



Blacks Must Confront Reality

Though racial discrimination exists, it is nowhere near the barrier it once was. The relevant question is: How much of what we see today can be explained by racial discrimination? This is an important question because if we conclude that racial discrimination is the major cause of black problems when it isn't, then effective solutions will be elusive forever. To begin to get a handle on the answer, let's pull up a few historical facts about black Americans.



In 1950, female-headed households were 18 percent of the black population. Today it's close to 70 percent. One study of 19th-century slave families found that in up to three-fourths of the families, all the children lived with the biological mother and father. In 1925 New York City, 85 percent of black households were two-parent households. Herbert Gutman, author of "The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925," reports, "Five in six children under the age of six lived with both parents." Also, both during slavery and as late as 1920, a teenage girl raising a child without a man present was rare among blacks.

A study of 1880 family structure in Philadelphia found that three-quarters of black families were nuclear families (composed of two parents and children). What is significant, given today's arguments that slavery and discrimination decimated the black family structure, is the fact that years ago, there were only slight differences in family structure among racial groups.

Coupled with the dramatic breakdown in the black family structure has been an astonishing growth in the rate of illegitimacy. The black illegitimacy rate in 1940 was about 14 percent; black illegitimacy today is over 70 percent, and in some cities, it is over 80 percent.

The point of bringing up these historical facts is to ask this question, with a bit of sarcasm: Is the reason the black family was far healthier in the late 1800s and 1900s that back then there was far less racial discrimination and there were greater opportunities? Or did what experts call the "legacy of slavery" wait several generations to victimize today's blacks?

The Census Bureau pegs the poverty rate among blacks at 28.1 percent. A statistic that one never hears about is that the poverty rate among intact married black families has been in the single digits for more than two decades, currently at 8.4 percent. Weak family structures not only spell poverty and dependency but also contribute to the social pathology seen in many black communities — for example, violence and predatory sex. Each year, roughly 7,000 blacks are murdered. Ninety-four percent of the time, the murderer is another black person. Though blacks are 13 percent of the nation's population, they account for more than 50 percent of homicide victims. Nationally, the black homicide victimization rate is six times that of whites, and in some cities, it's 22 times that of whites. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, between 1976 and 2011, there were 279,384 black murder victims. Coupled with being most of the nation's homicide victims, blacks are also major victims of violent personal crimes, such as assault, rape and robbery.



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To put this violence in perspective, black fatalities during the Korean War (3,075), Vietnam War (7,243) and all wars since 1980 (about 8,200) come to about 18,500, a number that pales in comparison with black loss of life at home. Young black males had a greater chance of reaching maturity on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan than on the streets of Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, Oakland, Newark and other cities.

The black academic achievement gap is a disaster. Often, black 12th-graders can read, write and deal with scientific and math problems at only the level of white sixth-graders. This doesn't bode well for success in college or passing civil service exams.

If it is assumed that problems that have a devastating impact on black well-being are a result of racial discrimination and a "legacy of slavery" when they are not, resources spent pursuing a civil rights strategy will yield disappointing results.

Walter E. Williams is a professor of economics at George Mason University. To find out more about Walter E. Williams and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate Web page at www.creators.com.

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