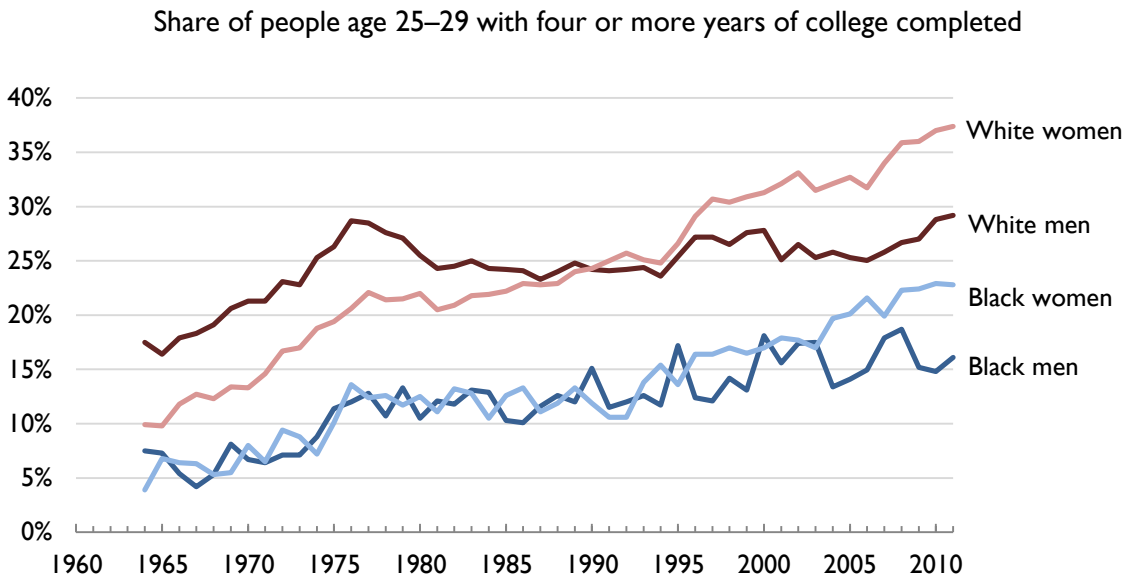
After making big progress in the civil rights movement in the '60s and early '70s, educational progress kind of stopped, and we're at a plateau. We need to move forward again.
—Dr. Irwin Garfinkel, Columbia University

Figure 8. Black-White Gap in High School Completion Rates Closed



Source: “Table A-2. Percent of People 25 Years and Over Who Have Completed High School or College, by Race, Hispanic Origin and Sex: Selected Years 1940 to 2011,” U.S. Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/education/data/cps/historical/index.html>.

Figure 9. Blacks Still behind Whites in College Completion

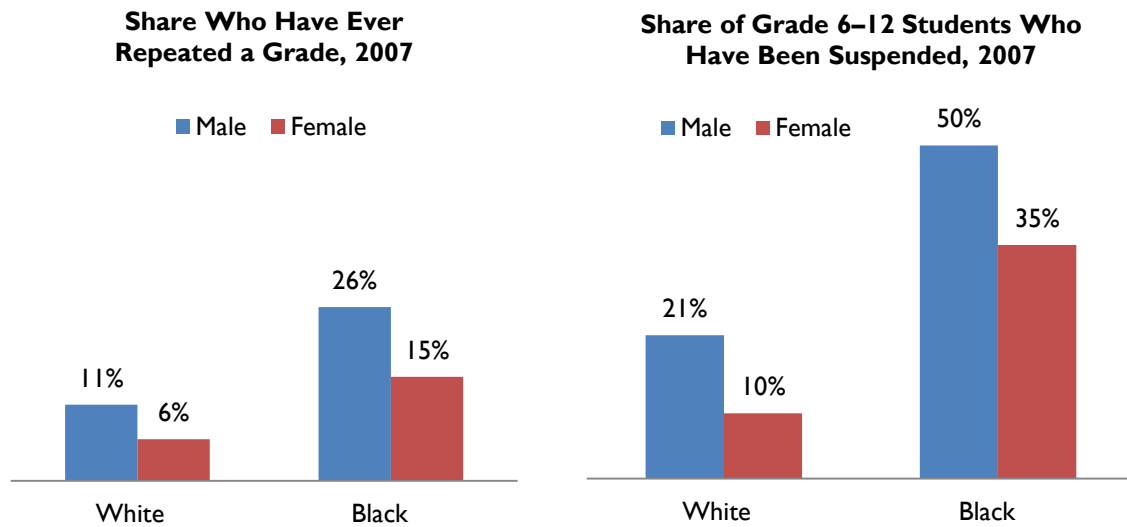


Source: “Table A-2. Percent of People 25 Years and Over Who Have Completed High School or College, by Race, Hispanic Origin and Sex: Selected Years 1940 to 2011,” U.S. Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/education/data/cps/historical/index.html>.

Although the share of young whites and blacks completing high school has roughly equalized, their school experiences differ notably, especially those of black boys. For example, 26 percent of black boys had repeated a grade in school in 2007, compared with 11 percent of white boys, 15 percent of black girls, and 6 percent of white girls (figure 10). Further, among junior high and high school students, 50 percent of black boys have been suspended compared with 21 percent of white boys.

Those school-related disparities likely mean that blacks, particularly black men, have very different schooling experiences than their white counterparts and are thus disadvantaged when they enter the labor market.

Figure 10. Public School Students' Experiences Differ Sharply by Race

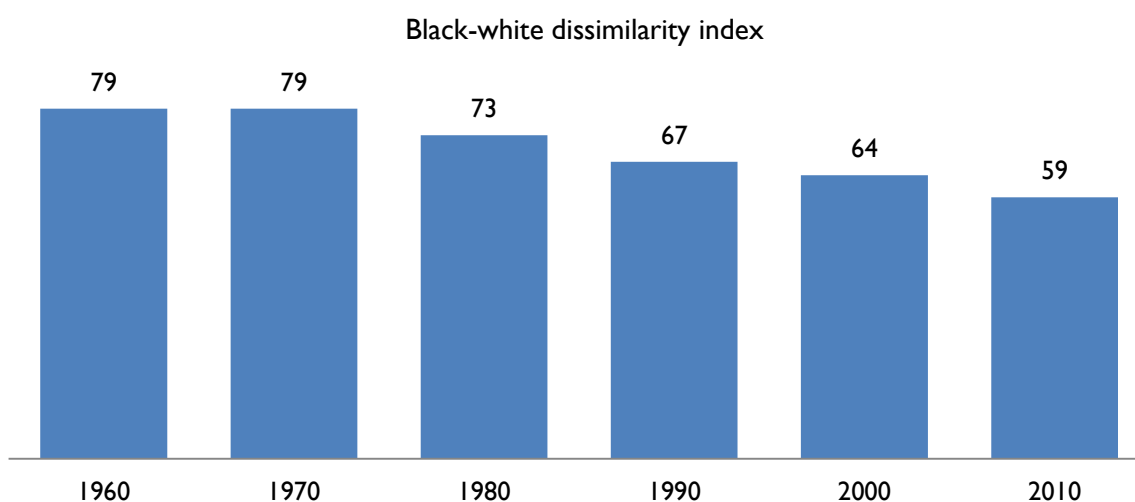


Source: Aud, Fox, and Ramani (2010), tables 17a and b.

Segregation and Concentrated Poverty

Housing segregation has declined since the 1960s, and more black families have been able to gain access to diverse neighborhoods both in cities and in suburbs. In 1960, America's neighborhoods were starkly segregated by race, and black families were routinely—and explicitly—denied homes and apartments in white neighborhoods. In the four decades since, society has made significant progress in combating housing discrimination, and the racial landscape of both cities and suburbs has changed dramatically. Many blacks have moved from central cities into suburban communities, and very few neighborhoods today remain exclusively white (Logan and Stults 2011; Turner and Rawlings 2009). But residential segregation of blacks from whites remains stubbornly high. The dissimilarity index, a widely used measure of segregation, has declined steadily since 1960 but remains at substantial levels (figure 11).³

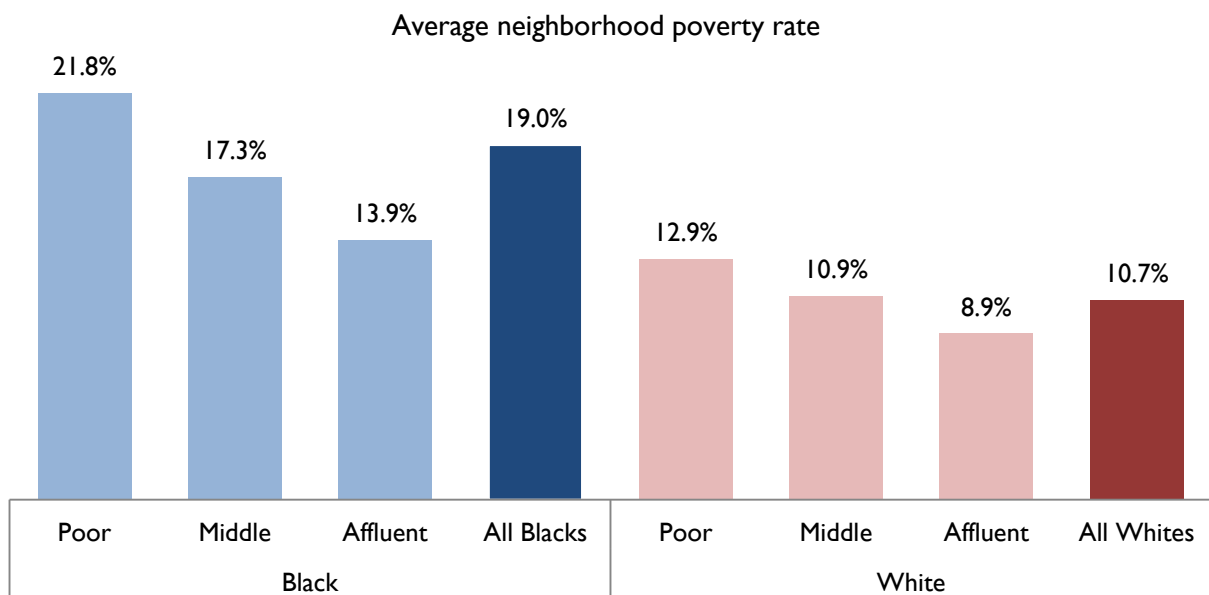
Figure 11. Residential Segregation of Blacks from Whites Declining



Source: American Communities Project, Brown University (Logan and Stults 2011).

The historical segregation of neighborhoods along racial lines fueled the geographic concentration of poverty and the severe distress of very high-poverty neighborhoods. As Massey and Denton demonstrated in *American Apartheid* (1993), discriminatory policies and practices confining urban blacks—among whom the incidence of poverty was markedly higher than for whites—to a limited selection of city neighborhoods produced much higher poverty rates than in white neighborhoods. Subsequent job losses and rising unemployment pushed poverty in many black neighborhoods even higher. Today, despite the significant decline in residential segregation, virtually all high-poverty neighborhoods (neighborhoods where more than 40 percent of the population is poor) are majority-minority, and blacks are over five times more likely than whites to live in high-poverty neighborhoods.⁴ Poor white households are much more geographically dispersed than poor black or Hispanic households. In fact, the average high-income black person lives in a neighborhood with a higher poverty rate than the average low-income white person (figure 12).

Figure 12. Blacks Live in Higher-Poverty Neighborhoods Than Whites



Source: 2005–09 American Community Survey data, tabulated by Logan (2011).

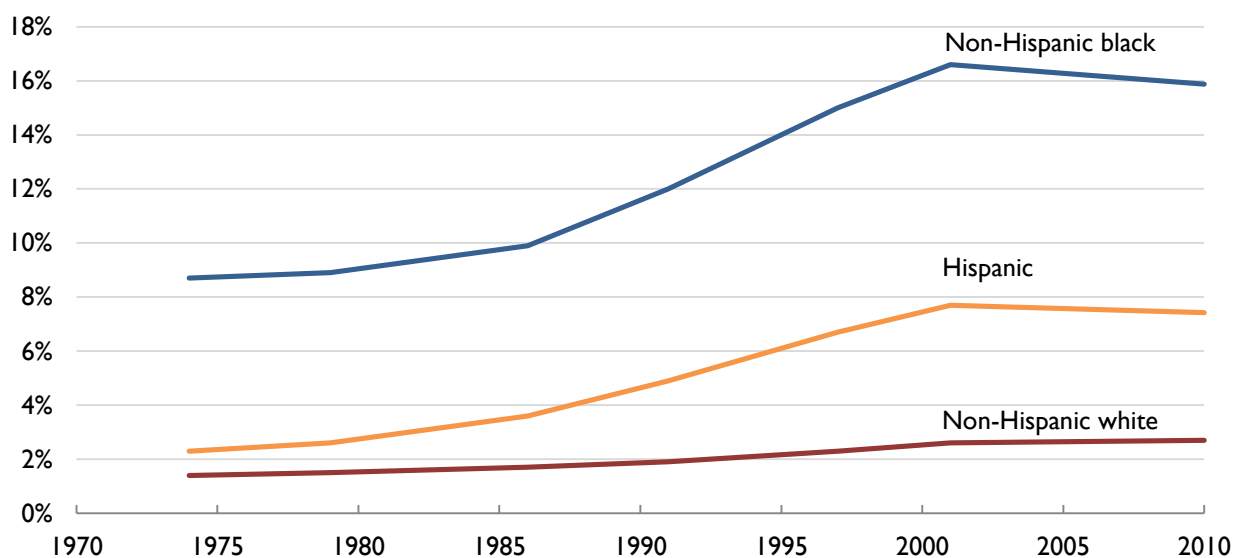
Living in profoundly poor neighborhoods undermines people's well-being and long-term life chances. High-poverty neighborhoods suffer from high rates of crime and violence, poor schools, and weak connections to the labor market. Decades of research have documented the damage these conditions inflict at every life stage. Preschool children living in low-income neighborhoods exhibit more aggressive behavior when interacting with others. Young people from high-poverty neighborhoods are less successful in school than their counterparts from more affluent communities: they earn lower grades, are more likely to drop out, and are less likely to go on to college. Neighborhood environment influences teens' sexual activity and the likelihood that teenage girls will become pregnant. Young people who live in high-crime areas are more likely to commit crimes themselves, other things being equal. And living in disadvantaged neighborhoods increases the risk of disease and mortality among both children and adults (Turner and Rawlings 2009). The concentration of disadvantage in predominantly black neighborhoods perpetuates the racial stratification from one generation to the next (Sharkey 2013).

The Criminal Justice System

The Moynihan report made only passing reference to the impact of the criminal justice system on black families. Unfortunately, the role of disproportionate incarceration has increased since the 1960s. Although active law enforcement and incarcerating violent criminals can improve community safety and improve the social and economic well-being of residents, the United States' approach to crime has disproportionately affected black communities and, some argue, may have done more harm than good.

Even in the early 1970s, black men were far more likely to have been in prison than other men (figure 13). In the following decades and with the War on Drugs contributing to the active prosecution and incarceration of those caught using or distributing even small quantities of narcotics, the proportion of black men who spent time in prison rose.

Figure 13. Black Men Have Spent Time in Prison at Disproportionately High Rates



Sources: Bonczar (2003) for 1974–2001; authors' calculations for 2010.
Note: Rates are for men ever incarcerated in state or federal prison.

By 2010, almost 1 in 6 black men had spent time in prison, compared with 1 in 33 white men. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the number of black men who were in jail or prison was roughly equal to the number enrolled in college. College enrollment rates by black men have since outstripped incarceration.⁵

The high rate of incarceration of black men profoundly affects black families and social equity. When a man is in jail or prison, he is removed from his family and community, and his children miss out on the benefits of a father's care. When a man is released from prison or jail, his economic prospects are greatly diminished as many employers will not

even consider hiring an ex-offender. Further, reentering a family and community after months or years of absence can be challenging for all concerned. To be sure, violent criminals and abusive partners and parents destabilize communities and families, and the criminal justice system must protect public safety. Nevertheless, the remarkably high rate of incarceration of black men likely contributes to the destabilization of black families, perpetuating poverty and obstructing mobility.

We spent one trillion dollars waging this drug war since it began—[a] trillion dollars—funds that could have been spent on education, job creation, drug treatment—a trillion dollars. And yet now we have more than 45 million people who have been arrested and yet rates of drug addiction and drug abuse remain largely unchanged.
—Michelle Alexander, Ohio State University

The Path Forward

Almost five decades after Daniel Patrick Moynihan issued his report on black families, the United States still struggles with many of the problems he identified. Although social progress has created opportunities for many talented members of the black community, success has been made more difficult by the high barriers many blacks face. Black poverty and unemployment rates are far higher than those of whites, black children are far more likely to be born into and raised in single-parent households than white children, and black teens and adults are far more likely to be imprisoned. Untangling the myriad factors impeding the progress of black families and increasing social and economic opportunities for blacks remains an important task for policymakers and community leaders today.

Moynihan argued that reversing the decay of the traditional two-married-parent family was the key to improving blacks' prospects. In the intervening years, however, more children of all races and ethnicities have been raised in one-parent families and cohabiting unmarried-parent families. Even 50 years ago, black poverty and social inequity was not simply a result of single parenting. Today's more complex social milieu requires a much broader strategy and set of initiatives to address the multitude of factors impeding black economic and social progress.

Untangling the web of obstacles that ensnares black families and undermines social equity requires efforts on three fronts: (1) reducing the structural barriers to black economic progress, (2) enhancing the incentives for working in the mainstream economy, and (3) improving family dynamics. Progress on these fronts can involve federal, state, local, and even individual policies and practices.

Structural barriers to black progress include criminal justice policy, residential segregation and concentrated poverty, the state of public schools in predominantly black communities, and lingering and pernicious racial discrimination. As noted earlier, the War on Drugs has taken an enormous toll on black men and families. While drug addiction and drug-related crime and violence are highly destructive to individuals, families, and communities, the mass incarceration of black men for nonviolent drug-related offenses has clearly contributed to the labor market struggles of black men and the continuing decline of traditional nuclear families in the black community, with the attendant negative consequences for children. Rather than continuing to pursue these criminal justice policies,

policymakers should consider alternative punishments for minor drug-related offenses and increase community resources for drug treatment.

Residential segregation and concentrated poverty disproportionately limit the economic opportunities of blacks. Historically, public policies played a central role in establishing and enforcing patterns of racial segregation in American neighborhoods, alongside discriminatory practices by private-sector institutions and individuals. But no single causal process explains the persistence of

residential segregation and concentrated poverty in America today. Discrimination, information gaps, stereotypes and fears, and disparities in purchasing power all work together to perpetuate segregation, even though many Americans—minority and white—say they want to live in more diverse neighborhoods.

Because the causes of segregation are interconnected, no single intervention can succeed on its own. Instead, the evidence argues for a multipronged strategy that includes (1) fair housing enforcement—to combat persistent housing market discrimination; (2) education for homeseekers of all races and ethnicities—about the availability and desirability of diverse neighborhoods; (3) affordable housing development—to open up exclusive communities to residents with a wider range of income levels; and 4) community reinvestment—to equalize the quality of services, amenities, and infrastructure in minority neighborhoods.

Although blacks have closed the gap in high school graduation with whites, they still lag behind whites in college completion. Policymakers perpetually decry failing schools and promote a wide variety of potential reforms, from more accountability to smaller class sizes to charter schools and vouchers. While there is no consensus on the best way to reform education, intensive programs that engage parents before their children are even ready to start school and support those children through high school, such as the Harlem Children’s Zone, illustrate the type of effort that may increase the educational and future economic opportunities for black children.

If we are serious about healing families, building families, repairing our communities, we have got to be willing to commit ourselves to the abolition of this system of mass incarceration as a whole. And that means ending the drug war once and for all. There is no path—no path to healing our communities, rebuilding families and ghettoized communities—that includes this War on Drugs.
—Michelle Alexander, Ohio State University

Although the level of overt discrimination in the United States has diminished markedly since the 1960s, race remains a factor in determining economic opportunities and outcomes. Whether discrimination is overt, subconscious, or based on statistical profiling, it impedes black economic progress. Continued, aggressive enforcement of antidiscrimination statutes as well as affirmative action policies are required to ensure equal opportunity.

Raising the rewards of working, particular for younger, less-skilled individuals not living with children, could have particularly strong socioeconomic benefits for blacks. A minimum-wage job today does not pay enough to keep a family out of poverty. And while low-earning custodial parents can use the earned income tax credit (EITC) to greatly supplement their families' incomes, the EITC for single adults is rather meager. As such, unmarried men who have no children or are living apart from their children and can only secure low-wage work may find working in the mainstream economy not worth the effort. Increasing the EITC for single adults could encourage more work among single men. Those men may then become established in the mainstream economy and be better positioned to support their future families financially.

Family structure and family dynamics influence children's development and future prospects. Children born into single-mother families are far more likely to be poor and persistently poor than children born into two-parent families. Providing information and access to contraception to low-income couples so they can avoid unintended pregnancies could reduce nonmarital childbearing. In addition, improving access to relationship resources through school, church, and Internet-based platforms could help young parents form more stable cohabiting and marital relationships. Such changes could improve the social and economic well-being of children and lead to better adult outcomes for those children.

Child support enforcement can channel much-needed resources to low-income women and children but may have adverse effects on noncustodial fathers. Men who are unable to pay their full child support amount or their arrears may opt out of the mainstream labor market to avoid automatic garnishment of their wages. As a result, less money flows to the child, and the father loses mainstream job experience that could help him support a family in the future. More flexible awards that adjust as the father's economic circumstances change as well as policies that allow time spent

with children to constitute part of the award may keep noncustodial fathers more engaged in their children's lives both emotionally and financially.

Finally, the decline of the traditional two-parent household among all racial groups has given rise to very complex families. Even in a family in which a mother and father live together, the mother may have a child from a previous relationship that lives with her and the father may have a child from a previous relationship that lives elsewhere. The adults and children in such households are interacting with adults and children living elsewhere who all have claims on their affection, time, and resources. Community service and other organizations need to be equipped to help complex families navigate the emotional, logistical, and financial challenges that come along with their complexity.

Debates about the status and progress of black families in the United States started before the Moynihan report and have clearly raged since. The report focused on how black family structure contributed to a host of factors that all impeded progress toward social equity. In the decades since its release, many of the social trends that concerned Moynihan have worsened for blacks and nonblacks alike. Today it is clear that no one factor by itself holds the key to economic and social progress. Policymakers, community leaders, and individuals themselves must act to enhance economic opportunities and social equity for black men and families. Otherwise, we may spend the next 50 years lamenting our continued lack of progress.

Notes

¹ Only “white” and “nonwhite” breakdowns by race are available for some of the historical data series examined in this report. In 1960, the population makeup of the United States was approximately 85 percent non-Hispanic white, 3.5 percent Hispanic, 11 percent non-Hispanic black, and less than 1 percent Asian, Native American, or other racial groups (Passel and Cohn 2008). Thus, the nonwhite figures are likely composed of about 75 percent non-Hispanic black individuals.

² “Table 4. Poverty Status of Families, by Type of Family, Presence of Related Children, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1959 to 2011,” U.S. Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/historical/families.html>.

³ The dissimilarity index ranges from 0 to 100, where a value of 0 means both groups are equally represented in every neighborhood and a value of 100 means that they share no neighborhoods. See Logan and Stults (2011) for more details.

⁴ Authors’ calculations from 2006–10 American Community Survey figures reported by Bishaw (2011).

⁵ There were 791,600 non-Hispanic black men in state or federal prisons or local jails at midyear 2000 (Beck and Karberg 2001) and 789,000 similarly situated men in midyear 2010 (authors’ calculations from Glaze 2011). The number of non-Hispanic black men enrolled in degree-granting institutions of higher education was 635,000 in fall 2000 and 1,089,100 in fall 2010 (“Table 237. Total Fall Enrollment in Degree-Granting Institutions, by Level of Student, Sex, Attendance Status, and Race/Ethnicity: Selected Years, 1976 through 2010,” National Center for Education Statistics, http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11_237.asp).

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