BLACK FAMILIES, MINORITY FAMILIES,
AND PUBLIC POLICY

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AND PUBLIC POLICY

by
Rose M. Brewer, Ph.D.

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Table of Contents

FOREWORD

Many leaders and activists in communities of color have long expressed the concern that there is seldom the opportunity to discuss critical community issues with either their peers in the community or their colleagues in the policy making or funding sector in a setting that encourages reflection and cooperation. Service providers and others interested in community problem-solving also have voiced similar concerns.

Some service providers also lament the difficulty they have in setting aside time for a deliberate, well-thought-out approach to resolving complex community issues in preparation for systematic and applied research. Even when the time to think about these issues is available, the time to research and investigate aspects of a particular issue, prior to "thinking about it," is in short supply. The problem is especially acute for managers in small to medium size nonprofit agencies and in all but the largest policy-oriented governmental agencies.

College faculty members and grantors share a similar concern and in addition worry about the lack of a common ground on which various factions can meet and discuss issues of mutual interest. College faculty, not wanting to conduct their research in a vacuum, feel this need; as can grantors and resource managers who want to base their decisions on the most up-to-date research.

All of the above groups seem to want to be able to meet together to discuss key issues but feel that there is no structure within which this can logically occur.

No one wanted to talk "just to talk" or spend an undue amount of time discussing issues that seem intractable. They were more interested in issues that:

- were researchable,
- lent themselves to a Minnesota-specific analysis,
- had aspects that were resolvable through public policy-making,
- had significantly important consequences or effects for people-of-color, and
- required and could garner community support or commitment to resolve.

In response to these concerns, the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) initiated in 1986, Community/CURA Policy Focus Meetings. The purpose of the focus meetings was to create an opportunity for community activists and leaders, college faculty, community representatives, grantors, policy/decision makers and service providers, to meet in a "hold harmless," non-confrontational environment to discuss key issues that are of interest to all. This was done to counteract forces that work against coalition building, solution sharing, and the continuing development of cross-cultural sensitivity.

Individuals from a cross-section of the community were invited to attend a luncheon or dinner meeting to discuss an issue of importance to one or several of Minnesota's communities-of-color. Prior to the meeting, attendees received a ten to fifteen page paper, including bibliography, written by a faculty member of the University of Minnesota. The content of each paper was primarily national. At the same time, questions were mailed to participants that when answered would help the experts obtain both a better picture of the Minnesota perspective and an enhanced understanding and description of the issue under discussion. In the meetings, discussions were led by the CURA Coordinator of Minority Programs and a faculty

expert. When time permitted, the faculty expert, with assistance from a graduate research assistant, used the discussion to revise the paper. Papers not revised were summarized and mailed to focus meeting participants and non-attending invitees.

Three focus meetings were conducted during the year 1987. Their topics were:

- Black Families, Minority Families, and Public Policy
- Black Leadership and Leadership Development
- Economic Development Policy in Minnesota for Minority Communities

The focus meeting on Black Families, Minority Families, and Public Policy was held February 26, 1987. Eleven individuals representing city and county government, community human service providers, and University of Minnesota faculty attended the meeting. (Please see the list of participants, p. viii.)

Because data about African-American families were more readily available locally and nationally than that for other minority families, the paper to which attendees responded focused on the African-American family. (During the discussion sources of information about Minnesota's other minority families were given. This additional information was incorporated into Brewer's essay).

During the meeting attendees were generally in agreement on several issues:

- Lack of adequate income is the core reason for problems affecting African-American families. Improving the general economic conditions of African-Americans will go a long way to solving the problems affecting these families.

- Though Minnesota's African-American population is better educated, has a higher median income, a lower proportion of single or female-headed households, and a lower incident of teen-aged pregnancy than do African-Americans nation-wide, poverty is an issue for African-Americans in Minnesota.

- There are aspects of the African-American family that should be strengthened. The reliance on statistics as the exclusive measure of the health of African-American families may overstate the problem. A small but affluent African-American middle and upper class in Minnesota mask the problems of other African-Americans.

- Social issues, values for example, may play a role in the perceived deterioration of the family. However, economic deprivation is so prevalent that it is not clear whether the observed social problems are the cause or effect of family deterioration, with family deterioration being the effect of economic deprivation. Consensus among discussants was that economic deprivation began the downward spiral.

- On the one hand, the relatively small size of the Minnesota African-American community makes problems seem manageable, but on the other hand, it limits the validity of statistical data and may contribute to a sense of complacency.

In summary, except as indicated above, discussants thought African-American families in Minnesota were very similar to African-American families across the

nation. Most of the differences that were noted were thought to be the result of the small number of African-Americans in Minnesota.

The essay that follows, *Black Families, Minority Families, and Public Policy*, by Rose Brewer, Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology and the Department of Afro-American and African Studies, is one of two resulting from the focus meetings. Saraswathy Subramony, a graduate research assistant, reviewed many articles for the author of this essay. Most of the administrative details as well as program research were provided by Janet Larsen. Others on CURA's staff, Edward Drury, Chris McKee, Louise Duncan and Judith Weir played key roles in bringing these publications to fruition. Without the able assistance of these individuals the project would not have been as successful.

Edward L. Duren, Jr.
Coordinator, Minority Programs
Center for Urban & Regional Affairs

BLACK FAMILIES, MINORITY FAMILIES, AND PUBLIC POLICY FOCUS MEETING

FEBRUARY 26, 1987

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Jim Abts, Ramsey County Human Services
Michael Baizerman, Center for Youth Development and Research, Univ. of MN
Kenyari Bellifield, Urban Coalition of Minneapolis
Rose Brewer, Department of Afro-American & African Studies and Department of
    Sociology, Univ. of MN
Kambon Camara, Survival Skills Institute
Edward L. Duren, Jr., Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, Univ. of MN
Robin Hickman, Inner City Youth League
Janet Larsen, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, Univ. of MN
Beverly Propes, North High School
Gladys Randle, Phyllis Wheatley Community Center
Jim Robinson, Summit University Teen Center
Jennifer Samaha, Minneapolis Community Development Agency
Jacqui Smith, Family and Children's Service
Saraswathy Subramony, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, Univ. of MN
Tony Wagner, Pillsbury United Neighborhood Services
Esther Wattenberg, School of Social Work and Center for Urban and Regional
    Affairs, Univ. of MN
Gloria M. Williams, Department of Design, Housing, and Apparel, Univ. of MN

BLACK FAMILIES, MINORITY FAMILIES, AND PUBLIC POLICY

by

Rose M. Brewer, Ph.D.
Dept. of Afro-American and African Studies
and Dept. of Sociology
University of Minnesota

> Because the issues of race are so stark, they make clear the essential challenge of family policy: the most appropriate approach to racial issues within family policy is to ignore issues of the family altogether and to concentrate instead on the most obvious and pernicious forms of discrimination--in employment, in education, in housing, and in access to political power. A family policy that focuses on minority families themselves will be inconsistent and incomplete, subject to cycles of public intervention and public withdrawal, depending upon how much families are blamed for their condition.
>
> Grubb and Lazerson (1982: 262-63)

INTRODUCTION

The thicket of family policy is a maze of conflicting approaches on how best to provide public support to black and other minority families. Despite the Grubb and Lazerson admonition to shift the emphases from families to social structure, the key decisions on black families under conservative policy makers have been on the families rather than social structures (Edelman, 1987). Furthermore, one might add to the Grubb and Lazerson remarks that under these same policies the cultural practices and meaning systems of minority families have been as overlooked as the social structural impact. The everyday world of families and the meanings racial-ethnic groups give to their families are either ignored or treated as pathology. This omission, coupled with the Grubb and Lazerson observation that structural change is essential to black family policy is the cornerstone of this discussion. The family focus meeting, and the exchange between community leaders and minority public policy researchers of CURA centered on these two ideas: black and other minority family strengths must be recognized and the cultural integrity of the various groups must be part of any public policy initiative; and, structural change must be instigated which strikes at inequality and closed opportunity structures which cripple minority families. Overall, culture, economy, and discrimination are the central issues to be addressed in forging a black and minority family policy.

With these key issues in mind, the focus of the discussion is inclusive of three other major ideas. First, what exactly is "minority family policy"? Key here is a discussion of the overall social policy debate around families occurring in the United States with implications for black and minority families nationally and within the state of Minnesota. Second, what are the cultural and economic realities of black families and other minority families with implications for public policy? Third, given the interplay between cultural and economic/political realities, what are possible public policy strategies for minority families?

Throughout the discussion, it is apparent that class and gender inequality are highly implicated in the problems confronting black and other minority families. Indeed, class is an essential commonality of all families involved in economic inequality. This is strikingly so in Minnesota. Economic downturn plays an essential role in explaining the difficulties of majority families: rural and Iron Range Minnesota families being the most obvious examples. Race, of course, shapes class and gender dynamics in peculiar ways, and racial inequality is the essential tension confronting minority families. Undoubtedly, understanding these multiple intersections is as essential to reasonable family policy as is understanding the broader landscape of culture and economy.

THE FAMILY POLICY DEBATE IN THE UNITED STATES AND MINORITY FAMILIES

The idea that the government should develop strategies which affect the lives of families is the crux of the family policy issue. Interestingly, especially in the last twenty years, policy makers have framed family issues in terms of the role of the state in family issues. Nonetheless, there has been widespread resistance to visible public action on families, even though, inadvertently, families are politically shaped (Zinn and Eitzen, 1987). This is largely because families in American society have been viewed as a private sphere, autonomous and exempt from governmental tinkering. In fact, economic, political, and social forces have always impinged upon families, but these effects have not been part of the public dialogue on families. Zaretsky (1976) argues forcefully that there would not have been American family without state intervention. Nevertheless, we mystify the role of the state in shaping family dynamics. Even still, the years since the New Deal have been absolutely essential in framing the family/government dialogue, and the last twenty-five years have been especially strategic because they coincide with government effort to respond to racial crisis in this country (Piven and Cloward, 1971). However, there remains a good deal of resistance to "government intervention," at least in terms of the current neo-conservative public debate on the proper role of government. Indeed, the current debate on family policy is highly reflective of contention around public and private issues. The public/private dichotomy is increasingly shown to be false but continues to shap dialogue on a range of policies in American society. Yet, it is recognized more and more that the state has "some kind of family policy" (Grubb and Lazerson, 1982).

Currently, the family policy debate is highly focused on the question of the nature of such policy. One can use a three-part division of policy orientations: liberal, conservative, progressive, as proposed by Grubb and Lazerson. Or one can use a two-part division: business elite and intellectual/intelligentsia-managerial class, developed in the work by Darity and Myers (1984). Both of these orientations require additional discussion and critique.

Conservatives resist the idea that the state has a role to play in the family; that is a visible public role. Thus, they continue to advocate the reduction of state influence. Conservatives use the language of voluntarism to show the scope of family responsibility. At the center of such voluntarism is the church and community, embedded in traditional sex role definitions of women's place. A major recent conservative strategy has been the "Family Policy Act." Upon dissection, critics showed its narrow and unrealistic conception of American family life today (Currie and Skolnick, 1985). The proposed legislation shaped its policy recommendations on a family form which is found less and less in America today: full-time female homemaker with hus-

band in the workplace. Only about 14 percent of all American families take this form (Currie and Skolnick, 1985), and it is certainly omissive of black family organization which rarely approximates this model (Staples, 1986). In short, core to conservative family strategy is the notion that the family is a private institution. Only those initiatives which are supportive of the nuclear family form are worthy of consideration. In fact, the range of American family form is broad. The cultural centrality of kin and augmented families is overlooked in such policy initiatives. Strategies supportive of groups incorporating the non-kin young and old have not been considered. And most certainly, female-headed households have suffered under such narrow conceptualizations of "family." Diversity and difference must be embodied in new state policy on families.

The conservative downplay of structural dynamics in family formation has important implications for black and other minority family policy. It is especially hard to focus on the special problems facing minority families given this orientation. Family compositional changes across racial-ethnic categories are related to broader value, economic, and political changes in the United States and Minnesota. Depending on point of view, the analyst might emphasize the changing position of women, minority/majority group changes, or political and economic transformations. In fact, family changes generally, and minority family changes specifically, are reflective of all these forces. Moreover, as noted, cultural and ethnic family innovations provide different lenses through which to view the various changes. For these reasons, the family is a complicated institution. As its structure changes, new studies and new policy strategies must be considered. In fact, there are two other major public policy orientations. These are liberal strategies and progressive strategies (Grubb and Lazerson, 1982).

Liberal social policy has been expressed in many Democratic Party initiatives. Liberal family policy stresses a role for the state. The federal government must implement strategies for the public good according to this reasoning. One example of this liberal initiative is full employment programs: the 1947 Employment Act and the 1978 Humphrey-Hawkins Act; another example of this liberal initiative is to coordinate existing programs (Grubb and Lazerson, 1982:237). Additionally, some liberal policy makers stress family impact analysis. Here the idea is that all public programs must be evaluated for their influence on families and children and in providing a political forum for children's advocates. But, family impact statements reflect a restricted view of family policy according to Grubb and Lazerson. They say, "by emphasizing consistency and coordination, they embrace a narrow conception of the underlying problems and avoid the politically difficult issues of structural inequalities and moral values."

Most recently, welfare reform has been at the center of liberal policy actions. Not surprisingly, it finds support among conservatives, too. This bipartisan effort is represented in the new "Family Security Act." Although more a Democratic than Republican initiative, it is expressive of the federal thrust to develop a family policy for this country. In July 1987, Democratic Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan introduced the senate version of the "Family Security Act." It is a replacement for AFDC and stresses family responsibility and community responsibility (National Council on Family Relations [NCFR] Report, 1987). There are several key features to the bill:[1]

1. Child support is parent-based with the community ensuring education and training.

2. Wage withholding and paternal identification is at the center of the bill.

3. The establishment of a special Commission on Interstate Child Support to make recommendations to congress "for improving interstate collections in support payments" is recommended.

4. Title VII of the bill creates the JOBS (Job Opportunities and Basic Skills) program, but it is up to the states to organize their own education, training, and employment programs. Private sector participation is encouraged. The targeted groups for JOBS are long-term welfare recipients, those under 21 years of age without a high school diploma and at least one parent of a two-parent family.

5. There are two tiers of funding for the JOBS program: $140 million for allocation among states with a federal match of 90 percent and a 60 percent match of approved JOBS expenses for states that spend their first tier allocations.

6. Transitional Medicaid and child care will be available for up to nine months for those trying to get off welfare.

7. Payments will be extended to all eligible children whether in one- or two-parent households.

Other Democrats have pushed issues such as flex-time and federally supported day care, but these progressive strategies have not evolved into coherent public policy initiative. Most recently, Democrats and Republicans have pushed for workfare for the poorest female-headed families in this country. It is notable how Republicans and Democrats see the value of work for poor women, but rarely address the broader policy issues of work/family intersections across class. Darity and Myers chalk this up to the interests of the business elite. They point out that cheap labor in the form of forced work for welfare mothers is in the interest of the private sector--thus workfare. Darity and Myers, however, are no less critical of the managerial elite. This elite's historical paternalism has been replaced by a form of feminism which is not supportive of full-time mothering according to Darity and Myers.

Finally, leftists or progressives outside of the liberal wing of the Democratic party have argued for more far-reaching structural change. Essentially, Grubb and Lazerson critique mainstream liberalism from this left perspective. They say:

Even at its best, liberal family policy falls short, for it fails to consider the nature of the state, its constraints, and the kinds of changes necessary to overcome those constraints. Promoting full employment as a cornerstone of family policy makes little sense without understanding why the United States has so consistently failed to achieve full employment. Calling for the elimination of poverty in a period of taxpayer revolts and hostility to the welfare system may be noble, but it is also futile without consideration of the reasons why redistributive programs have always been incomplete. . . .The very idea of a unified family policy assumes that the conflicting policies toward children and families and

-4-

different interest groups can be reconciled and neglects the deep class and racial divisions of American society.

Grubb and Lazerson (1982:239)

Liberalism faces a major dilemma says Grubb and Lazerson. It's practitioners feel that the state should enhance family life, but as presently constructed, the state is unable to accomplish these goals.

Darity and Myers bypass the distinctions between liberal, conservative, and progressive policy through a stringent critique of the whole range of public policies and policy makers in America. Using the terms business elite and managerial class, which are roughly comparable to conservatives and liberals, they argue that both "business and intellectual elite social policy has contributed to the present crisis in the black family. The black family is caught in the middle. New cultural currents, reflecting the struggle between the older capitalist elite and the newer managerial elite, is a major source of black family trouble," according to Darity and Myers. In essence, they say:

The swings between the rugged individualism of workfare and the paternalism of welfare capture a continuum of social programs that destabilize the traditional functions and forms of family life. The most pronounced impact would be on the most vulnerable of families living precariously at the bottom of the American social pyramid, although no American families are immune.

Darity and Myers (1984:160)

Darity and Myers conclude that neither group can provide adequate policy for black families. Any direction must come from the community and the population most affected. Other minority family critics have taken a somewhat different approach. They accept public policy but add to the critique of liberalism and conservatism by point out that even with far ranging structural alterations, the positive cultural features of racial and ethnic groups must be explicitly a part of the revisioning and restructuring process (Hill, 1972).

Of course to date neither liberals nor progressives in the United States have seriously considered the culture of black and other minority families in a positive light. Importantly, the works of Wilkinson (1987), Stack (1974), and Zinn (1980) are helpful in spelling out the cultural terrain of minority families. Wilkinson defines the cultural role of kin for African-Americans as being much more than long distance help patterns. She says they include residential propinquity, obligatory mutual aid, active participation in life cycle events, and central figures around whom family ceremonies revolve. In addition, Stack develops the notion of female domestic networks. These are sharing networks among Afro-American women. Kin are central to these networks, but they are fully augmented by non-kin. In this context the worse aspects of economic deprivation and poverty are cushioned by innovative sharing and support patterns. Policy makers do not consider these networks as essential to the elaboration and maintenance of Afro-American life; even though they are crucial and positive cultural innovations.

Wilkinson also discusses the patterns found among other ethnic minorities. She and Zinn shed light on Mexican-American families. Both scholars emphasize that help

patterns are central to Mexican-American family forms. Zinn (1980) challenges the notion that Mexican-American families are patriarchal and shows the scope of female power within Mexican-American families. Women are extremely important persons in this context. Just as matriarchy was critiqued by black scholars, Zinn critiques the idea of machismo. It is too simplistic a notion to define Mexican-American family life, even though scholars still define families in these stereotypical ways (Staples and Mirande, 1980).

Regarding Asian families, there is difference among the various Asian groups regarding kin alliances, but apparently shared customs and retention of kin alliances are key in all groups. Additionally, respect and care for the elderly are core to these cultures (Wilkinson, 1987). And finally, among American Indians there are urban and rural differences, but kinship ties are quite important. Wilkinson says, "extended family networks are a constant." She sums up ethnic family diversity nicely:

> Kinship forms vary among the different ethnic populations. La familia among Hispanics is quite distinct in structure and composition from the extended bonds found among Asians and Afro-Americans. Although the most frequent household type among Chicanos is nuclear-centered, the norm is geographic propinquity and strong kinship ties among family units, especially in times of need. Apparently, the legacy of the extended family system with strong emotional ties clustered in nearby residential areas remains an important aspect of Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, and Afro-American family bonding.

<div align="center">Wilkinson (1987)</div>

In short, public policy which is mindful of the cultures of black, Hispanic, Asian and American Indian families is as essential to policy formation as changing the "stark reality of racial and economic discrimination." The key thing for policy makers is to target ethnic diversity and to realize there are cultural variations among the various groups. This is not the same thing as focusing on the pathologies of minority families, nor is it to treat minorities as a lump-sum category or to focus only on blacks. The interplay between culture, economy, and minority family policy should be recognized in future policy. Nonetheless, we must get a good sense of the dilemmas confronting minority and other families before reasonable state action can be taken. Moreover, following the admonition of Grubb and Lazerson that the state itself is a site of conflict, policy realization is as much a product of ideological and partisan power as it is of the position of the state at an historical moment. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this discussion, the issue is what are the cultural and economic realities of black and other minority families? What are the policy implications of this positioning? While the critical issue of the realization of policies given the "state of the state" is not centrally addressed, we recognize that policy instigation is the result of political struggle and state possibilities. Furthermore, the Darity and Myers proposition that all state policy is manipulative and incapable of meeting the needs of families, is sidestepped in this discussion of national and Minnesota family policy because states are always involved in family policy, whether explicitly or not.

BLACK FAMILIES: CULTURE AND ECONOMY

The public policy debate has been intensively focused on black families. In fact, these families are at the center of this renewed interest. However, families in general are the focus too. The idea that something is wrong with the American family is the general tenor of much of this debate. Analysts argue there are too many divorces; too many teenage pregnancies; too much family violence, abuse and dissension. True, such causes for alarm have been met with the counterposed idea that the family is in a process of transition through which it will survive in one form or another, but the tone of much of the discussion is that the family is facing real problems in America. This concern has reached a fevered pitch around black family break-up and teen-age pregnancies. The broader landscape is that family composition is changing for all families in the U.S. (Moynihan, 1986), but the cause for alarm has been sounded for the emergence of single-parent and female-headed households. Half of all black families are now headed by women, many of whom live in poverty (Norton, 1985). The figures are just as high for Minnesota (Governor's Council on Families and Children, 1984).

This raises the additional question of how can and will black families thrive given such changes? The question is crucial, because the issue of the very survival of the black community and black families has been raised (Edelman, 1987). Some analysts suggest that by the 21st century, 70 percent of all black families will be headed by women. This is problematic primarily because the majority of these families are poor. Indeed, the life chances for the children in such households are highly restricted. It is argued that these children will never really have a chance. Something must be done. This is the tenor of the debate. Children's survival is defined as the crux of the problem (Edelman, 1987). Furthermore, female-headed, impoverished families are devastating for black mobility. They pull median incomes down; they offer little to the children born into them. They are the greatest source of the new poverty being experienced in the black community, or so the argument goes (Wilson and Neckerman, 1986). Stated this way, trouble in the black family is the source of trouble in the black community. But, this is an old argument. It has been critiqued before, given the work of Daniel Patrick Moynihan in 1965. Nonetheless, it has reemerged again as a burning family policy issue of the 1980s.

It is arguable that black families' troubles are the consequences and not the causes of the inequality black people still face in America. Of course, the situation is complicated by the fact that the fastest growing group of family formers within the black population are young black women under 25. A good number of these young women are teenage girls. Indeed, teen-age pregnancy is frequently cited as the source of black family troubles. Because of educational deficits and few marketable skills, these young women and their male counterparts are least able to provide financially and perhaps emotionally for their children (Ladner, 1986). They are most likely to show up as a Minnesota state welfare statistic (Governor's Council on Families and Children, 1984).

Yet is is arguable that the current crisis in black families, as it is deemed by academics and policy makers, can be explained historically and culturally. The root of the crisis seems to be what happened to black families after migration to northern and southern cities, their confrontation with urban labor markets and systems of work, as well as the alteration in family dynamics as these forces converged: family, culture, and work systems. Furthermore, changes in cultural meaning systems about kinship and family have occurred in the urban context where female domestic networks are the

spoke around which many families revolve rather than a nuclear family (Stack, 1974). Many of the problems are centered in the poorest third of the black population--the so-called underclass; but working poor, solidly working class, and middle class families are confronting problems too. Black adults of all classes have the highest divorce rate in the country. They are also the group most likely to be single (Staples, 1986).

The subject of policy debate--extremely high rates of female-headed black families, is something which has not always characterized Afro-American families, even given slavery (Gutman, 1976). The up-turn in the last twenty years, however, has been dramatic (Wilson and Neckerman, 1985). Moreover, if the cultural practices of the group are to be considered, black family life has often involved more than a mother and her children. Kin is important. The policy question might be how to buttress kinship structures which are overburdened but essential to the maintenance of black family life? In addition, there is a black family cycle which is not well sort-out. The household may begin with a woman and her child, or a woman and her child and maternal kin, but it may end with a woman and children and a male co-parent. The nature of the black family life cycle needs to be addressed. It is possibly a process of being connected and disconnected to various family forms. The current policy concern with black female heads-of-household and teen pregnancies does not address this issue. We must understand that black female-headed households exist for different reasons: some are economically self-sufficient, many are not (Cottingham, 1982).

Moreover, black family life is highly implicated with the welfare system for many poor or near poor families (Darity and Myers, 1984). According to Stack (1974), welfare is matched by intermittent work and kinship reciprocity. Kin networks are essential to the maintenance of family life rather than an employed male head-of-household. Consequently, to the degree that families are a social construction of their participants, the economic variables are affected by cultural practices and assumptions. Yet, there is a snare to this. The very practices which make family life possible under difficult economic circumstances may make mobility difficult or nearly impossible. Finally, there are real economic problems facing the black population today. Many young men and women cannot find work (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 1986).

In summary, family compositional changes across racial-ethnic categories are the subject of current policy debate. The key concern has been the dramatic upsurge in poor female-headed families in the black population. But there is no consensus on what is to be done. The solutions follow ideological lines, and the origins and solutions to poor female-headed households depend on whether one takes a conservative, liberal, or progressive stance. Consideration of economics, culture, and discrimination enter into the equation. Accordingly, a discussion of black and other minority families in Minnesota emerges out of the broader national debate on black families.

The central questions regarding black and minority families in Minnesota include: How relevant are the issues of family crisis, formation, and change to Minnesota? How like families nationally are Minnesota black and other racial ethnic families? What is unique about the Minnesota case? Given these questions, the focus of this discussion is the Minnesota black family specifically and other racial-ethnic families generally. The main concern is what social policy possibilities are there, given the special problems facing Minnesota black and other minority families?

BLACK FAMILIES IN MINNESOTA

Nearly all blacks in the state concentrate in the Twin Cities region which is the Minneapolis-St. Paul Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. This SMSA includes Hennepin, Ramsey, Anoka, Washington, and Dakota counties. About 94 percent of the state's black population live here (Metropolitan Council Census Log, 1984). More importantly, it is a diverse population along economic lines. Nonetheless, a disproportionate number of black men, women, and children lead economically harsh lives in the state (Metropolitan Council Census Log, 1984). Indeed, the class divisions within the state black population are noteworthy. The most striking difference is between the poorest fourth and the rest of the black population. Actually, there is a three-tier, sometimes four-tier class split along income lines. The middle group is a working poor population, which is quite needy. Between 1970 and 1980, nationally as well as state-wide, there has been an increase of households headed by women (Governor's Council on Families and Children, 1984) and, these women fuel the working poor population. They are living on the edge. Unfortunately, recent public policy changes regarding qualifications for child care, health care, and nutritional supplements for children make their situation even more precarious. The third group is the black middle class. It seems to be a somewhat more substantial middle class than nationally, and it is fueled by the black white-collar workforce in the state. Nonetheless, becoming and staying middle class is more problematic for the black population nationally (Landry, 1987), and this appears to be the case in Minnesota.

Given the relationship between the black class structure and family life, black family and economic issues are strongly related in Minnesota. Black families most distressed are the poorest, those with incomes under $5,000. This group is well represented in the Minnesota black population. Officially, at least one-fourth of all black families are poor in the state (Metropolitan Council Census Log, 1984). Moreover, it is most striking for the central city black population. Indeed, we are talking largely about poor, central city families who are female-headed. This is quite similar to the national profile. In Minneapolis alone, 54 percent of black families are headed by a single parent, and over 95 percent of these families are headed by women. Although teen-age pregnancy is less of a problem in the state than nationally, young women account for a good number of the new female-headed households in Minnesota. They also are the poorest of these households. Again, Minneapolis is the site for the greatest number of these families. In Minneapolis 60.5 percent of such families have children, St. Paul 58 percent, and the rest of the region 27.1 percent. Of the families with female heads, 51 percent are at or below the poverty level in the state (Metropolitan Council Census Log, 1984).

The data show that central city blacks are poorer than blacks in suburbia and the rest of the region. In sum, poverty in the state is related to race. Blacks represent 1.3 percent of the total Minnesota population, but they represent 8.5 percent of the poverty population. Overall, poverty is complicated by race as well as gender considerations.

It is interesting, however, that Minnesota blacks are somewhat better educated than the national black population. They also are somewhat better represented in white-collar occupations, and have somewhat higher median incomes. Even still, there is an educational difference, with more whites graduating from college than blacks. Although, black Minnesotans start college in about the same numbers as whites. Black Minnesotans also graduate from high school in about the same numbers as whites. Yet this does not translate into economic parity for the black population. It does mean that

the most well-off blacks move to the suburbs leaving central city blacks poorer and more vulnerable.

Black family income in the state has not grown at the rate of white family income. White median family income increased 115 percent between 1969 and 1979. Black family income grew by only 89 percent (Governor's Council on Family and Children, 1984). Some of this discrepancy is due to the fact that although blacks are represented in the white collar and professional levels in the Twin Cities SMSA in numbers greater than their population percentage, they are also heavily represented in service, labor, and unskilled work. Almost one in four blacks in the state and one in five of other non-whites are employed in such occupations, compared to less than one in eight white workers. This work is less well-paid and accounts, to some extent, for the lower median income. However, this is not the whole story, for unemployment is a problem for the black population and especially for black men. Even the best jobs reflect racial ethnic disparities. White-collar black workers are often in lower level jobs, with less job mobility. A good deal of black white-collar work is sales, clerical, data entry, and secretarial. Oftentimes this is ghettoized women's work with low pay and little mobility.

In summary, the Minnesota black family is confronting many of the issues of its national counterpart. The large number of families which are female-headed and poor speaks directly to this issue. There are, however, certain economic strengths for a well-off segment of the black population. This does not translate into community development for the black population, because this group is likely to live in suburbia and likely to be working in a white institutional structure rather than within the black community. There is clearly an underclass population which needs help.

OTHER MINNESOTA ETHNIC FAMILIES

Less attention has been given to other racial-ethnic families in terms of the national debate on the family. This is, in part, because so little research has been done on non-white families other than blacks (Staples and Mirande, 1980). Furthermore, we have little sense, comparatively, of how American Indian, Asian, and Hispanic families fare vis-a-vis blacks and whites given the so-called "crisis" in the American family. It is known, however, that other racial-ethnic families are stressed. They are more likely to be poor, underemployed, and vulnerable to occupational loss. This does not appear to translate as readily into family break-ups as for the black population, but it does mean restricted life chances for the children of these families. For the state of Minnesota, it is important to get a sense of other racial minorities, for they make up a good percentage of the state's minority population.

American Indians

American Indians in the state are as likely to be rural as urban dwellers. Thus, they are more spread out over the state. There is however, a large concentration of American Indians in the Twin Cities SMSA. In addition, the majority of Minnesota's American Indians are members of the Chippewa and Sioux nations (Minnesota Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1975). There are also several other tribes including the Oneidas and Winnebagos. As mentioned, currently about half of all Minnesota American Indians are in the Twin Cities. There probably is an undercount of the population, and the numbers may be greater. We do, however, know

that migration from reservations to the cities has increased the number of urban American Indians.

Both rural and urban American Indians face numerous problems. However, if we focus the analysis on urban American Indians, there are a unique set of issues to be considered. Foremost is the problem of operating in a setting which is in cultural conflict with a way of life. The reservation does offer some cultural continuity; the city is usually more alienating. Accordingly, urban American Indians fare poorly along a number of dimensions including education, income, and jobs. American Indians have the highest unemployment rates in the state, and, most likely, the greatest level of poverty. Like black families, there are a large number of families headed by women. These families are quite poor; as are their black counterparts. Many lack adequate food, shelter, and health care.

In the Minneapolis metropolitan area the American Indian infant death rate was more than 50 percent higher than among whites (Minnesota Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1975). The lack of prenatal care plays a major role in this. For other indicators, the inequality is just as great. For example, the median income for the Twin Cities region's American Indian families is less than half what it is for whites. Family life is problematical in much the same way that black family life is. Over half of all American Indian children are in single-parent households. In addition, a good number of American Indian families are attempting to live on incomes of $5,000 and below. It is arguable that an American Indian underclass more than rivals the black underclass of the central cities.

Likewise, as their black counterparts, Twin Cities suburban American Indian families have much higher median family incomes than central city dwellers. For Minneapolis, the median family income figure is $9,400, for St. Paul, $12,100, and for the remainder of the region $20,000 (Metropolitan Council Census Log, 1984).

Asians

Minnesota Asians have far fewer of their families headed by a single parent or woman in the state. Nonetheless, they still do not fare as well as whites economically, politically, or socially in the state. Apparently within the Asian population there is a bifurcation between an older group made up of Chinese, Japanese and Pacific-Islanders, and a newer immigrant group of Indo-Chinese people (Minnesota Department of Economic Security, 1982). These include Vietnamese, Thai, Cambodian and Hmong. Furthermore, the older Chinese and Japanese families fare rather well economically, similar to their national counterparts. The newer immigrants are doing less well, although there is variation between groups (Minnesota Department of Economic Security, 1982). As stated, it is a diverse group ranging from the Hmong to Vietnamese. It includes Cambodians as well as Thais, and a fairly large concentration of these persons are living in poverty. Today, they are largely an urban population situated primarily in the Twin Cities SMSA region.

Asians are .7 percent of the Minnesota population and represent 7.2 percent of persons living in poverty. In fact, 40 percent of the Asians in Minneapolis are poor, 47.7 percent in St. Paul and 8.5 percent for the remainder of the region. Asian median family income is also less than white median family income. In 1979, it was $11,700 for Minneapolis, $9,300 for St. Paul, and $25,000 for the rest of the region (Metropolitan Council Census Log, 1984). Nonetheless, families have managed to stay together

under these conditions. For the region, 9.5 percent of the families are female-headed. Still, it may be too soon to say what will happen with the younger group as they confront restricted opportunities and embrace the cultural norms of mainstream American society.

Hispanics

The Hispanic population is quite small, and predominately situated in the Twin Cities SMSA. Of the two cities, St. Paul has a larger Hispanic population (Metropolitan Council Census Log, 1984). Although not as poor as blacks, some Asians, and American Indians in the state, Hispanics face a good deal of inequality in Minnesota. Hispanics are .8 percent of the population of Minnesota and represent 1.4 percent of the poverty population. For those living in the central cities, the divergence from white median family income is striking. In Minneapolis, 28.3 percent of the Hispanics are living in poverty, for St. Paul, 21.0 percent are living in poverty, and for the remainder of the region, 9.4 percent. Hispanic family median income is $13,000 for Minneapolis, $17,600 for St. Paul and $24,000 for the remainder of the region (Metropolitan Council Census Log, 1984).

Fewer Hispanic families are headed by women than blacks or American Indians but more are female-headed than Asians in the state. Women lead 23.6 percent of the Hispanic families, and their pre-marital teen-age pregnancy rate is up. In short, even with a father present, many Hispanic children are growing up poor without adequate food, shelter, and necessities.

PUBLIC POLICY POSSIBILITIES: THE KEY ISSUES

If lost opportunities for families and children fuel the discussion of structural changes in the black family, the issue, more generally, is equity. There is no economic, political or social parity for racial ethnic minorities nationally or in the state of Minnesota. In short, inequality between minority and majority groups is the prime issue. From being able to maintain families to providing food, health care, and shelter for their children, minority families fare more poorly nationally and in the state than whites. By all economic indicators--occupational status, income, poverty level--blacks, Asians, American Indians, and Hispanics are poorer, more concentrated in low level occupations and receive less family income in the state. This inequality has profound consequences for life chances, health, education, and well-being for the 100,000+ minorities in the state.

Focusing more narrowly on Minnesota black families, one finds they look a lot like their national counterparts. Despite the common idea that blacks are better off across the board in Minnesota, there is the reality of poverty, underemployment, and family disabilities which affect most severely a quarter of the black population in the state. These are largely central cities dwellers, mainly concentrated in the Minneapolis-St. Paul SMSA. Ninety-four percent of the Minnesota black population lives in the Twin Cities region. This is approximately 50,000 residents, and the dilemmas they face parallel the national black population. Additionally, what is intriguing about Minnesota is its diverse and needy other minority population. American Indians fare poorly and a new population of Indo-Chinese (Asians) are disproportionately impoverished. Finally, the relatively small Hispanic population has not reached parity with whites, although they fare somewhat better than the other groups. Nevertheless,

regarding median income, access to adequate health care, food, shelter, and educational opportunities, there are problems for Hispanics in the state. Yet, each group is somewhat unique with its own set of cultural needs and interests. This translates into somewhat different policy possiblities as well as some shared overall public policy considerations.

BLACKS, OTHER MINORITIES, AND PUBLIC POLICY IN MINNESOTA

The various racial-ethnic groups within the state share a common bond of inequality. Class and cultural differences, however, complicate the situation. Indeed, not all blacks are in the underclass nor are all of any of the racial-ethnic groups, but they certainly stand a much greater chance of being there than their white counterparts. A good deal of poverty is being channeled along female-head-of-household lines because women fare so poorly economically and because of teen-age pregnancy. Nonetheless, it should not be overlooked that even with a father present, racial-ethnic families have a good chance of being poor or working poor.

Apparently, within the black community there is a significant split between a managerial-professional class living outside the central cities and a black underclass and working poor population. Central cities are thus left poorer by the black professionals' flight to suburbia. They are also left more vulnerable, as many people are economically marginal there. These class and race issues are complicated by the discrimination that minority women face due to their gender. The inequality, in essence, is race, class and gender.

Given these economic stresses on black families, clearly, public policies must address issues of economic equity or democracy. Liberal policies come close to confronting the structural impediments to equity, but there is a need for serious new proposals along these lines. Increasingly, data suggest that business and corporate decisions can be highly damaging to communities, especially inner-city minority communities (Brewer, 1983). Decisions to move plants to suburbs or out of the country altogether gut areas of economic development and growth possibilities.

In addition, race and gender inequality in the workplace is the linchpin of some minority women's poverty. These women find themselves in low paying, ghettoized jobs or unemployed. This is a reflection of gender inequality as well as racial inequality. As women, they are likely to be in a narrow range of female jobs, thus sharing a fate with women across race, ethnic and class lines. As black women, they are likely to be the last hired, first fired, and performing the least desirable work in women's jobs. Ending race and gender discrimination on the job should be an essential policy thrust.

Overall, there are a range of economic issues which must be addressed. This reality suggests forging public policy around the following economic issues at the national and state level.

Economic Equity Policy

A. **How corporate decisions marginalize various groups from economic participation and gut communities of economic viability.**

Since many minority families are in trouble or are suffering because of corporate and multinational level decision-making, some national and state level planning involving business, community, labor and government should be undertaken to insure economic access and jobs for all groups.

B. **A full employment economy in the nation and the state.**

Clearly, the issue is not simply one of finding work for the welfare population as addressed in the Family Security Act, but addressing the employment needs of a broader group of unemployed and working poor people who are underemployed with extremely low wages. Full employment cross-cuts racial-ethnic lines and includes majority families in the nation and Minnesota who would benefit from economic democracy. There is still too little work with too little pay, and this has an adverse effect on families.

C. **Racial gender pay equity and the strong enforcement of affirmative action and anti-discrimination laws in the workplace.**

Minority women suffer from racism and sexism. Poverty is present among fully employed black, American Indian, Asian, and Hispanic women in the state. Poverty is especially present among female-headed households. For the black and American Indian populations, especially in the Twin Cities region, the issue of female-headed families who are impoverished must be addressed. Education and retraining are part and parcel of employment initiatives. Because a near majority of black families with children under the age of 18 are headed by a woman who is generally the sole wage earner, such families suffer from the occupational segregation and low wages of the mothers/sisters/aunts/grandmothers who head them. Since black women participate in the labor force in greater numbers than other women in the state, but are disproportionately concentrated in low-paying female jobs, pay equity initiatives are important policy steps.

In fact, full employment and pay equity are complementary. Black and other minority men need jobs, and black and other minority women need living wages from the jobs they have. Full employment, skills acquisition, retraining, ending discrimination and pay equity are all essential to turning the situation around (Leashore, 1986).

D. **Local community economic development, cooperative enterprises.**

Beyond national and state policies for full employment and fair employment practices, cooperative economic development emanating out of black and other minority communities is in order. Buying apartment buildings, credit unions, food-coops, etc. in common are essential new initiatives which go considerably beyond the idea of "black, Asian, American Indian, or Hispanic capitalism." It means support of collective work and responsibility on the part of ethnic groups, possibly drawing upon the skills of the managerial-professional classes who no longer live within the central cities.

Minority Family Policy

Other than economic equity issues, there are a range of explicitly family-oriented policies which might be considered. America's welfare state is conservative, some say minimal. Moreover, policy makers have been slow to come to some sense of family policy. Other western European countries are clearly ahead (Currie and Skolnick, 1985). Initiatives such as the Family Security Act focus too narrowly on welfare recipients. Other initiatives have supported a form of family life which is increasingly obsolete. Clearly, other strategies are needed. Moreover, the cultural strengths and innovations of groups should be considered in making family policy. This involves working in conjunction with community representatives who are most familiar with the rhythms and strengths of minority communities. The buttressing of extended family arrangements and kin and non-kin support networks must be considered. There are a range of possibilities which can be legitimately treated as family policy. Including:

A. **Innovations around the prevention of teen-age pregnancies.**

Sex education, contraceptive availability and information, have been rated as good strategies for preventing teen pregnancies. Support services for teen mothers and their children which allow schooling and training should be expanded. Community involvement in all aspects of the prevention process should be tried. This includes strengthening male involvement in support as well as preventive aspects. Although teen pregnancy rates are lower in Minneapolis than nationwide, there is still a problem. More importantly, "young people need to realize they have a future," says Marian Wright Edelman (Edelman 1987).

B. **Children's policies and programs.**

Integral to family policy is support for children. Following the recommendations of the 1984 Governor's Council, the rights and needs of children must be supported in the state. This involves more explicit state policy for children including health, education, nutrition and housing. Indeed, families and communities must become advocates for children. This might mean groups of families joining together to ensure the best for their children across the range of possibilities (Edelman, 1987). In fact, these might be community run and based institutions taking into consideration the cultural preferences and innovations of the various minority communities.

C. **National and state family policy which is economic and social in scope.**

The range of possibilities include national day care, family subsidies to support families, and community input on a range of family needs from the care of the elderly to infant mortality and health issues. Policy makers have not been prepared to address such a full range of policy issues. We need a mixture of policy considerations which deal with single-person households, extended families, and unrelated persons who see themselves as family. This involves taking into consideration the cultural preferences of the groups as well as mainstream family practice.

D. Enhance the role of fathers.

This entails efforts to identify fathers, encourage financial support where possible, and make sure young men have access to jobs, training, and opportunities.

Other Quality of Life Policies

Working poor and middle class families will benefit from low cost, quality child care. This is not simply an underclass issue. Low-income housing is not being built. It is nearly impossible for working poor persons to obtain it. Tensions around housing, health care, and child care are destabilizing to families. Policies addressing these issues would be supportive of families and take some of the pressure off. Clearly, access to health care is essential. Furthermore the high infant and maternal mortality rates of black and American Indian women in the state must be addressed. Affordable and quality health care should be available at the state and local levels, even though a national health care policy is needed.

Quality education is clearly part of an overall quality of life thrust. Minority drop-out rates are above average in Minnesota. Every effort must be made to make schools relevant and important to the lives of these young people. Their culture and way of life must be included in a multi-cultural thrust which takes into consideration the ethnic diversity of the state. Moreover, young people should be able to translate education into jobs and a living wage. Currently, this is not the case for many minority youths. They might have credentials, but they are too likely to be underemployed or unemployed. Discrimination is alive and well, and must be eliminated.

National and State Data Collection Efforts to get a Better
Sense of Family Life Across Racial-Ethnic Categories

It is apparent to some minority family scholars (Wilkinson 1987, Zinn 1980) that a good deal of data on minority family formation and change are yet to be collected. The unimpressive record of survey research has been noted on a number of occasions. This is due largely to poor instrumentation, biased samples, and poorly worked out explanations of the causes and effects of minority family change. One of the chief problems is the lack of good data on blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and American Indians. Such a national and state data collection effort would rectify the notion that modal and normative processes apply across the population of families in the United States and Minnesota to take into consideration cultural nuance. Moreover, qualitative studies which involve participant observation and the use of informants are essential to forging a policy inclusive of cultural strengths and diversity. We need additional qualitative studies which give a finer sense of the cultural priorities of minority families.

CONCLUSIONS

We know that families with both parents present are better off economically, but being in such a family is no guarantee that black children and other children of color will live well. Thus, in a fundamental sense the key issue is the economic status of black people specifically, and minorities in general, in this country and the state.

The precarious economic position of many black men and black women, and the psychology of racial oppression, make contemporary family life a highly risky proposition. This must be overcome. Indeed, it is the role of public policy to change this state of affairs as much as possible. The job is yet to be done.

NOTE

1. Since this paper was written, the "Family Security Act" has been passed in the form of new welfare legislation signed into law by President Reagan. According-ing to some reports, it contains the most "sweeping revisions" of AFDC since its inception in 1935. The crux of the law is government support for training and employment for destitute parents to become independent of welfare.

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Center for Urban and Regional Affairs

University of Minnesota
330 Hubert H. Humphrey Center
301 19th Avenue South
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455
(612) 625-1551