

CHAPTER I

A Historical Overview of Black Families

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To understand contemporary black family life and culture, it is necessary to examine the influence of African cultural patterns, slavery, and the ways in which black families adapt to segregation and discrimination in American society. This chapter reviews both the historical underpinnings of the black family and contemporary forces affecting family life. In addition, it provides an overview of how black families interact with formal social service systems and of the development of self-help social services in the black community. The impact of limited access to mainstream programs on family functioning is highlighted.

AFRICAN PAST AND AMERICAN SLAVERY

Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, blacks were taken forcibly from their African homelands, and many were transported to America to serve as slaves. They came from long and honorable cultural traditions in African society in which the family was highly valued. Common to many African societies were masculine-dominated families that represented economic, political, and religious units. Children and elders were highly valued in these close-knit, well-organized families (Bilingsley, 1968). In traditional Africa, nuclear families were a part of an extended family network that formed a clan, and several clans would comprise a tribe or community that was characterized by a feeling of unity and mutual aid.

Male dominance was one of the foremost traditions of African family life. Men served both as heads of families and as leaders and decision makers in the community, and women were expected to be submissive and respectful to their husbands. Although women were expected to perform all household tasks, as

well as some agricultural labor, the most important role for women was that of childbearing. Children represented the continuity of life, and women were expected to be fruitful (Martin & Martin, 1985; Billingsley, 1968). African children were taught to value and be proud to help family members and others in the community. Communal and religious rituals and celebrations, music, and art were all important parts of the expression of everyday life in Africa.

Slavery existed in Africa, but in much more moderation than in America. The typical slave in West Africa was viewed as a member of a household and had many rights—such as the right to marry, to own property, to own a slave himself, and to inherit from the master (Elkins, 1967). The writings of early European traders reveal that, up to the eighteenth century, Africans were viewed as trade partners not as inferiors. A very proud people, Africans also did not consider themselves inferior to Europeans (Bennett, 1982, p. 33).

The first black immigrants arrived in the United States in 1619. Like many other early blacks in this country, they were not slaves but indentured servants, who worked out the terms of their indenture and later often acquired land and servants of their own. These early blacks often worked together with whites and sometimes intermarried. Prejudice was based more on class differences than on race, creed, or color. In fact, the earliest colonists identified themselves as Englishmen or Christians rather than as whites. The term "white" did not become synonymous with superiority until late in the eighteenth century, as a result of slavery. Similarly, the term "Negro," the Spanish and Portuguese word for "black," did not come into general use until the latter part of the eighteenth century.

With the growing worldwide demand in the 1660s for sugar and tobacco, the early colonists recognized the need for a huge cheap labor force. Small farms were becoming huge plantations, and the owners felt that they needed a permanent involuntary labor force instead of indentured servants. After ruling out enslavement of whites and Indians, these colonists settled on Africans, a group of easily identifiable and unprotected people whose supply seemed to be unending. A system of involuntary servitude based on skin color was established, and in the mid-1600s laws that prohibited intermarriage and made blacks slaves for life were enacted (Lacy, 1972).

Coming primarily from the west coast of Africa, Africans were captured in large numbers, shackled, and forced to march hundreds of miles to the coast, where they were examined like cattle and packed tightly like parcels into the hull of ships for the dreaded Mid-Passage to the Americas. Those that did not succumb to malnourishment, unsanitary conditions, disease, suicide, or rebellions on board ship were branded like beasts and sold when they reached the New World. Considered bondsmen, or slaves for life, these blacks were considered "things" that were owned by the master and could be bought and sold like any property. They had no civil status and could not enter into legal contracts, so they could not legally marry, own property, sue, or be sued. Slave masters could separate members of the slave's family at whim and could commit adultery with or rape bondswomen (Berry & Blassingame, 1982). Educating slaves was prohibited, and slaves were forbidden from assembling, voting, and holding

political office. Black parents had no legal responsibility for their children; the master provided for and held final authority over slave children and their parents (Lacy, 1972).

Most blacks lived on plantations located in seven states in the south, but an estimated 500,000 blacks worked in cities as domestics, factory workers, or skilled artisans. Other blacks were free, living in both the north and the south (Bennett, 1982).

FAMILY LIFE UNDER SLAVERY

Despite the roadblocks to the formation of stable families, positive affective familial and kin arrangements among slave families did emerge (Sudarkasa, 1981). The slave's survival depended in large part on the training and sustenance provided in the slave quarters. Slave parents provided their children with love and affection, helped them to understand their situation and how to avoid punishment by the master, and taught them to cooperate with other blacks. This early socialization served to bolster the child's self-esteem by providing love, positive feedback, and acceptance as a valued person.

Among slave masters, there was a great deal of variability with regard to attitudes toward slave families. Many slaves lived on plantations in which the master had to approve a slave's marriage partner. Some masters promoted social relationships on the plantation so the slave would have fewer excuses to leave the estate and would be more likely to marry and have children, who would also become the master's slaves. Some slave masters encouraged strong family ties in order to lessen the likelihood of slaves rebelling and running away. Slave-owners sometimes recognized the black male as head of the household, and some even promoted sexual morality and encouraged monogamous relationships by punishing slaves for adultery. It was thought that if the male slave were devoted to his family he would be unlikely to engage in activities that might cause him to be separated from them. Other masters sanctioned polygamy and promiscuity among slaves, hoping to insure a continuous labor supply as well as economic benefits accrued from the sale of surplus slaves (Bennett, 1982).

In African societies, patriarchy had been the predominant form of family decision-making, but on the majority of southern plantations the master was in charge. He determined when the slave and his wife would go to work, when and whether the slave wife would cook the slave's meals, and he settled family arguments. The master furnished food, clothing, and shelter for the family. The slave husband was unable to protect his wife and children from sexual advances of whites or from floggings, and he often lived in fear that the master would choose to sell his wife and children at will (Blassingame, 1979). Approximately 10 percent of slave marriages were ended by the master in an attempt to teach slaves a lesson. Such a breakup affected not only the immediate family but also their relatives and other slaves on the plantation (Gutman, 1976).

Bondswomen were generally expected to do the same work as men, as well

as raise their children and do domestic chores. Women as well as men in the agricultural work force were expected to plow fields, drop seeds, hoe, pick, sod, mate cotton, harvest rice, plant sugarcane, and perform many other tasks. As few as 5 percent of all adult slaves served in the elite corps of house servants responsible for cooking, sewing, ironing, washing, dusting, sweeping, child care, and being on call to any white slave-owner or house guest.

Slaves were able to survive these dehumanizing experiences partly because of the positive interactions in the slave quarters, the support provided through the church, and inner strength. Within the slave quarters and no longer under the direct view of the master, the male slave could demonstrate affection and true feelings toward his family. There he could play the role of husband and father and teach his children how to survive. In the confines of the slave cabin the slave could receive nurturance, respect, love, and have fun. Many slaves were highly respected within the slave quarters, especially if they held jobs that took them away from the plantation or became involved in protests, had important positions on the plantation, or were skilled craftsmen. Respect in the slave community was also accorded slaves who had learned to read and write despite restrictions on education (Blassingame, 1979).

Black women were expected to perform tasks equal to those of the men and were punished just as brutally. Many slave masters chose to "defeminize" women by insisting that they dress like men, by treating them like sex objects, and by breeding them like animals. Also, many black women suffered from the psychological burden of being repeatedly sexually victimized, as well as from poor health resulting from having many children (Martin & Martin, 1985).

HELPING NETWORKS DURING SLAVERY

The church too provided support, solace, and sometimes protection for slave families. Many white clergy preached against the separation of slave families. Advocating that marriages were divine institutions not to be broken, some clergy strongly discouraged masters from separating families. However, the importance of making profits generally superseded any biblical injunction (Blassingame, 1979). Participation in the black church made slaves better prepared to resist the psychological assault of human bondage. Creating their own means of worship, which reflected a combination of West African beliefs and Christianity, slaves used metaphors, rhythmic chants and music, clapping, prayers and sermons, shouting, and stomping of feet as a means of religious expression and emotional uplift. Through worship services, slaves were able to release their pent-up feelings of despair, express their desires for freedom, and look forward to the hereafter. The songs reflected the day-to-day experience of slavery, but they were also used to spread news of upcoming slave rebellions or plans for escape (Blassingame, 1979).

Church gatherings also gave slaves a brief respite from the toils of the day and an opportunity to spread hope for the next life, for deliverance, and for relief from toils. Religious gatherings helped develop group solidarity and pro-

more mutual aid among slaves. These meetings provided slaves with another frame of reference and a source of positive self-feeling, courage, and confidence (Blassingame, 1979). Their belief that God recognized them as equal to whites and that God was more powerful than the slave master proved to be one essential tool for psychological survival.

The helping tradition characteristic of African societies was reinforced and became essential for survival during slavery. Slaves had to cooperate with each other to escape some of the master's oppression as well as to ensure that their basic needs would be met. They worked together to supplement the meager rations provided by the slave-owner, took care of each other in sickness, and helped newly arrived Africans. Blood relatives as well as fictive kin (unrelated neighbors or friends) were all part of the slave family. Blacks felt a sense of obligation to support not only family members but also others. Sometimes such terms as "aunt" and "uncle" were used by children to refer to nonkin adults (or "fictive kin") who were close to the family. Orphan children as well as new slaves were frequently incorporated into the family unit. The elderly, often considered practically worthless to the slave master, also received much respect from younger blacks and even if unrelated were often incorporated into the family (Martin & Martin, 1985).

FREE BLACKS DURING SLAVERY

Not all blacks were slaves. The noted historian Lerone Bennett states that in the late 1780s there were 697,000 black slaves and 59,000 free blacks. All but 8 percent of the slaves lived in the south, and the free blacks lived primarily in the northeast, mostly in New York and Philadelphia (Bennett, 1982). By 1860 there were about 500,000 free blacks, and most lived in the southeast in such states as Maryland, North Carolina, and Louisiana. Free blacks—blacks who were born in a nonslave state or had been set free or had successfully run away or bought their own freedom—were free from physical bondage but not from oppression and prejudice. Their free status was constantly challenged by whites, and they found that their rights differed according to where they lived. For example, in some states (e.g., Maryland and New York) free blacks voted, but in most southern states blacks did not have the right to vote. Most were relegated to low-status and low-paying jobs. They found solace in the extended family as members helped one another emotionally, spiritually, and physically. Despite the numerous hardships, some free blacks became skilled artisans, acquired property, and lived comfortably. In fact, some became slaveholders themselves (Berry & Blassingame, 1982).

Wealthier free blacks often formed fraternal orders and benevolent societies through the black church—for example, the Black Masons. These groups provided burial for their members, sick pay for disabled members, pensions to the elderly, and education for homeless children (Martin & Martin, 1985). Such early social welfare institutions assisted the natural helping networks within the family in combating poverty and provided services not available to blacks

because of segregation. In addition, many free blacks worked with antislavery organizations (Berry & Blassingame, 1982).

Education was emphasized among free blacks and was viewed as a means of mental enhancement and a vehicle for improving one's chances for occupational advancement. Because they were often barred from white schools or, if admitted, treated as inferiors, free blacks established private schools, sometimes aided by white philanthropists. One of the best known such schools was the Institution des Orphelins, built in New Orleans in 1846 (Berry & Blassingame, 1982).

SOCIAL SERVICES FOR BLACKS AFTER SLAVERY

Before the Civil War, slave masters were responsible for the care of poor and sick blacks, and free blacks were responsible for their own care. After the war, however, controversy arose over who would assume responsibility for the welfare of the freedmen (Rabinowitz, 1974). In 1865, after much debate, Congress established the first federal social welfare institution, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, known as the Freedmen's Bureau. This organization was responsible for providing military protection, clothing, housing, tools, and land, as well as for distributing rations, for establishing social agencies, hospitals, day schools, industrial schools, night schools, institutes and colleges, and for educating freed blacks. Between 1865 and 1871 the Freedmen's Bureau spent more than \$5 million on education for blacks (Berry & Blassingame, 1982). The bureau also helped former slaves reunite with families that had been separated during slavery. The Freedmen's Bureau was underfunded and opposed by hostile white southerners, and by 1872 the agency was no longer in existence. Despite some of the successful programs made available by this short-lived federally funded agency, the bureau did not provide sufficient services to reach the majority of freedmen. One out of every four blacks died of disease and want after emancipation (Bennett, 1982).

Supporters of the slave system used such statistics to suggest that blacks had been better off living on the plantation and being cared for by their masters. Some claimed that "the high death rate among blacks was due to inherent weaknesses of the race" (Rabinowitz, 1974, p. 331) and failed to consider the real causes: poverty and overcrowding. Additional justification for the continued segregation of the races occurred in 1896. In the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld "separate but equal" accommodations for blacks, thereby formally sanctioning segregation.

At various times between 1865 and 1890, segregated services for blacks provided by missionary societies, among others, were an impetus for the continuation of segregated facilities provided by state and local governments. These segregated almshouses, insane asylums, orphanages, schools, hospitals, and other institutions were in no way equal to their white counterparts and were not funded equally. Blacks were usually given inadequate accommodations and less funding for services.

Welfare services were also dispensed on a segregated basis in the south after reconstruction. In Virginia, food and fuel were available to whites during specified morning hours on certain days and to blacks in the afternoon. This practice gave whites first choice of goods and further relegated blacks to a second-class status. Blacks were barred from institutions for the "deaf, dumb, and blind" in the south until the mid-1880s. Blacks experienced such inequities in death as well as in life. Cemeteries established for blacks were generally littered, overcrowded, dreary patches of land. These discrepancies were based on the belief that blacks were inferior, as well as on the paucity of available resources for establishing identical facilities for blacks and whites. "Separate" facilities therefore became synonymous with "unequal" facilities (Rabinowitz, 1974).

BLACK SELF-HELP STRATEGIES

Blacks continued to supplement these governmental services and to help provide services to blacks. The extended family came to the rescue of thousands of related and nonrelated black children, widows, and elderly people who had no means of support. Large extended families were considered an asset, a survival mechanism, as families engaged in sharecropping after emancipation (Martin & Martin, 1985).

Other self-help efforts, including day care centers, working girls' homes, kindergartens, and private services for poor children, were launched to reach both unserved and underserved populations of black children. According to W. E. B. Du Bois (1909), churches made monetary contributions as well. Church members were engaged in such benevolent work as visits, care of the sick, and adoption of children. Du Bois suggested that at the beginning of the twentieth century black churches had contributed more than half a million dollars annually for "uplift purposes" (Du Bois, 1909). Black ministers also played an integral role in developing services for black juvenile offenders.

Black lodges of Masons or Odd Fellows performed social welfare functions, such as aiding widows and orphaned children. Societies connected with local churches provided sick benefits and burial services for members. Specialized branches of private relief groups were formed to aid blacks. For example, the Colored Ladies Relief Society, a branch of the Nashville Ladies Relief Society in 1886, investigated the needs of poor black applicants. Both societies were financed by individual donations and county court appropriations. However, the "colored society" received only one-third the amount the county appropriated to the white group (Rabinowitz, 1974).

Many of the early orphanages were founded by individual black women who could not tolerate the deplorable conditions that many black orphans were forced to endure. Other concerned black women would gather children from streets and alleys and educate and train them in trades or industry so that they could become useful citizens.

Because no provisions were made for reformatories for black youth, black delinquents in the south as young as six years of age were generally placed in

penitentiaries and jails with adult criminals. White youths were seldom sent to the penitentiary, because juvenile reformatories had been established for them. In Virginia, the black press, organizations of black women, and black churches expressed concern about these inequities in the treatment of black delinquents. Their lobbying eventually led to the establishment of a reformatory for black youths in Richmond, Virginia, in 1898 (Pollard, 1978).

State and local governments did little on behalf of elderly blacks. States that did offer such services at the turn of the century provided the aged with a very meager existence. Again, it was black men and women who made donations to provide relief for black senior citizens. This pattern of mutual aid and reliance on the black community for the provision and subsidization of social services for blacks continued until the depression of the 1930s.

By the beginning of World War I, more and more blacks were leaving the rural areas and moving to the cities, hoping to escape sharecropping and the oppressive conditions characteristic of the south. Many former agricultural and domestic workers found jobs as janitors, railroad workers, merchants, and mechanics, or work in shipyards, steel and iron mills, chemical factories, and coal mines. Blacks were restricted to the least desirable and lowest-paid jobs by a number of means, including trade union exclusion and limited opportunities for advancement. Hoping to obtain economic prosperity, many found that their rural values of mutual aid and self-help were not adaptable to big-city life. The extended family, a benefit in the rural areas, became cumbersome in urban, industrial settings in which small, geographically and occupationally mobile families were the norm (Martin & Martin, 1978). To survive, many black families often assimilated the individualistic values characteristic of the dominant society and urban life-styles.

Due to the limited employment opportunities available to blacks during this time and the continued racial segregation, however, the black community support systems—churches, schools, and benevolent societies—continued to assist black families. Many extended-family systems served as supports to newly arrived blacks in urban areas, providing housing and emotional support to kin and fictive kin who were now seeking a better life in the large urban area.

During the depression of the 1930s, blacks again tried to rekindle the self-support energies characteristic of slavery and postslavery days to protect their own against the economic hardships of the time, but families were finding it difficult to feed their immediate blood relatives and had to begin limiting their efforts to help the wider community. Social service agencies that had depended on the charitable donations of the black working poor found themselves having to cease operations because those families were devoting all their resources to their own sustenance (Martin & Martin, 1985).

Blacks were hardest hit by the depression because they were at the bottom rung of the economic ladder. As factories closed or reduced the number of employees, blacks were generally the first to be released. In 1932, approximately 50.6 percent of blacks were unemployed, and 39.0 percent of whites. With the passage of the Social Security Act and the New Deal programs of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, however, the government began to assume

more responsibility for providing social welfare services. In 1935 there were 2 million blacks on relief (Grant, 1968; Lacy, 1972). Although assisting blacks in many ways, the New Deal legislation served to further confine blacks to a caste-like status. For example, the Federal Housing Administration programs favored racially homogeneous neighborhoods and gave legal sanction to residential segregation by practices that discouraged the guarantee of mortgages on homes in integrated areas (Lacy, 1972).

In the 1930s and 1940s, blacks continued to protest unequal treatment, campaigning against employment discrimination, disenfranchisement, and segregation in education, housing, and public accommodations. Such organizations as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) were instrumental in leading the movement. By the 1950s it was clear that segregation meant discrimination, and in 1954 the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the integration of public education. As a result of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, additional barriers to equality were disbanded. Voting restraints were outlawed, and discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodations was prohibited by law. By 1968, blacks had finally been given the same legal rights as all other Americans (Lacy, 1972).

ISSUES IN SOCIAL SERVICE DELIVERY TO BLACK FAMILIES

Although some progress was made in the mid-1960s to mid-1970s, the late 1970s brought a return to the conservatism of the past, and minority issues were no longer given high priority in American society, especially in governmental agendas. Race relations became more polarized as competition for jobs grew more intense during the recessions of the 1970s (Heffernan, et al., 1988; McGhee, 1983). Throughout the 1980s, the nation's economic difficulties have taken precedence over black economic problems. Gaps between black and white earning power continue, and blacks are still disproportionately poor and more at risk than whites for problems related to low-income status.

In 1968, the National Association of Black Social Workers was founded to improve the provision of social services to blacks and to call attention to the need for more black social workers. The National Association of Social Workers has since established a National Committee on Minority Affairs to address some of the issues of practice with minority populations.

In order to make social work education more relevant to the needs of minority groups, the Council on Social Work Education established a Commission on Minority Groups in the 1970s, and a curriculum policy statement in 1972 mandated the development and inclusion of content on minorities in the social work curriculum (Dieppa, 1984). Moreover, in 1978 the National Institute of Mental Health issued a twofold mandate: (1) that minority content be included in all mental health training programs and (2) that public resources be targeted for the unserved and underserved populations that are disproportionately

minority and more at risk for mental health problems (Bush, et al., 1983). There has been some progress from efforts to increase the number of black social service professionals and to enhance mental health training by including an emphasis on effective intervention with specific minority populations, but much more work is needed to change attitudes and to enhance commitment to the development and integration of a systematic body of knowledge about social work practice with blacks.

Despite special efforts to enhance social services to blacks, few blacks are being reached. There continues to be a need for mutual aid and informal helping networks, such as the black extended family and fictive kin networks (Martin & Martin, 1985). Both financial aid and emotional support are important features of the mutual-aid system. McAdoo (1978) found that neither socioeconomic status nor upward mobility decreased the amount of informal support received by urban blacks in her sample. Similarly, Taylor's (1986) study of black family support among a sample of blacks revealed that the majority received support from their extended family members. Urban blacks in this study reported that they had frequent interaction with family members, lived relatively close to family and relatives, and found family life to be a source of satisfaction and emotional support.

Neighbors and Taylor's (1985) study found that the majority of blacks did not use social services and that the majority of those who did (14.4 percent) had incomes of less than \$10,000 and contacted public social services regardless of the type of problem. The highest percentage of social service utilizers sought help for economic problems. Using the same data, Neighbors (1984) found that few blacks experiencing personal problems seek help from mental health agencies. These findings suggest that natural helping and support within the black community should be considered a very important component in the planning of social services to reach black families. Other family members can be viewed as support systems and as potential resources to assist with problem resolution.

Although the black extended family is still a viable mechanism in rural and urban communities, the helping tradition that seemed to be institutionalized in the black community during earlier times has waned. The racial consciousness of the 1960s that served as an impetus for blacks to consider the well-being of all blacks, not just family members, seems to have taken a back seat to the desire of some blacks to obtain material goods, gain social status, and escape the stigma of being poor (Martin & Martin, 1985).

Some social service and religious organizations have had to continue to provide services to black individuals and families, primarily because the availability of and extent of governmental social service programs tend to fluctuate depending on the state of the national economy and presidential politics and policies. During the late 1970s, churches as well as professional and fraternal organizations in some cases collaborated with social agencies to address some of the social problems facing blacks. For example, in 1978 the Congress of National Black Churches formed a nonprofit coalition and has since instituted programs in child care, economic development, employment, and teen pregnancy prevention (McAdoo, 1987; Logan, 1980). Taylor and colleagues (1987)

found that both historically and currently the black church is one of the few institutions that is black owned and controlled. It is still a viable community gathering place and source of material, emotional, and spiritual assistance.

CONTEMPORARY FORCES AFFECTING BLACK FAMILY LIFE

Currently, blacks constitute about 12 percent of the population of the United States. This represents about 29 million people and 15 million black families. McAdoo (1987) characterized the contemporary black population as being younger and having a higher fertility rate than nonblacks. The average age of blacks is 26.3 years, and black children represent 15.4 percent of all children in the United States. About 56 percent of black children live in central cities (Edelman, 1981). Moreover, in 1984 the black population consisted of about 1.4 million more women than men. Over the past two decades, the structure of black families has changed (see Chapter 5), with the number of female-headed households increasing, the number of children living with two parents decreasing, and the rate of poverty among blacks increasing.

Since the 1960s the percentages of children living in one-parent families significantly increased by more than fifteen percentage points. A closer look reveals that in 1986 some 18 percent of white children lived with one parent, and 53 percent of black children ("More Children," 1988). Increasing separation, divorce rates, and out-of-wedlock births are among the factors responsible for this trend toward single parenthood. Also, because of the sex-ratio imbalance between black men and women, it is less likely that divorced black women will remarry. The divorce rate among whites has increased by about 300 percent over the past twenty years, and the divorce rate among blacks has increased about 400 percent. Also, the high cost of divorce means that many more blacks just separate, and children are left in a single-parent household (McGhee, 1985).

Although single parenthood is not necessarily problematic, the loss of a wage earner creates economic hardships for the family and often plunges many families into poverty. Black married couples generally have two incomes, and the males usually have higher median incomes than females and therefore fare better economically. For example, in 1983 the median income of a black married couple with both spouses in the labor force was \$20,586, but for a black female head-of-household, the median income was \$7,999. These income differentials can be attributed to the higher earning power of the black male and the dual-earner capacity within the two-parent family (McGhee, 1985).

After the divorce, because many noncustodial parents refuse to or are unable to support their children, the single parent may be in a difficult financial situation. For example, in 1981 only 16.0 percent of the 23.9 percent black women with minor children who were awarded child support payments actually received them. When actually paid, these awards were usually less than \$70 a month per child (Edelman, 1985).

Teen parenthood is another major issue in the black community today and a cause of single-parent families. By the age of 20, nearly 50 percent of all black females have been pregnant (Wallis, 1985). Religious beliefs serve to dissuade many from considering abortion to terminate the pregnancy, and many are reluctant to place children for adoption outside the extended-family network. If they choose to raise their children in a separate household from their parents, they are almost certain to be in poverty (McAdoo, 1987).

According to a 1987 census study, out-of-wedlock births are much more likely to occur in families with incomes below the poverty line across all racial groups. Because blacks have disproportionately low incomes, more black children find themselves living in impoverished single-parent households for longer periods of time than white children in the same circumstances. While the average white child may live in poverty for about ten months of his or her life, the average black child will remain in poverty for at least five years (Schaefer, 1988).

Although the national poverty rate was about 14.0 percent, the poverty rate among blacks in 1986 was 31.1 percent. The hardest hit by poverty are single black mothers and children. According to the Children's Defense Fund, more than half of all black infants born in 1982 were born into poverty. Also in that year, about 71 percent of black female-headed families with children at home were poor (Edelman, 1985).

Unemployment rates have continued to be disproportionately higher for blacks than the rate for whites. For example, in 1986 the average unemployment rate was 14.5 percent for blacks and 6.0 percent for whites. The unemployment rate for black teenagers was 39.3 percent and for white teenagers it was 15.6 percent (Swinton, 1988).

Consequently, a number of factors are responsible for the change in black family structures today. These include high rates of unemployment for young black men, increases in rates of separation and divorce, and earlier sexual activity followed by reluctance to consider abortion or adoption (McAdoo, 1987). Blacks are still experiencing income inequalities. In 1986 the average median family income for blacks was \$17,604, compared to \$30,809 for whites (Swinton, 1988).

There has been little gain in income equality between the races since the 1960s. Although the rates moderated slightly during the 1970s, they rose at the peak of the recession in the early 1980s. This suggests that black economic progress seems to be directly influenced by the status of the U.S. economy. The escalating budget, trade deficits, and a weak dollar have drawn the attention of the nation, while the plight of the black population has been placed on the back burner (Swinton, 1988).

Poor and working-class blacks have suffered because of the back-to-back recessions, high inflation, and technological changes that resulted in a shift from high-paying unionized manufacturing jobs to low-paying nonunionized service jobs, but in the 1970s and 1980s, middle-class blacks were particularly vulnerable to these economic shifts. Between 1969 and 1984 the percentage of middle-class blacks decreased from 39 percent to 32 percent. These families too have

not escaped the impact of economic instability on family structure. During this period, the proportion of single-parent families actually rose almost ten times faster among college-educated blacks than among school dropouts who were black. Hill (1987) predicts that in 1990 black family strengths will continue to be tested as this decline in the percentage of middle-income blacks will continue—low-paying jobs, such as janitors and fast-food workers, will be plentiful, and relatively few newly created high-tech jobs will be available.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the external economic forces that have taken their toll, black families have proven to be amazingly resilient. As Hill (1972) has reported, such strengths of the black family as strong kinship bonds, strong work orientation, flexible family roles, strong achievement orientation, and a religious orientation have helped the black family to survive. These factors have been responsible for increasing the number of blacks who have not experienced teen pregnancies, welfare dependency, children in foster care, and involvement in criminal and gang activities.

In addition, black religious organizations and grassroots self-help organizations have been responsible for developing prevention programs and for organizing the black community to address specific issues. Blacks in political power should continue to fight for systemic changes, but the mutual-aid tradition of the past must resurface in order to provide black youths with successful role models, educational and occupational opportunities, hope for a better life, and belief in themselves and in the future.

Social workers and other mental health professionals are urged to (1) take a closer look at the multitude of external factors (income inequality, racism, etc.) that have had a negative impact on black families and their resulting special needs; (2) develop an appreciation for the mutual-aid survival mechanisms as well as the internal coping strategies that blacks have utilized since slavery; (3) develop policies and programs that acknowledge the unique and viable aspects of the black family structure, and recognize and overcome systemic barriers to service utilization (e.g., agency fee structures, location); and (4) work through existing religious, community, and familial support systems in order to serve black families effectively.

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