

The (Poor) State of Black Families

By: Bobbi Bowman

Posted: March 2, 2010 at 6:57 AM

Despite the progress African Americans have made on income and education, when it comes to marriage and families, the numbers are bleak.

Marriage

Nearly half of black Americans have never married—the highest percentage for all racial groups. Only 30 percent of blacks are now married.

Married couples make up nearly three-quarters of all U.S. families. Among black families that number falls to 44 percent.

The Children

Black kids in the United States are in deep trouble.

Nearly 10 million black families lived in the United States in 2007. Twenty-one percent of these families were married couples with children. This is the lowest for all racial groups. The U.S. average is 32.4 percent.

But nearly one-third of these families were single mothers with children under 18. The U.S. average is 12.1 percent.

Slightly less than 20 percent of black families were grandparents raising their grandchildren. The U.S. average is 10 percent.

No surprise then that slightly more than half of black kids live with only one parent and that's overwhelmingly with their mother. A home headed by a single mom often equals an economically poor home.

Historical Look

In 1960, the proportion of black children living with a single parent was 20 percent. By 1970, that number had grown to 30 percent. The numbers for intact families slid throughout the 1970s. Black families started crumbling in the 1980s.

In 1980, more black children were living with a single parent than with two parents (43.9 percent versus 42.2 percent, respectively). Black single-mom families continued to mushroom, making them a stark contrast with most U.S. families where children lived with both mom and dad.

Working Moms

The likelihood of having a family member with a job declined from 2007 to 2008 for white, black and Hispanic families. Asian families remained the most likely to have an employed family member (90 percent) in 2008, followed by Hispanic families (87 percent) and white families (82 percent). Black families remained the least likely to have an employed family member (78 percent).

Historically, black mothers with children under 18 have been more likely than white mothers with children under 18 to work. In 2008, 76.7 percent of black mothers worked, compared with 70.8 percent of white mothers. In 2008, 61.4 percent of Hispanic mothers and 68.8 percent of Asian mothers worked.

Single-Mom Homes = A Poor Family

Black married-couple families have a median income of more than \$65,000 a year, the lowest for all races.

But the median income for a black family headed by a woman is about \$26,000 a year. The poverty threshold for a family of four is \$22,000 a year.

Nearly half of young black children living with their mom are poor. "They are going to start out in poverty. They will go to schools that are failing or will be labeled as failing," Roderick Harrison, the founding director of DataBank at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, said when I first wrote about black families in 2008. "At 17, they are three years behind the white students." The gaps don't get closed by the education system—this leads to the higher dropout rates, higher unemployment rates and single parenthood again, he said.

As candidate Barack Obama, who was raised by his mother and grandparents, said in his June 2008 Father's Day speech: "... if we are honest with ourselves, we'll admit that what too many fathers also are is missing from too many lives and too many homes. They have abandoned their responsibilities, acting like boys instead of men. And the foundations of our families are weaker because of it."

Become a fan of [The Root on Facebook](#). Follow us on [Twitter](#).

[2010 census](#) [2010 census and African Americans](#) [black families and 2010 census](#) [black single mothers](#) [family](#) [Politics](#)

Source URL: <http://www.theroot.com/views/poor-state-black-families>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.theroot.com/users/bobbibowman>
- [2] <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam.html>
- [3] <http://www.census.gov/prod/2008pubs/p70-114.pdf>
- [4] <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam.html#ht>
- [5] http://www.bls.gov/cps/race_ethnicity_2008_families.htm
- [6] <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/09poverty.shtml>
- [7] <http://www.facebook.com/theroot>
- [8] <http://www.twitter.com/theroot247>