



The Negro Family: The Case For National Action

Office of Policy Planning and Research
United States Department of Labor

March 1965

Two hundred years ago, in 1765, nine assembled colonies first joined together to demand freedom from arbitrary power.

For the first century we struggled to hold together the first continental union of democracy in the history of man. One hundred years ago, in 1865, following a terrible test of blood and fire, the compact of union was finally sealed.

For a second century we labored to establish a unity of purpose and interest among the many groups which make up the American community.

That struggle has often brought pain and violence. It is not yet over.

*State of the Union Message of President Lyndon B. Johnson,
January 4, 1965.*

The United States is approaching a new crisis in race relations.

In the decade that began with the school desegregation decision of the Supreme Court, and ended with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the demand of Negro Americans for full recognition of their civil rights was finally met.

The effort, no matter how savage and brutal, of some State and local governments to thwart the exercise of those rights is doomed. The nation will not put up with it — least of all the Negroes. The present moment will pass. In the meantime, a new period is beginning.

In this new period the expectations of the Negro Americans will go beyond civil rights. Being Americans, they will now expect that in the near future equal opportunities for them as a group will produce roughly equal results, as compared with other groups. This is not going to happen. Nor will it happen for generations to come unless a new and special effort is made.

There are two reasons. First, the racist virus in the American blood stream still afflicts us: Negroes will encounter serious personal prejudice for at least another generation. Second, three centuries of sometimes unimaginable mistreatment have taken their toll on the Negro people. The harsh fact is that as a group, at the present time, in terms of ability to win out in the competitions of American life, they are not equal to most of those groups with which they will be competing. Individually, Negro Americans reach the highest peaks of achievement. But collectively, in the spectrum of American ethnic and religious and regional groups, where some get plenty and some get none, where some send eighty percent of their children to college and others pull them out of school at the 8th grade, Negroes are among the weakest.

The most difficult fact for white Americans to understand is that in these terms the circumstances of the Negro American community in recent years has probably been

[History Home Page](#)

[In-Depth Research](#)

[Annals of the
Department](#)

[History eSources](#)

[Departmental
Timeline](#)

[Historical Office](#)

■ [Century of Service](#)

[Wirtz Labor Library](#)

getting worse, not better.

Indices of dollars of income, standards of living, and years of education deceive. The gap between the Negro and most other groups in American society is widening.

The fundamental problem, in which this is most clearly the case, is that of family structure. The evidence — not final, but powerfully persuasive — is that the Negro family in the urban ghettos is crumbling. A middle class group has managed to save itself, but for vast numbers of the unskilled, poorly educated city working class the fabric of conventional social relationships has all but disintegrated. There are indications that the situation may have been arrested in the past few years, but the general post war trend is unmistakable. So long as this situation persists, the cycle of poverty and disadvantage will continue to repeat itself.

The thesis of this paper is that these events, in combination, confront the nation with a new kind of problem. Measures that have worked in the past, or would work for most groups in the present, will not work here. A national effort is required that will give a unity of purpose to the many activities of the Federal government in this area, directed to a new kind of national goal: the establishment of a stable Negro family structure.

This would be a new departure for Federal policy. And a difficult one. But it almost certainly offers the only possibility of resolving in our time what is, after all, the nation's oldest, and most intransigent, and now its most dangerous social problem. What Gunnar Myrdal said in *An American Dilemma* remains true today: *"America is free to chose whether the Negro shall remain her liability or become her opportunity."*

Table of Contents

[Chapter I. The Negro American Revolution.](#)

[Chapter II. The Negro American Family.](#)

[Chapter III. The Roots of the Problem.](#)

[Chapter IV. The Tangle of Pathology.](#)

[Chapter V. The Case for National Action.](#)

[Footnote References.](#)

NOTE: The 1965 published version of this Report included numerous tables and graphs, which are not reproduced electronically here at this time. Readers who wish to use the graphics should be able to access a printed copy of the Report at the nearest Federal Depository Library. Contact [GPO Access](#) for locations.

 [Back to Top](#)

www.dol.gov

[Freedom of Information Act](#) | [Customer Survey](#)
[Privacy & Security Statement](#) | [Disclaimers](#) | [E-mail to a Friend](#)

U.S. Department of Labor
Frances Perkins Building
200 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20210

1-866-4-USA-DOL
TTY: 1-877-889-5627
[Contact Us](#)