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ABSTRACT

This research paper defines the present day black family, discusses trends and problems and discusses why there will be less young men and women available to mobilize during a national emergency in the United States.

First the black family is defined and the desire of most black to be married is pointed out. The part adoption, formal and informal, play in the black family are discussed.

The trends of marital status, black class structure, fertility rates, and unemployment and the cause of these trends are then pointed out.

The major black family problems of crime, drug and alcohol abuse, AIDS, teenage pregnancy and lack of male role models are then discussed and the conclusion drawn that there is a decreasing amount of black youth available to mobilize to serve in the military in case of a national emergency.

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Mobilizing Black America: The Family Problem

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The purpose of this research paper is to discuss black family problems as they relate to mobilizing black Americans for defense of United States national interests. Black Americans make up 12.1 percent of the U.S. population, and represent a significant human resource for the military. But because of significant social problems only a fraction of black America is available for mobilization and following the present trends, this number will decrease with time. Reconstitution is a major part of our military strategy. To carryout this part of our strategy we need to have an available pool of young men and women qualified and able to serve in the military. This paper defines the present day black family, its trends, its problems and the availability of its members to mobilize if needed. There are many strengths and favorable trends in the black family but this paper will focus on the problems that make less black men and women productive members of our society.

MYTHS ABOUT THE BLACK FAMILY

Because of much bad publicity there are many deep routed misconceptions about the black family. Daniel P. Moynihan's 1965 report, *The Negro Family: A Case For National Action* (Rainwater and Yancey, 1967) implied that the disorganized black society was a result of the deteriorating black family. He cited statistics, based on census data, on the dissolution of black marriages, the high rate of black illegitimate births and the prevalence of female headed households to make the point that blacks themselves were the cause of problems in their community not the American social structure. This was a government publication and it implied a

shift in the government's position on dealing with the effects of racism and economic deprivation on the black community.¹ Over the past two decades, this deficit model has been the predominant perspective projected by the news media in their coverage of black families. In late 1983, the *New York Times* presented a series of articles on "The Black Family", which focused almost solely on poor one-parent families on welfare, a group that comprises only about 15% of all black families. In 1984, the *Baltimore Sun* also ran a series of articles on "The Black Family" that was so stereotyped that the black community launched a boycott of that newspaper. And in January 1986, Bill Moyer produced a CBS-TV documentary on black families that characterized single-parent families as "vanishing" non-families. A recent analysis of the media conducted by the University of Michigan (Jackson, 1982) reveals that black families continue to be portrayed stereotypically in both the television and print media.² Because of many misconceptions about the black family, development of usable solutions for strengthening the black family is impossible. For example, it is widely assumed that the problem of poverty in the black community can be resolved by simply reforming the welfare system. Yet such an assumption fails to recognize that half the poor blacks are not on welfare and thus would remain in poverty after such "reform." Similarly, it is widely believed that poverty can be eliminated by simply providing

¹Robert Staples, "Social structure and Black Family Life", *JOURNAL OF BLACK STUDIES*, March 1987.

²Robert B. Hill, *Research on the African-American Family: A Holistic Perspective*, William Monroe Trotter Institute, University of Massachusetts at Boston, 1989

jobs. However, such a policy fails to confront the fact that two million people in the United States currently work year-round, full-time, but still remain in poverty³. Lets now look at what makes up the black family of today.

WHAT IS THE BLACK FAMILY ?

The National Urban League defines the black family as an intimate association of persons of African-American descent living in America who are related to each other by a variety of means including blood, marriage, formal adoption, informal adoption, or by appropriation; sustained by a history of common residence; and deeply imbedded in a network of social structures both internal to and external to themselves.⁴ This definition could easily fit whites, hispanics and many other ethnic groups.

The foundation of the black family is a nuclear family composed of husband and wife or single parent and their children. The second element is the extended family made by joining the nuclear core with other relatives. The third element is the augmented family. This element is formed by adding non-relatives to the extended family.⁵

³Ibid

⁴The State of Black America, 1990, Published by National Urban League, Inc. ,January 1990.

⁵Ibid

Blood ties are the strongest bond in the black community, followed closely by marriage. Marriage in the black community is not just a union of two people, it is the joining of two families by a common bond. From the end of slavery until 1990, a majority of black families have been married-couple families. The value placed on marriage is still so strong that a majority of African-Americans, youth and adults, want to be married; and even when one marriage is dissolved, a majority seek still another.⁶

Adoption, formal and informal, is another important element in the black family. While it is not generally reported, the fact is that middle-income African-American families formally adopt children at a higher rate than their white counterparts⁷.

Informal adoption is very prevalent in the black community. Black children born out of wedlock are often cared for by their grandmother with out the benefit of legal adoption.

The term appropriation used in the definition of the black family describes people who become part of a family by living and acting toward each other as family. This is however a rare occurrence. One example is described by Andrew Billingsley in his book *Climbing Jacob's Ladder*. He recounted a story told by the Rev. Otis Moss, senior pastor of the Olivert Institutional Baptist Church,

⁶Ibid

⁷Ibid

Cleveland, OH, whose mother died when he was quite young. His father died tragically in an automobile accident a few years later. While young Otis stared in shock at the car wreckage, a neighbor woman came by, took him by the arm, and said, "come home with me." There was never anything formal or legal, but Otis grew up in this family, went to college, and launched into his adult life, all with the benefit of a caring family.⁸ Figure 1 shows the make up of present day black families compared to white families.

TYPE OF FAMILY BY RACE, 1990 (Number in Thousands)		
<u>TYPE OF FAMILY</u>	<u>BLACK</u>	<u>WHITE</u>
All Families	7,470	56,590
Percent	100	100
Married-Couple Families	50.2	83.0
Female Householder no husband present	43.8	12.9
Male Householder no wife present	6.0	4.1

Source: Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey, March 1990

One can not describe or define the black family without using the word diversity. There are many exceptions to the listed categories and because the black family is hard to define and the causes of their problems are varied, solutions to solving these problems are

⁸Howard and Wanda Jones, **Heritage and Hope**, Victor Books 1992.

complex and difficult to formulate. The black lower class family is made up of the elderly, the mentally ill, welfare recipients, ex-offenders, people in prison and the homeless, just to name a few of the categories they fall into. The black family is also dynamic. Black families move from the lower class to middle class and visa versa. Although this paper focusses primarily on black family problems, I do not want to imply that all single parent families are poor and/or have problems. The problems of crime, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy affect all families regardless of income level. Now lets discuss some of the trends of the black family.

BLACK FAMILY TRENDS

Since 1960 the trends in marital status, fertility, marital stability, and child rearing for both blacks and whites have been similar. Those trends include:

- lower marriage rates and a delayed age at first marriage
- higher divorce rates
- lower birth rates
- earlier and increased sexual activity among adolescents
- a higher proportion of births to unmarried mothers
- higher percentages of children living in female-headed families
- a higher proportion of women working outside the home
- a higher percentage of children living in poverty

There are differences in the rates of change for these trends and

some of the causes differ for blacks and whites. In 1990 black husband-wife families were 51 percent of all black families. Forty-three percent of black families are headed by a women compared to 13 percent of white families. Fifty-one percent of all black children lived with their mothers but not their fathers compared to 16 percent of white children. In 1987, forty five percent of all black children under age 18 lived in families below the poverty level compared to 15 percent for white children.⁹ These figures show that almost half of black families are headed by single parents, mostly mothers, and more than half of black children grow up below the poverty line. How did the black family get into this situation when in 1940 husband-wife families made up 76 percent of all black families?

There are several social and economic factors that have caused the disintegration of the traditional two-parent black family. The ability to produce enough income to sustain a family is one of the main causes. Figures 2,3 and 4. shows unemployment statistics and indicate that black unemployment is more than double the unemployment in the white community.

⁹Statistical Record of Black America, Carrell P. Horton, Gale Research Inc., Detroit, MI. 1990

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES
TOTAL POPULATION

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>BLACK</u>	<u>WHITE</u>
1989 ^a	11.3	4.5
1988	11.7	4.7
1987	13.0	5.3
1985	15.0	6.2
1982	18.9	8.6
1980	14.3	6.3
1978	12.8	5.2
1972	10.2	5.1

Figure 2

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES
MEN (20 YEARS AND OVER)

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>BLACK</u>	<u>WHITE</u>
1989 ^a	9.8	3.9
1988	10.1	4.1
1987	11.1	4.8
1985	13.2	5.4
1982	17.8	7.8
1980	14.5	5.3
1978	9.3	3.7
1972	7.0	3.6

Figure 3

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES
WOMEN (20 YEARS AND OVER)

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>BLACK</u>	<u>WHITE</u>
1989*	9.7	4.0
1988	10.4	4.1
1987	11.6	4.6
1985	13.1	5.1
1982	15.4	7.3
1980	14.0	5.6
1978	11.2	5.2

Figure 4

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Handbook of Labor Statistics, June 1985, pp69, 71, 72, and 73; Employment and Earnings, January 1989 and October 1989. * Average of first three quarters for 1989.

The number of unemployed black family heads jumped from 122,000 to 504,000 between 1969 and 1985, while their jobless rate tripled from 3.5% to 11.1%. Over the same period, the number of unemployed white family heads tripled from 631,000 to 1,944,000, raising their jobless rate from 1.7% to 4.7%. Heads of both two-parent and one-parent families were strongly affected by unemployment. The number

of unemployed black husbands rose from 84,000 to 188,000 between 1969 and 1985, while their jobless rate rose from 2.9% to 7.1%. In 1969, only 38,000 (5.6%) of black women heading families were unemployed. By 1985, seven times as many female heads of black families were unemployed (273,000), while their jobless rate tripled to 16.4%.

Among white families, the jobless rate went from 1.5% to 4.2% among husbands and from 3.6% to 7.8% among female heads between 1969 and 1985.¹⁰ From 1985 to 1989, the unemployment rates have decreased for everyone but the overall unemployment rate of 11.3% for blacks is still almost three times the 4.5% unemployment rate for whites.

These high levels of unemployment have been the single most detrimental problem of the black family. The reduced level of income has promoted family dysfunction. As our economy shifted from an industry-based economy to a service-based one, blacks have been pushed out of available jobs and not retrained for high-paying jobs in high technology. Many blacks who migrated to the urban North now find less opportunity there. This lack of employment opportunity is present in most urban areas in the United States where over 57% of blacks live. This is the highest concentration in the central cities of any racial and ethnic group.¹¹

¹⁰Robert B. Hill, **Research on the African-American Family: A Holistic Perspective**, William Monroe Trotter Institute, University of Massachusetts at Boston, 1989

¹¹Robert D. Bullard, "Urban Infrastructure's Social, Environmental and Health Risks to African-Americans," **The State of Black America 1992**, Published by National Urban League, Inc.,

Unemployment of young black males prohibits them from making enough money to support a family, this promotes a growing trend of young men that fail to marry but still father children which leads to more black children growing up in single-parent households and in poverty. Black couples who encounter income problems because of unemployment are finding it harder to stay together. A newspaper article printed information from a U.S. Census Bureau report released in January 1993 stating couples heading two-parent families are nearly twice as likely to separate or divorce if they're living in poverty. It also said poor African-American families are nearly twice as likely to break up as poor white or Hispanic families, which may be at least partly explained by the fact that black poverty is deeper than white poverty. The families with the best chance of staying together are those in which the husband works full time and the wife works part time. These findings represent important new evidence in the investigation of the disturbing national decline in two-parent families and increase in single-parent households over the past two decades a trend that has been particularly pronounced among blacks.¹²

The black community has evolved into two basic classes of blacks in America, the black poor and the black middle/upper class. The most important trend regarding this black class structure is the birth rate of the black poor is much higher than the black middle/upper

January 1992

¹²The Ledger-Star, Saturday 15, 1993 page A5

class. Some blacks rise above the poverty level, but that number is offset by the growing number caught in the cycle of poverty.

There are a number of reasons for the low birth rate of the black middle/upper class. They begin child-bearing much later in life after a relatively long educational period.¹³ And because equally educated blacks earn less than whites, middle class blacks are more likely than whites to have two parents working. The medium income level of black married couples, in 1991, was \$33,309 as compared to a medium income level of \$41,506 for white married couples.¹⁴ Therefore, it is hardly surprising that both spouses work among 60% of married black couples as opposed to 49% among married white couples.¹⁵ However, not only does the black middle/upper class have fewer children than the black lower class, but research indicates that these children are much more likely to be female than male.¹⁶ These females often grow up, attend college and maintain their status in the middle class. Black males however do not do as well in high school as black females, and don't attend college in the same numbers as black females. In 1991, there were

¹³Ruth McKay, "One Child Families and Atypical Sex Ratios in an Elite Black Community", **THE BLACK FAMILY**, Robert Staples, Wadsworth Publishing, 1978

¹⁴ U. S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey 1991, Report Number 169, p.60

¹⁵

¹⁶Ruth McKay, "One Child Families and Atypical Sex Ratios on an Elite Black Community", **THE BLACK FAMILY**, Robert Staples, Wadsworth Publishing, 1978

523,000 black males enrolled in college, compared to 667,000 black females.¹⁷ This indicates a 22 percent higher enrollment rate for black females compared to black males. Since less black males attend college, less reach middle class status, resulting in many more college educated middle class black females in relation to college educated middle class black males. This imbalance sex ratio in the black middle class also adds to the low birth rate. The norm in American culture is for the man to be more educated and have a higher income than the women. But because this is not the case in the black middle class. Black women have a smaller pool of available black males with similar backgrounds which leads to women taking longer to find a mate, and marrying at an older age thus reducing the number of reproductive years. A number of professional black women are opting for single motherhood, but single middle class mothers cannot maintain families as large as their counterparts in two wage-earner families.¹⁸

The story is completely different however, among the black poor. Because of several reasons the birth rate of the black poor is increasing. As black men were pushed from the labor force in the early 1970's, there was a rapid increase in the number of women heading households. One reason for this was the federal welfare policies that forced men to leave their families. Under a policy

¹⁷The State of Black America, 1993. National Urban League, Inc.

¹⁸Andrew Hacker, U/S A Statistical Portrait of the American People, New York: Viking Press, 1983

that was popularly known as the "no-man-in-the-house rule," a family could receive welfare only if there was no able bodied male head of household in the home.¹⁹ Black female-headed families are one of the most impoverished groups in America. In 1988, 49 percent of black female headed families lived below the poverty line, compared to 26.5 percent of white female headed families.²⁰ Presently among black Americans, 56.3% of female-headed families were in poverty, as compared to 12.5% of married couple families.²¹ Single-parent black families tend to be poor for several reasons. First, it takes two-parent income in the black family to maintain a middle class income. Second, black women who form single-parent house-holds generally come from low income families and often lack the skills to generate high income. Third, because of the high cost of health care and lack of adequate health insurance associated with low paying occupations, many black single mothers cannot earn enough from employment to justify working, so they depend on welfare and food stamps.²² This is the start of a cycle of poverty because black children who reside with one parent are more likely not to finish high school, more likely to have a teenage or premarital birth and more likely to have a marital

¹⁹Joyce A. Ladner, "Our Families Then and Now", ESSENCE ,May 1990.

²⁰U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census

²¹Carrell P. Horton, **STATISTICAL RECORD OF BLACK AMERICA**, Gale Research Inc. Detroit, 1990.

²²Robert Joseph Taylor, " Developments of Research on Black Families: A Decade Review", JOURNAL OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY, November 1990

disruption. These trends are increasing the number of black children growing up in poverty, a condition that weakens their potential to be productive citizens and eliminates some of them from the available pool of young men and women able to mobilize. The smaller number of black children not growing up in poverty are available to mobilize but their numbers are decreasing with time. What is the cause of black youth being unavailable in the pool required for mobilization ? Lets now discuss the other major problems in the black family. We have already talked about unemployment.

MAJOR BLACK FAMILY PROBLEMS

Crime and drug abuse is a growing problem in America. The problem is more pervasive in the urban areas, thus more acute in the black community. Crime and drug abuse are discussed together because it is very difficult in terms of the black community to talk about one without referring to the other. The high rates of unemployment of young black males has made them less able to function in today's society. Unlike poor women with children, they are not eligible for public assistance. Sources of income for them are very limited. Many still live with parents or other relatives. Some find shelter with women on public assistance. The majority of young black males in trouble come from families with no strong male role model. In this situation, with little hope of participation in mainstream America, many resort to crime and the sale and/or use of drugs as a source of income and self-esteem. Many of these

black youth get caught up in the criminal justice system. Nationwide, One out of four black men in their 20's is behind bars, on probation or on parole.²³ But in urban areas like Baltimore and Washington D.C., the percentage is higher because this is where you have more young men and women being raised by single black females. According to an article in the **Washington Post** on 2 Sep, 1992 56% of Baltimore' black men between the ages of 18 and 35 were either in prison, on parole or probation, being sought on arrest warrants or awaiting trial on an average day in 1991. An Alexandria-based group reported that 42% of young black men in Washington D.C. were caught up in the criminal justice system. These figures are attributable to the war on drugs which for some reason tends to go after black males. This renders many black men and women less employable and more likely to return to a life style that will lead to more contacts with the criminal justice system. This also eliminates them from the pool of available people to mobilize when needed.

Drug abuse and crime also affects young black females. Although blacks comprise 12 percent of all women in the U. S., they account for 50 percent of all women in state and federal adult prisons. Many are involved in the sale and use of illegal drugs. Since most female drug users are sexually active, some engage in prostitution to finance their drug habit. These sexually active females account for increased instances of sexually transmitted diseases and the

²³"A Black Indictment of The Inner City", U.S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORT, March 12, 1990

spreading of the AIDS virus. Parents abusing drugs have had an increasing negative affect on their children. Increasing numbers of children have been neglected, beaten, burned, sexually abused and a few have died.²⁴

Black do not only represent a high percentage of criminal offenders, they are over represented as victims as well. Homicide is the second leading cause of death among black youth 15 to 24 years old.²⁵ Over half the murder victims in the United States are black. And low income black families have the highest rates of criminal victimization for personal crimes such as rape , robbery, assault, and theft as shown by figure 5.

VICTIMIZATION RATES FOR PERSONAL CRIMES BY INCOME		
INCOME	BLACK	WHITE
LESS THAN \$7,500	54.1	49.0
\$ 7,500- \$9,999	54.9	42.7
\$10,000- \$14,999	41.1	29.9
\$15,000- \$24,999	31.5	28.5
\$25,000- \$29,999	29.6	26.7
\$30,000- \$49,999	22.9	21.8
GREATER THAN 50,000	19.3	21.0

PER 1,000 PERSONS, 12 YEARS AND OLDER

Source: Black Americans: A Statistical Source Book 1990 Edition, Alfred N. Garwood Editor, Numbers and Concepts, Boulder Colorado

²⁴The State of Black America, 1990, Published by National Urban League, Inc., January 1990

MALE PRESENCE

The inadequate number of positive black male role models is another problem in today's black family. Black males as head of a family or in an extended family who are to positively influence children are on the decline. Studies indicate black children who grow up in female headed households do less well on several social indicators than those who grow up in two parent families. Black females who spent part of their childhood in single-parent families were 36% more likely to have a teenage birth, 52% more likely to have a premarital birth, and 32% more likely to have a marital disruption than their white counterparts.²⁶ In 1992 50% of black boys are raised by black women. Dr. Spencer H. Holland, Director of the Center for Educating African-American Males at Morgan State University in Baltimore, claims that "women raise sons, not men." In order for black males to grow up and be responsible adults, they need good nurturing while they are young. Black boys need to be taught how to face life's adversities without resulting to drugs and violence.

TEENAGE PREGNANCY

Teenage pregnancy is a growing problem in the black community. The birthrate of black teenagers is decreasing, but it is still 2 times

²⁶Robert J. Taylor, "Developments in Research on Black Families: A Decade Review", JOURNAL OF MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY, November 1990.

higher than the birthrate for teenage whites. There are several reasons for this trend. One, black teenagers become sexually active early in life, on average two years earlier than whites. Two, black teenagers are less likely to use some form of birth control. Three, they are less likely to resort to an abortion to end a pregnancy. Four, black teenagers are less likely to put up their child for adoption. The majority of black unwed mothers usually continue to live in the household of their parents or with other adult relatives after the birth of their babies. A young female with a baby is another element of society not available to mobilize if needed for reconstitution.

ALCOHOL ABUSE

Alcohol abuse is a problem that has had wide ranging negative affects of the black family. Alcoholism is strongly associated with wife abuse, child abuse, homicide, family break-ups and physical illness in black families. Research compiled by the Center for Science in the Public Interest indicates that among all age, sex, and race groups, black males ages 30 to 59 experience the highest rate of alcohol-connected problems. Men's sexual potency is reduced by excessive drinking, and alcohol abuse has been linked to increased levels of violence, including homicide, rape, and domestic violence.²⁷ Alcoholism in the black community is not

²⁷Felicia E. Halpert, "Sobering Thoughts," **ESSENCE**, November 1991

highly published, but it has a very detrimental affect on the strength of the black family.

AIDS

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) us a growing problem in the black family. Because of intravenous drug use and heterosexual transfer of the AIDS virus, all parts of the black family are infected with the HIV virus and dying in disproportionate numbers as compared to the white family. 1989 statistics show that 55.9% of children under 13 that have AIDS are black, that figure is 17.8% for white children. Fifty point seven percent of the children who have died of AIDS in the United States have been black, 25.7% have been white children. The figures are similar for females, 56.3% of all females AIDS cases in the U.S. are black compared to 28.3% for white females. Fifty nine point four percent of female AIDS deaths in the U.S. were black compared to 29.3% for whites.²⁸ The majority of male AIDS cases and deaths are white, but if you just look at the cases and deaths due to intravenous drug use and heterosexual contact the percentages would be similar to those of black children and females.

All of the problems discussed in this paper combine to decrease the numbers of black men and women with the potential to be productive

²⁸Statistical Abstract of the United States 1991, U.S. Department of Commerce

members of society. This also decreases the pool of people able to mobilize if needed. This makes the problems of the black family and other families with similar problems potential problems of national security. The strength of our nation is the aggregate strength of all of its citizens, so it is important that our precious natural resource not be wasted.

CONCLUSION

The root cause of the crisis in today's black family is, in reality, the crisis of the black male and his inability to carry out the normative responsibilities of husband, father and role model in the nuclear family. The family's disintegration is only a symptom of the larger problem, the institutional discrimination of black males.²⁹ The inability of black males to be income providers, positive role models and heads of households is the root cause of most black family problems. The majority of black children today grow up in single-parent households with an income below the poverty line. Too many black males in today's society will follow in their biological fathers footsteps and die at an early age, become entrapped in the criminal justice system and/or become an unemployed burden to society. The lack of the strong male role model also affects young black females. Some of their problems are attributed to lack of proper guidance. Forty percent of black females by the age of 18 will become pregnant reducing their

²⁹Social Structure and Black family Life, Journal of Black Studies, March, 1987

chances of being productive members of society. I submit that because fewer black children are growing up today in a strong two-parent family structure than in the past, fewer are growing up to be productive citizens able to mobilize in support of our nations national security.