

# Section 2

## Where Are We? Where Do We Go from Here?

As we seek to hear and heed Dr. King’s call to justice and peace as God’s intention for every child, we start by looking at where we’ve come from in the movement for justice, where we are, and where we need to go in the days ahead. In this section, you will find:

- **Reflections on Moving Forward by Marian Wright Edelman, President of the Children’s Defense Fund**
- **Invest in Every Child, Secure the Future: CDF’s Immediate Priorities for All Children**
- **CDF’s Cradle to Prison Pipeline® Fact Sheet**

Use this material for your own reading and reflection; as context for the development of a sermon, homily, or other message; as a discussion starter for a conversation in your place of worship; as text for an educational program; as material for active response in the context of a social action committee or other group in your place of worship; or another use. You may want to pair it with one or more of the reflections from various religious perspectives offered in “Faith Voices” beginning on page 46.

---

## Reflections on Moving Forward

by **Marian Wright Edelman**  
**President of the Children’s Defense Fund**

This year, 2008, is a significant year that prompts us to consider three crucial questions: Where have we come from, where are we now, and where do we want our nation to go in the years ahead? Those questions are prompted in part by 2008 marking not only 40 years since Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s death, but also the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his Poor People’s Campaign, which challenged our nation to end the poverty afflicting millions of Americans of all races and to confront the entrenched triple evils of racism, excessive materialism (and its flip side, poverty), and militarism that threaten our nation and world. The Poor People’s Campaign gave birth to CDF’s parent organization, and I had the privilege of serving as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference’s congressional liaison and general counsel. I remained in Washington to follow up on its demands and to begin sowing and nurturing the seeds for the next movement that you and I must help build to put the social, economic, and human rights—health care, decent jobs with living wages, quality early childhood development, and education—beneath the political and civil rights for which Dr. King and so many others sacrificed and died. I believed then—and still do—that children are the metaphor for this next transforming movement whose time is now.

### **When Will We Hear and Heed Dr. King’s Call to End Poverty in America?**

In 1968 at Washington National Cathedral in his last Sunday sermon, Dr. King retold the parable of the rich man Dives and the poor man Lazarus. Its message transcends the specificity of the Christian tradition from which it comes and poses an urgent moral question for all of us, whatever our faith tradition. In the story Dives dies and goes to hell because he walked past poor, sick Lazarus,

who waited at Dives’ gates every day hoping for a few crumbs from his table. Dives ignored him and did not respond. Dr. King reminded us that “Dives didn’t go to hell because he was rich,” but because “Dives didn’t realize that his wealth was his opportunity... to bridge the gulf that separated him from his brother, Lazarus.... He never really saw him. He went to hell because he allowed his brother to become invisible... [and] sought to be a conscientious objector in the war against poverty.”<sup>2</sup> Dr. King warns us even today that “this can happen to America, the

---

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Remaining Awake through a Great Revolution,” sermon at Washington National Cathedral, March 31, 1968.

*We must act together with urgency to reset our nation's moral compass. Dr. King believed "our only hope... lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit [of America] and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism."*

richest nation in the world... There is nothing new about poverty. What is new is that we now have the techniques and the resources to get rid of poverty. The real question is whether we have the will."<sup>3</sup>

That is *still* the real question you and I must answer and demand our nation answer in this nation- and world-defining year when 36.5 million Americans still live in poverty, including nearly 13 million children, a majority in working families, and 47 million people in America lack health insurance, including 9.4 million children, nearly 90 percent of whom live in working families.

### Where Have We Come From?

The day after Dr. King was shot, I went out into the riot torn Washington, D.C., streets and into schools in those neighborhoods scorched by flames to talk to children. I went to tell them not to loot and raid so that they would not get arrested and ruin their futures. A young Black boy about 12- or 13-years-old looked squarely at me and said, "Lady, what future? I ain't got no future. I ain't got nothing to lose."

I've spent 40 years and will spend the rest of my life trying to prove him wrong. As the Children's Defense Fund celebrates its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year—and the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our parent organization, the Washington Research Project—I had no idea how hard it would be. For this boy saw and spoke the plain truth for himself and millions like him in our money rich, militarily powerful, but morally anemic, race-, gender-, and income-stratified society. Despite great progress over the past 40 years, so much peril remains to snuff out the hopes and dreams and lives of millions of children like him.

The current crisis at the intersection of poverty and race, about which CDF recently issued the deeply disturbing America's *Cradle to Prison Pipeline*<sup>SM</sup> report, threatens to turn back the clock of racial and social progress unless the nation opens its eyes and ears and hearts and sees and hears and responds to the cries of our children. We must act together with urgency to reset our nation's moral compass. Dr. King believed "our only hope... lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit [of America] and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism."<sup>4</sup>

We must act upon his warnings if our children and future and founding principles are to be saved, but too many Americans would rather celebrate than follow Dr. King. Many have enshrined Dr. King the dreamer and ignored Dr. King the disturber of all unjust peace, as theologian Dr. Vincent Harding said.<sup>5</sup> Many celebrate King the orator but ignore his words and warnings about the need for reordering the misguided values and priorities he believed will be the seeds of America's downfall. Many remember King, the vocal opponent of violence, but not the King who called for massive nonviolent civil disobedience to challenge the stockpiling of weapons of death and the wars they fuel and the excessive materialism of the greedy that deprive the needy of the basic necessities of life. Many of us trivialize or sanitize Dr. King's words and would much rather build a monument or name a street or school after him than build the new nation and world he called for. And many freeze him in his eloquent dream of 1963 and ignore the nightmares and struggles that followed—the deaths of the four young girls in the Birmingham church; the deaths of three young people and others during Mississippi's Freedom Summer; the cries for Black power; the horrible violations of his human rights by the FBI; the growing violence in southern and northern cities; and the Vietnam war, which stole the hopes and lives of our poor here at home and in that poor country. His greatness lay in his willingness to struggle to hear and see the truth; to not give into fear, uncertainty and despair; to continue to grow and to never lose hope, despite every discouragement from his government and even his closest friends and advisers. He opened his heart to the cries of the bitter urban youth he did not know and moved to Chicago for a spell to be present to them. And he resisted those who sought to compartmentalize or segregate his concern for social justice and peace. Amidst huge criticism

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Remaining Awake through a Great Revolution," sermon at Washington National Cathedral, March 31, 1968.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?" in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, p. 632.

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Vincent Harding, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Inconvenient Hero* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1996).

## Where Are We? Where Do We Go from Here?

for his opposition of the Vietnam War by Whites and Blacks alike, Harding correctly asserted that King found no basis in the commandments for setting boundaries of nation or any other sort around the neighbors he was to love. Black people told him to be quiet lest he anger the Johnson White House; White people told him to be quiet because he was not an expert on foreign policy. And contributors deserted him as he spoke out not only for an end to the war but for a fairer distribution of our country's vast resources between the rich and the poor. Why was he pushing the nation to do more on the tail of the greatest civil rights strides ever made and challenging a President who had declared a war on poverty? Because he saw that our nation's ills went far deeper and that fundamental structural changes had to be made.

### Where Are We Today?

Today Dr. King would be so proud that Tiger Woods reigns on the golf circuit and Oprah on television; that Deval Patrick is Governor of Massachusetts, and Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton became the two leading Democratic contenders for the presidency of the United States. He would be delighted that there are thousands of Black elected officials across the land, and that Black and Brown leaders now dot the corridors of power in many sectors. But he would be appalled that a Black boy born in 2001 has a one in three chance of going to prison in his lifetime and a Latino boy a one in six chance; that all these years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, a majority of minority children are in racially segregated and unequal schools; that 86 percent of Black, 83 percent of Latino, and 58 percent of White fourth graders cannot read at grade level; and that 89 percent of Black, 85 percent of Latino, and 59 percent of White eighth graders cannot do math at grade level. He would be outraged that 579,000 Black males are serving sentences in state and federal prisons while only 48,000 Black males earn a bachelor's degree each year. And he would be challenging us to root out the still glaring and subtle racial disparities in all our child serving systems and major institutions in American life that reflect the continued vibrancy of racism in our society. For example, Black youths are almost five times as likely and Latino youths are about twice as likely to be incarcerated as White youths for drug offenses.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great Protestant theologian who died opposing Hitler's holocaust, believed that the test of the morality of a society is how it treats its children. We flunk Bonhoeffer's test every hour of every day in America where a child is:

- abused or neglected every 36 seconds;
- born into poverty every 35 seconds;
- born without health insurance every 41 seconds; and
- killed by a firearm every 3 hours — 8 a day.

Dr. King would be appalled and call for an end to the relentless violent war of American against American that has taken the lives of more than 1.1 million Americans, including more than 104,000 children and teens, since his and Robert Kennedy's lives were snuffed out by guns in 1968. What is it going to take for you and me to stand up and build a movement to stop the senseless deaths of children and adults from gunfire and poverty, neglect and abuse and the denial of health care, and the indifference and inaction in a society deadened by "affluenza" and the unjust structures and budget priorities that support and enable it?

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great Protestant theologian who died opposing Hitler's holocaust, believed that the test of the morality of a society is how it treats its children. We flunk Bonhoeffer's test every hour of every day in America.*

We are living in a time of unbearable dissonance between promise and performance; between good politics and good policy; between professed and practiced family values; between racial creed and racial deed; between calls for community and rampant individualism and greed; and between our capacity to prevent and alleviate human deprivation and disease and our political and spiritual will to do so.

Something is awry when the net worth of the world's 946 billionaires exceeds the combined GDP of the 138 poorest countries.

Something is awry when, in the United States, nearly 1.7 million families lived on less income than was received last year by one private equity firm executive; when the gap between rich and poor is at its highest level ever recorded; when the average CEO of a large company makes more in a day than the average worker makes in a whole year; when the number of children in poverty has increased by 1.2 million since 2000; and the number of children without health coverage by more than one million

## Where Are We? Where Do We Go from Here?

from 2004 to 2006, and our political leaders contend we cannot afford to provide all children and pregnant women with access to health coverage for about \$70 billion over five years but can afford to continue to give tax cuts to the top one percent of richest Americans, which will cost us more than \$76 billion in lost revenues this year alone.

The facts about child poverty, neglect and abuse, and denied health care are not acts of God, they are our choices as men and women, leaders and citizens. They can and must be changed. But it requires speaking truth to power as Dr. King did on behalf of the poor, the young, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger who cannot speak for themselves. And it requires our examining and changing our values as a society and the measure of our success.

### Where Do We Go from Here?

We are living at an incredibly perilous and promising moment in history. Few human beings are blessed to experience the beginning of a new century *and* millennium. How will we say thanks for the life, earth, nations, and children that God has entrusted to our care? What legacies, principles, values, and deeds will we stand for and send to the future through our children to their children and to a spiritually confused, balkanized, and violent world desperately hungering for moral leadership and community?

How will progress be measured over the next thousand years, if we survive them? By the killing power and number of weapons of destruction we can produce and traffic at home and abroad, or by our willingness to shrink—indeed, destroy—the prison of violence constructed in the name of peace and security? Will we be remembered in this beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and third millennium by how many material things we can manufacture, advertise, sell, and consume, or by our rediscovery of more lasting, non-material measures of success—a new Dow Jones for the purpose and quality of life in our families, neighborhoods, cities, national, and world communities? Will we be remembered by how rapidly technology and corporate merger-mania and greed can render human beings obsolete or by our struggle to find a better balance between corporate profits and corporate caring for children, families, communities, and the environment? Will we be remembered by how much a few at the top can get at the expense of the many at the bottom and in the middle, or by our struggle for a concept of enough for all? Will we be remembered by the glitz, style, and banality of too much of our culture and in our electronic global village and shopping arcade or by the substance of our efforts to

rekindle an ethic of caring, community, and justice in a world driven too much by money, technology, and weaponry?

The answers lie in the values we stand for and in the actions we take today. What an opportunity for good or evil we personally and collectively hold in our hands as parents and religious, education, business community and political leaders, and as citizens in our titular world leader country in this post-Cold War and post-industrial era.

A thousand years ago the United States was not even a dream. Copernicus and Galileo had not told us the earth was round or revolved around the sun. Gutenberg's Bible had not been printed, Wycliffe had not translated it into English, and Martin Luther had not tacked his theses on the church door. The Magna Carta did not exist, Chaucer's and Shakespeare's tales had not been spun, and Bach's, Beethoven's, and Mozart's miraculous music had not been created to inspire, soothe, and heal our spirits. European serfs struggled in bondage while many African and Asian empires flourished in independence. Native Americans peopled America, free of slavery's blight, and Hitler's holocaust had yet to show the depths that human evil can reach when good women and men remain silent or indifferent.

A hundred or thousand years from now, will civilization remain and humankind survive? Will America's dream be alive, be remembered, and be worth remembering? Will the United States be a blip or a beacon in history? Can our founding principle that all men—and women and children—"are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights" withstand the test of time, the tempests of politics, and become deed and not just creed for EVERY child and human being? Is America's dream big enough for every second child who is female, every sixth child who is poor, every sixth child who is Black, every seventh child who is Latino, and every seventh child who is mentally or physically challenged? Is our world's dream big enough for all of the children God has sent with the message that God has not yet given up on humankind, as Indian philosopher Rabindranath Tagore believed?

Can our children become the healing agents of our national and world transformation and future spiritual and economic salvation? Methodist minister Edmond McDonald wrote that "when God wants an important thing done in this world or a wrong righted, God goes about it in a very singular way." Instead of unleashing the

## Where Are We? Where Do We Go from Here?

power of thunderbolts or earthquakes, “God simply has a tiny baby born, perhaps of a very humble home, perhaps of a very humble mother. And she puts it in the baby’s mind, and then—God waits.” McDonald concludes, “The great events of this world are not battles and elections and earthquakes and thunderbolts. The great events are babies, for each child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged with humanity, but is still expecting goodwill to become incarnate in each human life.”<sup>6</sup> And so God produced a Gandhi and a Mandela and a Harriet Tubman, an Eleanor Roosevelt, and a Martin Luther King, Jr., and each of us to guide the earth towards peace and justice rather than conflict.

I believe that protecting today’s children—tomorrow’s Mandelas, Mother Teresas, Wangaris and Kings—is the moral and common sense litmus test of our humanity in a world where millions of child lives are ravaged by wars, neglect and abuse, and racial, ethnic, religious, and class divisions of adults.

### What Can We Do to Move Forward?

How, then, can you and I pick up the torch of the last Civil Rights Movement and build the next transforming movement to unify a world torn by poverty, racism and war?

#### **The first step is to read, heed, and follow Dr. King.**

The great Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, introducing Dr. King to a Rabbinical Assembly shortly before he was assassinated, said: “Where in America today do we hear a voice like the voice of the prophets of Israel? Martin Luther King is a sign that God has not forsaken the United States. God has sent him to us.”<sup>7</sup> Heschel continued, “His mission is sacred...The situation of the poor in America is our plight, our sickness. To be deaf to their cry is to condemn ourselves.” Heschel affirmed, “Martin Luther King, Jr., is a voice, a vision, and a way. I call upon every Jew,” and I would add, every person of faith, “to harken to his voice, to share his vision, to follow his way. The whole future of America will depend on the impact and influence of Dr. King.”<sup>8</sup> I would add the world.

**Second: We must assign ourselves personally right now to be a voice for justice for children and the poor in these scary and turbulent times of war and terrorism**

**and greed and economic uncertainty.** A lot of people are waiting for Dr. King to come back or for another Dr. King to appear and save us. He’s not coming back—we’re it. Some people think that if we just elect a new President and Congress, everything will be solved. Not so. A caring President and a more enlightened Congress will make a difference, but they won’t make the transforming changes our nation and world needs if we don’t build the movement to push them. It took the Civil Rights Movement to make John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson and Congress respond. Wendell Phillips, the abolitionist, fervently condemned slavery in the 1840s as a “moral outrage” when his cause seemed hopeless. A friend asked him after a speech, “Wendell, why are you so on fire?” Phillips replied that he was on fire because he had mountains of ice before him to melt.

The great Quaker leader John Woolman did not wait for Abraham Lincoln, the Civil War, or the Emancipation Proclamation to speak and act against slavery. He traveled by horseback to home after home of individual Quakers to discuss the incompatibility of slavery with Quaker principles and urged them to stop being slave owners. Harriet Tubman didn’t wait for President Lincoln and the Civil War either. She ran away from slavery and returned again and again to deliver others through her underground railroad from slavery to freedom.

You and I must do the right thing for children—right now—and insist our leaders do so—whatever the risk. And each of us must vote, organize, and inform ourselves about how well our leaders are protecting children and hold them accountable. Visit CDF’s website ([www.childrensdefense.org/act\\_home](http://www.childrensdefense.org/act_home)) for our annual nonpartisan Congressional voting record and for our 2008-2009 child policy agenda. And each of us must get out of our comfort zones and organizational silos to challenge the deeply entrenched special interests that resist change whether on health care for children or the quality education every child needs to succeed.

It is hard to believe that, today, in the wealthiest nation in the world, our President has vetoed a child health bill that would have met—albeit inadequately—the health coverage needs of about 3.2 million of the 9.4 million uninsured

<sup>6</sup> Edmond McDonald, as quoted in *Guide My Feet: Prayers and Meditations on Loving and Working for Children* by Marian Wright Edelman, 1995, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Dr. King at the sixty-eighth convention of the Rabbinical Assembly, March 25, 1968, p. 657 in *Testament of Hope*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

## Where Are We? Where Do We Go from Here?

children. We must do better in 2009 and cover *all* children and pregnant women. A lot of people contend it's unrealistic for the Children's Defense Fund to seek about \$70 billion over five years to enact the All Healthy Children Act (S. 1564/H.R. 1688). They say our nation cannot afford it. I say nonsense. This increased annual phased-in investment of \$14.8 billion in covering our children and pregnant women is equivalent to less than two months of what we spent in Iraq last year or less than three months of the tax cuts to the top one percent of richest taxpayers.

In March 2009 when the Congress and President act again to reauthorize SCHIP, I hope you will join with CDF in demanding that *every* child and pregnant woman gets comprehensive coverage immediately. A child is born only once and has only one childhood. She or he cannot wait for us to take long overdue action on health coverage for all. And if you believe as I do that every child's life has equal value and that God did not make two classes of children, then lift your voice and vote—and challenge any political leader of any party who says we can't cover *all* children.

CDF's child policy priorities call for an end to child poverty in this nation. We know how to do it and cannot afford not to do it. Every year that we keep 13 million children poor costs our nation \$500 billion in lost productivity, and the cost of crime and poor health. Can we afford to end child poverty? Of course we can: Every poor child could be lifted out of poverty for four months of the Iraq war spending last year and less than nine months of the tax cuts for the top one percent of the richest taxpayers. What do you think is more important to the future of America? More tax cuts for our richest Americans or hope and basic necessities for 13 million children, a majority in working families?

We do not have a money problem in America; we have a profound values and priorities problem. Imagine the kind of nation and world we could build if we became more people centered rather than profit and property centered, as Dr. King urged, and really invested in rather than just talked about peace and not war. The Congressional Research Service says the Iraq war will cost us over \$600 billion by the end of 2008. The Bush tax cuts that began

in 2001 will cost us about \$2 trillion—or much more if extended. With this money, we could save the lives of millions of people on our earth and replace the terrors of poverty and war with hope and health care and clean water and education for all God's children in our global family.

**Third: We must, as Dr. King urged, “live by conviction rather than conformity.** Ultimately a genuine leader is not a searcher for consensus but a molder of consensus,” King said. “If every Negro in the U.S. turns to violence, I will choose to be that one lone voice preaching that this is the wrong way.”<sup>9</sup> In his letter from a Birmingham jail he described two kinds of leaders: thermometer leaders and thermostat leaders. Thermometer leaders stick their fingers in the air, test the political temperature and conform; thermostat leaders change and set the temperature. We need more thermostat leaders in every institution in our nation, especially in our faith and education institutions, to stand up for justice. Dr. King said, “If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the 20<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>10</sup>

**Fourth: We must, like him, understand the difference between charity and justice** and that the demand of all great faiths and our professed democratic principles of fair opportunity is justice. Dr. King said, “We have moved into an era where we are called upon to raise certain basic questions about the whole society. We are still called upon to give aid to the beggar who finds himself in misery and agony on life's highway. But one day, we must ask the question of whether an edifice which produces beggars must not be changed.”<sup>11</sup>

**Fifth: We must never give in to despair or give up. We must keep moving.** I first heard and was inspired by Dr. King in Sisters Chapel at my alma mater Spelman College in 1960. He told us to always keep moving: “If you cannot fly, drive; if you cannot drive, run; if you cannot run, walk; if you cannot walk, crawl. But keep moving. Keep moving” forward.<sup>12</sup> And fight with all our might those who seek to move us backwards.

<sup>9</sup> Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community*, as quoted in *A Testament of Hope*, p. 595.

<sup>10</sup> Letter from Birmingham Jail in *A Testament of Hope*, p. 300.

<sup>11</sup> Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break the Silence,” address delivered at Riverside Church, New York, on April 4, 1967.

<sup>12</sup> Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Spelman College 79th Founders Day,” Sisters Chapel, Spelman College. Atlanta, Georgia, April 10, 1960.

## Where Are We? Where Do We Go from Here?

### **Sixth: Keep working and struggling—no matter what.**

When Dr. King's dear friend and mine, Dr. Vincent Harding, spoke to Denver children at a Martin Luther King Day assembly, he alluded to Dr. King's awareness that he could be killed at any time. Afterwards a boy asked him, "If Dr. King knew he could be killed at any time, why didn't he just back off? Why didn't he just chill out for a while?" While Vince was pondering his answer, a Latina girl unhesitatingly responded: "What do you mean chill out? Dr. King *couldn't* chill out. He had work to do." Yes he did and so do we if the triple evils of racism, poverty, and militarism that he sacrificed and died for to open our eyes to are to be overcome.

### **Seventh: We must keep Dr. King's vision of a new world and beloved community for all our children before us:**

One day youngsters will learn words they will not understand.

Children from India will ask:  
What is hunger?

Children from Alabama will ask:  
What is racial segregation?

Children from Hiroshima will ask:  
What is the atomic bomb?

Children at school will ask:  
What is war?

You will answer them:  
Those words are not used any more  
Like stage coaches, galleys or slavery  
Words no longer meaningful.

That is why they have been removed from dictionaries.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/uk/tz/resources/assets/pdf/assembly\\_sec\\_martinlutherkingday\\_jan15.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/uk/tz/resources/assets/pdf/assembly_sec_martinlutherkingday_jan15.pdf).



Let me end with a prayer:

## I Care and I Am Willing to Serve and Stand for Children

Lord, I cannot preach like Martin Luther King, Jr.  
or turn a poetic phrase like Maya Angelou  
*but I care and am willing to serve and to stand up for children.*

I do not have Fred Shuttlesworth's and Harriet Tubman's  
courage or Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt's political skills  
*but I care and am willing to serve and raise my voice with others for children.*

I cannot sing like Fannie Lou Hamer  
or organize like Ella Baker and Bayard Rustin  
*but I care and am willing to serve.*

I am not holy like Archbishop Tutu,  
forgiving like Mandela, or disciplined like Gandhi  
*but I care and am willing to serve and sacrifice to build our children a better future.*

I am not brilliant like Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois or  
Elizabeth Cady Stanton, or as eloquent as  
Sojourner Truth and Booker T. Washington  
*but I care and am willing to serve and use the talents I do have to keep children safe.*

I have not Mother Teresa's saintliness,  
Dorothy Day's love or Cesar Chavez's  
gentle tough spirit  
*but I care and am willing to serve and make a difference for children.*

God, it is not as easy as it used to be  
to frame an issue and forge a solution  
*but I care and am willing to serve and to keep struggling until we find the way to build the  
21<sup>st</sup> century movement for children.*

My mind and body are not so swift as in youth  
and my energy comes in spurts  
*but I care and am willing to serve and to vote for my grandchildren.*

I'm so young  
nobody will listen  
I'm not sure what to say or do  
*but I care and am willing to serve.*

I can't see or hear well  
speak good English, stutter sometimes, am afraid of criticism  
and get real scared standing up before others  
*but I care and am willing to serve.*

Lord, use me as Thou will to save Thy children today and tomorrow and to build a nation and  
world where no child is left behind and everyone feels welcome.

(by Marian Wright Edelman)

---

## Invest in Every Child: Secure the Future

### CDF's Immediate Priorities for All Children

#### **Priority: End Child Poverty.**

**The Problem:** Today, 12.8 million children in America, or 1 in 6, are poor, the majority living in working families. The burden of poverty falls disproportionately on minority children, with 1 in 3 Black children and 1 in 4 Latino children affected compared to 1 in 10 White children.

**Why It Matters:** Poor children lag behind their peers in many ways beyond income; they are less healthy, trail in emotional and intellectual development, and do not perform as well in school. The challenges that poor children face accumulate and interact, casting long shadows throughout their lives. Every year that we keep children in poverty costs our nation half a trillion dollars in lost productivity, poorer health, and increased crime.

**What Must Be Done:** We must end poverty through investments in high quality education for every child, livable wages for families, income supplements like the Earned Income and Child Tax Credits, job training and job creation, and work supports like child care and health coverage.

#### **Priority: Ensure Every Child and Pregnant Woman Access to Affordable, Seamless, Comprehensive Health and Mental Health Coverage and Services.**

**The Problem:** Today, 9.4 million children are uninsured, an increase of more than one million children over the last two years. Each year more than 750,000 pregnant women are uninsured and lack timely access to essential health services.

**Why It Matters:** People who are uninsured live sicker and die sooner. The United States is the wealthiest nation in the world, yet children's health status in our country as measured by selected indicators is among the worst in the industrialized world.

**What Must Be Done:** We must ensure every child and pregnant woman has access to affordable, seamless, comprehensive health and mental health coverage and services.

#### **Priority: Provide High Quality Early Childhood Development Programs for All.**

**The Problem:** Today, only 3 percent of eligible infants and young children (0-3) are enrolled in Early Head Start and only about half to two-thirds of children eligible for Head Start are enrolled. Quality child care and preschool programs are crucial to level the playing field and ensure every child entering school is ready to learn.

**Why It Matters:** Studies reveal that those enrolled in high quality early childhood education programs are subsequently more likely to complete higher levels of education, have higher earnings, be in better health and be in stable relationships, and are less likely to commit a crime or be incarcerated.

**What Must Be Done:** We must make early childhood development programs accessible to every child by ensuring such programs are affordable, available and of high quality.

## **Priority: Ensure Every Child Can Read at Grade Level by Fourth Grade and Guarantee Quality Education through High School Graduation.**

**The Problem:** Today, more than 8 of every 10 Black and Latino fourth graders and almost 6 out of every 10 White fourth graders in our public schools cannot read at grade level. Those unable to read well are at high risk of grade repetition and dropping out of school.

**Why It Matters:** Attainment of a high school diploma is the single most effective preventive strategy against adult poverty. Yet the U.S. has the sixth lowest high school graduation rate among the 30 industrialized market economies.

**What Must Be Done:** To help each child reach his/her full potential and succeed in work and life, we need to ensure our schools have adequate resources to provide high quality education to every child.

## **Priority: Protect Children from Abuse and Neglect and Connect Them to Caring Permanent Families.**

**The Problem:** Almost 900,000 children each year in America are abused or neglected, one every 36 seconds. Forty percent of these children get no services at all after the initial investigation. Each year, more than 800,000 children spend time in foster care. On any given night, 200,000 children are homeless—1 in every 4 of the homeless population.

**Why It Matters:** Children left with no permanent family connections or a connection with a caring adult have no one to whom they can turn for social, emotional or financial support and face numerous barriers as they struggle to become self-sufficient adults. The annual total direct and indirect costs of child maltreatment are estimated to be nearly \$104 billion.

**What Must Be Done:** We must expand prevention and specialized treatment services for children and their parents, connect children to caring permanent families, improve the quality of the child welfare workforce and increase accountability for results for children.

## **Priority: Stop the Criminalization of Children at Increasingly Younger Ages and Invest in Prevention and Early Intervention.**

**The Problem:** A Black boy born in 2001 has a 1 in 3 chance, a Latino boy a 1 in 6 chance and a White boy a 1 in 17 chance of going to prison in his lifetime. In 2003, almost 15,000 girls were incarcerated—1 in every 7 juveniles in residential placement.

**Why It Matters:** States spend about three times as much money per prisoner as per public school pupil. Unless we focus our efforts on early intervention and prevention, rather than punishment, we are robbing thousands of youth each year of their futures and our country of vital human resources.

**What Must Be Done:** We must reduce detention and incarceration by increasing investment in prevention and early intervention strategies, such as access to quality early childhood development and education services and to the health and mental health care children need for healthy development.

**Learn more, take action or support CDF's priorities for all children at [www.childrensdefense.org/priorities](http://www.childrensdefense.org/priorities)**

## Cradle to Prison Pipeline® Fact Sheet

The Children's Defense Fund recently launched the Cradle to Prison Pipeline® Campaign, a national call to action to stop the funneling of tens of thousands of youth, predominantly minorities, down life paths that often lead to arrest, conviction, incarceration and, in some cases, death. Race and poverty are the major factors underpinning the Pipeline. We, as a nation, created the Pipeline and we have the power, knowledge and will to dismantle it. The need is urgent.

### KEY FACTS

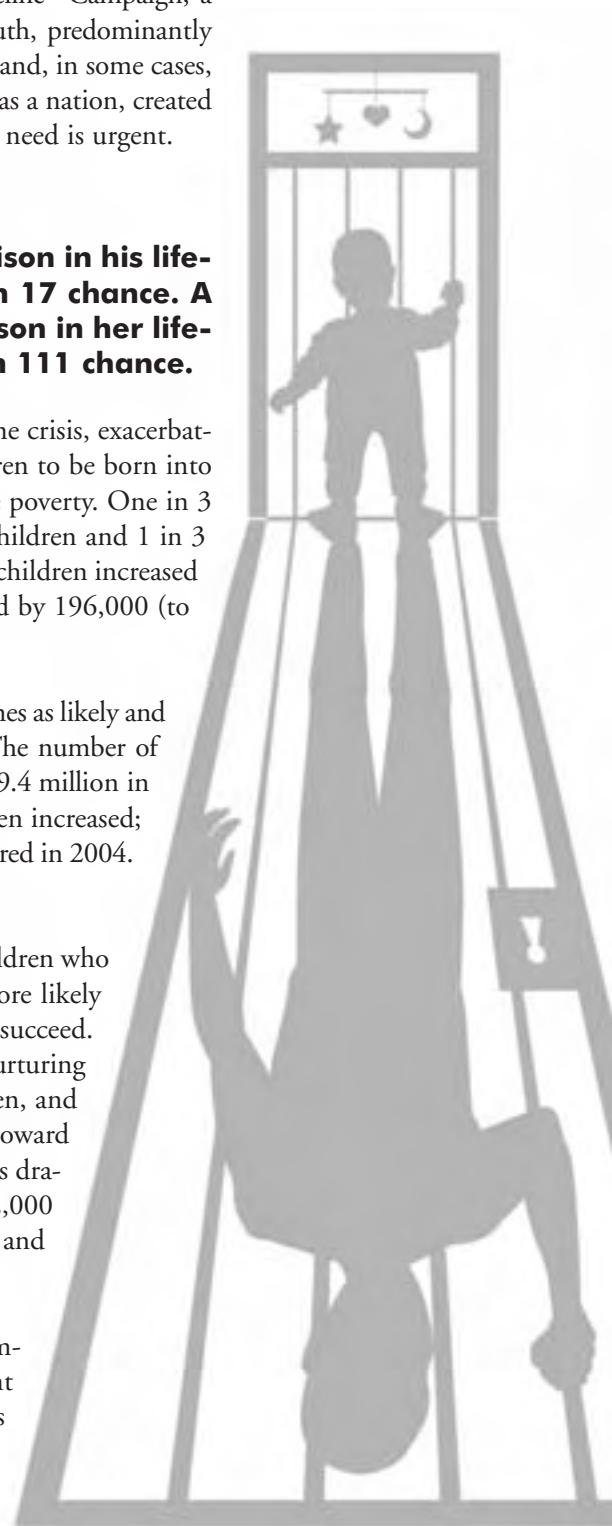
**A Black boy born in 2001 has a 1 in 3 chance of going to prison in his lifetime; a Latino boy a 1 in 6 chance; and a White boy a 1 in 17 chance. A Black girl born in 2001 has a 1 in 17 chance of going to prison in her lifetime; a Latino girl a 1 in 45 chance; and a White girl a 1 in 111 chance.**

**Pervasive Poverty** – Poverty is the largest driving force behind the Pipeline crisis, exacerbated by race. Black children are more than three times as likely as White children to be born into poverty and to be poor, and are almost four times as likely to live in extreme poverty. One in 3 Latino babies and 3 in 7 Black babies are born into poverty; 1 in 4 Latino children and 1 in 3 Black children are poor. Between 2000 and 2006, the number of poor Latino children increased by 550,000 (to 4.1 million) and the number of poor Black children increased by 196,000 (to 3.8 million).

**Inadequate Access to Health Coverage** – Latino children are three times as likely and Black children are almost twice as likely to be uninsured as White children. The number of uninsured children from birth through age 18 rose from 8.7 million in 2005 to 9.4 million in 2006. This was the second year in a row that the number of uninsured children increased; more than 1 million more children were uninsured in 2006 than were uninsured in 2004. The majority of these uninsured children have a parent who works full-time.

**Gaps in Early Childhood Development** – Studies have shown that children who do not get the early intervention, permanence and stability they need are more likely to act out and fail in school because they lack the skills necessary to succeed. Researchers of early childhood emphasize the importance of early childhood nurturing and stimulation to help the brain grow, especially between birth and age seven, and even beyond, and thus help children to thrive and to be on a positive path toward successful adulthood. The importance of stimulation in the first years of life is dramatically underlined in the U.S. Department of Education's study of 22,000 kindergarteners in the kindergarten class of 1998-99, which found that Black and Hispanic children were substantially behind when they entered kindergarten.

**Disparate Educational Opportunities** – Children in the most economically depressed communities are at high risk of low achievement and attainment and are often stuck in under-funded, overcrowded schools. Poor urban schools have the highest numbers of teachers who are inexperienced or do not have degrees in the subjects they teach. Eighty-six percent of Black, 83 percent of Latino and 58 percent of White fourth graders cannot read at grade level; and 89 percent of Black, 85 percent of Latino and 59 percent of White 8<sup>th</sup>



SM

## Where Are We? Where Do We Go from Here?

graders cannot do math at grade level. Black students are more likely than any other students to be in special education programs for children with mental retardation or emotional disturbance. Black and American Indian children are almost twice as likely as White children to be retained in a grade. The public school suspension rate among Black and American Indian students is almost three times that for Whites. Black, Latino, and American Indian children are more than twice as likely as White children to drop out of school. According to a Harvard Civil Rights Project and Urban Institute report, in 2001 only 50 percent of Black and 53 percent of Latino students graduated from high school on time with a regular diploma. When Black children do graduate from high school, they have a greater chance of being unemployed and a lower chance of going to college full-time than White high school graduates. Only 48,000 Black males earn a bachelor's degree each year, but an estimated 1 in 3 Black men ages 20-29 is under correctional supervision or control. Approximately 579,000 Black males were serving sentences in state or federal prison at mid-year 2006.

**Intolerable Abuse and Neglect** – Low income is the largest predictor of abuse and neglect. Children in families with annual incomes below \$15,000 are 22 times as likely to be abused or neglected as children in families with annual incomes of \$30,000 or more. A child is abused or neglected every 36 seconds. Four in ten of the children who are abused or neglected get no help at all. There are also twice as many Black children in foster care as we would expect. Although they comprise only 16 percent of all children, Black children represent 32 percent of the foster care population.

**Unmet Mental and Emotional Problems** – A Congressional study found 15,000 children in juvenile detention facilities, some as young as 7 years old, solely because community mental health services were unavailable. Studies have reported that as many as three-fourths of incarcerated youth have mental health disorders and about 1 in 5 has a severe disorder. Children who age out of foster care are less likely to graduate from high school or college, and experience more serious mental health problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder, than children generally. They are less likely to receive adequate health and mental health care, and are more likely to experience homelessness, and to be involved in the criminal justice system.

**Rampant Substance Abuse** – Drugs, tobacco and alcohol lead our children down the wrong path. Disconnected youth, lacking a decent education or high school degree, job training skills, and social support systems or mentors, often resort to self-destructive acts. Unfortunately, alcohol and other substance abuse treatment for youth and for parents and adults is in too short supply.

**Overburdened, Ineffective Juvenile Justice System** – One-size-fits-all zero tolerance school discipline policies are transforming schools into a major point of entry into the juvenile justice system as children are increasingly arrested on school grounds for subjectively and loosely defined behaviors. Black youth are about four times as likely as their White peers to be incarcerated. Black youth are almost five times as likely to be incarcerated as White youth for drug offenses. Of the 1.5 million children with an incarcerated parent in 1999, Black children were nearly nine times as likely and Latino children were three times as likely to have an incarcerated parent as White children. Most juvenile correctional facility programs focus on punishment rather than treatment and rehabilitation, often creating environments that further harden youth. This makes it more difficult for them to productively reintegrate into their families and communities.

## Where Are We? Where Do We Go from Here?

**We must speak out against policies that contribute to criminalizing children at younger and younger ages, and fight for policies that help children thrive and put them on track to a productive adulthood.**

**We need to:**

- End poverty through investments in high quality education for every child, livable wages for families, income supplements like the Earned Income and Child Tax Credits, job training and job creation, and work supports like child care and health coverage.
- Ensure every child and pregnant woman has access to affordable, seamless, comprehensive health and mental health coverage and services.
- Make early childhood development programs accessible to every child by ensuring such programs are affordable, available and of high quality.
- Help each child reach his/her full potential and succeed in work and life, by ensuring our schools have adequate resources to provide high quality education to every child.
- Expand prevention and specialized treatment services for children and their parents, connect children to caring permanent families, improve the quality of the child welfare workforce and increase accountability for results for children.
- Reduce detention and incarceration by increasing investment in prevention and early intervention strategies, such as access to quality early childhood development and education services and to the health and mental health care children need for healthy development.

**For those children who do get caught in the deeper end of the Pipeline, we must accelerate reforms of juvenile justice policy at the federal, state and local level to ensure that troubled youth get the integrated services needed to put them on a sustained path to successful adulthood.**



Where Are We? Where Do We Go from Here?

