

# Justice delayed: Time to do right by children—now

By Marian Wright Edelman  
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This June brought some extraordinary stories in the news about new victories to correct very old injustices. On June 21, many of us rejoiced when we heard there was finally a conviction of former KKK member Edgar Ray Killen for manslaughter in the deaths of three civil rights workers: James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner. It came 41 years to the day after those murders took place on a dark, awful night in Neshoba County, Miss. Members of all three men's families attended the trial, and Carolyn Goodman, Andrew Goodman's mother, summed up what many felt: "It's the end of a long, long struggle."

She told reporters about a conversation she had had almost 40 years ago with her late husband, Robert: "He said, 'I don't know if I'll live to see it, but justice will come.' I said, 'I hope so, Baby.' He was right." While a lot late and not full justice, it was a step forward in righting old wrongs.

That same week, Virginia announced the names of the first 60 recipients of its Brown v. Board of Education Scholarships, designated for people who had been victimized as children by the state's "massive resistance" campaign against desegregation between 1954 and 1964. The state of Virginia simply shut down the public schools in four districts rather than integrate. Many White students

in those districts went to newly-formed private schools while many Black and less privileged White students were forced to stop their educations when the schools closed. Through the new scholarship program, students who moved or dropped out of school because of those closings — all now middle-aged or older — are receiving grants to help them return to school for a high school or college diploma.

"You can never replace those lost years," Virginia Governor Mark Warner correctly said, "but this at least goes a partial way to [repay] the debt we owe to these folks."

The U.S. Senate also recently passed a resolution apologizing for its failure to pass an anti-lynching bill — 105 years after an anti-lynching bill was first proposed. During that 100 years, the House of Representatives had passed legislation three separate times to make lynching a federal crime only to have it struck down in the Senate each time with passionate opposition from powerful Southern senators. Some of those Jim Crow Senators actually argued on the Senate floor that lynching helped keep law and order in their states. Law and order for Whites meant death and devastation for Blacks. Between 1882 and 1968, more than 4,700 Americans — mostly Black men — were lynched.

Many descendants and family members of lynching victims were invited to witness the Senate's apology, including Simeon

Wright, Emmett Till's cousin.

"Years ago, African-Americans were being beaten and hung, and the people who had the power to do something about it were afraid to do anything or just didn't," he said. "Now, their sons and daughters realize how wrong they were, and they want to do something. The apology is appropriate. It was a long time coming, but it is here."

What can we learn from these long overdue steps to right profound wrong? It's never too late to do the just thing. But wouldn't it have been so much better if these injustices had been acknowledged and repaired when they happened — or if they had just never taken place in the first place?

This summer, our nation is standing on the precipice of a new injustice for which we could be apologizing to our children for years to come. In April, Congress passed a budget resolution to cut critical services for vulnerable children while giving extravagant irresponsible tax benefits to the wealthiest Americans. Over the past four years, Congress has bestowed \$5.1 trillion in tax cuts that mostly benefit the top 2 percent of Americans.

Now Congress wants to provide \$106 billion more in tax cuts that will go mostly to the wealthy. While the rich are getting huge tax breaks, children are threatened with budget cuts, caps and freezes on health care, child care, Head Start, food stamps and more. Mil-

lions of our children will suffer twice if unjust administration and congressional proposals are enacted: They'll be denied vital investments they need today to stay healthy and get educated, and they'll be saddled as adults with a crushing debt.

We only have until mid-September to convince Congress that denying hope and opportunity to children will result in too many more Black and Latino children getting sucked into a "Cradle to Prison Pipeline" crisis.

What can we do about it? Stand up for justice for children and the poor, and tell your members of Congress to stop tax cuts for the wealthy and protect funding to critical programs for children. As Congress deliberates on final decisions between now and September, your outraged voices must be heard saying it is plain wrong to rob children to pamper millionaires.

Let's not find ourselves apologizing and repairing damage again in 40 or 50 or 100 years. Let's make sure we do the right thing right now for our children, who are dying from guns and drugs and filling our prisons. It is time to say no to the criminalization of children at younger and younger ages and the building of a booming prison industry on the backs of those least able to bear such an inhumane burden.

Marian Wright Edelman is CEO and founder of the Children's Defense Fund.

## Black families' problems linked to slavery's impact

By Hazel Trice Edney  
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WASHINGTON (NNPA) — The tenets of American slavery, with its disregard for the cohesion of the Black family — the auctions and sales of family members and use of the Black man as a stud to increase the slave owner's stock — may be a main cause of what appears to be a modern day failure of the Black family, says a study released by a Boston, Mass.-based Black Christian think tank.

"The unique historical experience of slavery has exacted a high price on Black people in the United States," says the report by the Seymour Institute for Advanced Christian Studies.

"The impact of the decay of marriage among Black people has been enormous, resulting in higher poverty rates among Black families, school failure among children, and the inter-generational transmission of high teen pregnancy rates and female-headed households. Sociological research has implicated fatherlessness in violence, drug use, and criminal behavior, especially among young Black males."

The Seymour Institute is headed by the Rev. Eugene Rivers III, co-founder of the Azusa Christian Community in Boston.

The report, titled, "God's Gift: A Christian Vision of Marriage and the Black Family," says a significant answer to the crisis in the Black family is the Black church returning to its leading role in being an example and speaking out against social ills and immorality.

Statistics compiled by Seymour, in part, from 2002 U. S. Census data paint an ominous picture:

- Blacks were 38.6 percent less likely than Whites to be married at all, 35 percent to 57 percent.

- With 8.8 million Black families and 53.6 million White families in the U. S., nearly half of the Black families, 48 percent, were intact, married mother-father couples, while 43 percent were Black unmarried female-headed households, and 9 percent were unmarried male-headed households.

In comparison, 83 percent of White families were married male-female households (73 percent higher than Black families), 13 percent of White females were unmarried female-headed households (70 percent less than Blacks), and unmarried males headed only 5 percent of the White families (44 percent less than Blacks).

- Though economic differences between Blacks and

Whites are drastic, the report cites researchers who show that low marriage rates among Black fathers cannot be explained by income or unemployment.

"Even among high-earning young men, Blacks are much less likely than Whites to be married and living with their wives. Of the 27- to 29-year-old men with earnings over \$25,000, 53 percent of Blacks were married, spouse present, verses 68 percent of Whites (28 percent higher).

"In a significant percentage of cases, Black men and women simply don't get married," the report states. "Some Black women have a series of children, each fathered by a different man and raised in a female-headed household. High unemployment rates among Black men and their limited access to well-paying jobs have had a corrosive effect on relationships between Black couples. Another powerful contributor to the erosion of meaningful long-term relationships between Black men and women has been a lack of sexual fidelity, especially on the part of Black men, resulting in embittered relations between Black men and women, both married and unmarried."

The report concedes that marriage rates among Blacks may also be down because of

the unavailability of marriageable Black men because of incarceration, murder rates and other social ills.

"Sociologist Daniel T. Lichter noted the severity of these sex ratios, observing that 'for every three Black unmarried women in their 20s, there is roughly one unmarried man with earnings above the poverty threshold,'" the report states.

The key answer, the report states, is in the role of the Black church, which the report describes as, "the absent voice."

"The Black Church has been the leading institution among Black people for most of their history in the United States. The church has played a very important role in the Black community in many times of crisis. Its impact on the definitive changes wrought by the civil rights struggle is one powerful example," it states.

"But, the church has been largely silent on the decline of the Black family, in part because a number of church leaders have themselves not led an exemplary life in this regard. Even in the recent past, leading Black clergymen have been caught in nationally publicized sexual scandals. Despite this sad fact, the church must now take a stand on this issue. At this time in history, it is es-

sential that the Black community have a clear and proper understanding of the true meaning and function of marriage and family."

Public policies are among other answers, the report states, but even with new laws and programs Black church leaders must be involved.

As an example, the report cites the Bush Administration's efforts to promote marriage between unmarried parents.

"Officials need to hear Black churches' recommendations on the most effective methods based on their experience serving these populations," the report states.

"The Black church must seize this opportunity to encourage the administration and Congress to pursue family-friendly and father-friendly social policies."

The Seymour Institute was founded in 1985 by Rivers and a group of Black Christian intellectuals and activists at Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Rivers is widely known for his anti-crime activism in Boston, including his 10-point Coalition, a church-based anti-crime coalition.

He has also been involved with President Bush's Faith-based Initiatives.

A picture of him, among

several other ministers, is posted on the White House website with Bush as he introduced a new "Religious Hiring Rights" handbook in 2003.

The new report is billed as being non-partisan and based on meticulous statistical analysis, Seymour states. "Not since 1965 when the late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan authored an historic and controversial study entitled, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," has there been an analysis of the Black family that transcends partisan politics.

So thorough, insightful, penetrating, and so complete that it resonates with every faction of the Black community.

Concluding the 44-page report, Seymour issues a challenge to the Black church:

"The challenge before the Black churches in the United States is to vigorously articulate and promote a clear and deep Christian philosophical anthropology of human sexuality, marriage, and the family," the report states.

"The Black Church, as the major Black-owned and operated organization, can ignite and sustain this necessary transformation. Black survival in 21st century America depends on it."