

Chapter 7

Social Justice, America, & African American Children: 21st Century Challenges of Disparities in Health Care and Education

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ABSTRACT

Technology plays a very important role in the world. Therefore if some individuals or groups have no access or very limited access to technological advances, these advances have little or no value to them. In American society, which by its standards is considered a technological leader, there are some vulnerable populations which are underserved in critical areas such as health care and education. America's proficiency at highly technological advances does not serve to elevate the quality of life nor eliminate social injustices for these vulnerable populations. This chapter examines one of America's most vulnerable groups, African American children. Its intent is to remind readers of the importance of working toward continued efforts to ensure that children are not forgotten or lost in the ever-expanding global awareness of technological advances. The focus on health care and education is to provide a cursory view of the past, awaken a consideration for the present, and solicit anticipation of the future for these African American children if they continue to be the underserved population in American society.

INTRODUCTION

For many Americans, the dawn of the 21st century poses a great opportunity to examine past successes and failures and continue to progress in a positive direction toward goals that empower the nation with the knowledge gained from these

experiences. The United States has a history of allowing individuals the freedom to express their viewpoint, the power to bring about change democratically, and the freedom to continually remodel the social “norm” based on learning and experience. Therefore, it is no surprise that social justice, the direction and attitude of Americans toward their fellow Americans, and the socio-

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Table 1. (Source: Schwartz & Howard (2009). Health Insurance Coverage of America's Children. Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured. Kaiser Family Foundation, Washington, D.C., pg.3.)

Uninsured Children vs All Children, by Family Poverty Level (2007)		
	Uninsured (8.9 Million)	All Children (78.6 Million)
300%+	15%	41%
200-299%	15%	16%
100-199%	28%	20%
Under 100%	42%	23%

economic status of African American children are important challenges that should be a central focus in the 21st century. Historically, Americans have expressed great concern about social injustices around the world. For example, inhumane acts and subjugation of women in other countries (i.e. rape and murder of women and children in Darfur, or lack of equal rights for Middle Eastern women) have angered many average Americans and even some famous Americans, enough to send financial aid to those countries, and to adopt young children affected by these tragedies. Yet, on close investigation, children, especially African American children, in the United States, are left to experience the painful reality of American injustice. Two areas where injustice is extremely prevalent are health care and education. These two very important conditions, especially when occurring simultaneously are not only devastating, but have caused harm that will affect generations of African American children in the future.

The ratio of children to adults seems to have continued to decrease since 1964 in America. In 2008 children comprised only 24% (73.9 million) of the population which is a downward trend by 36% since the end of the baby boomers in 1964 (Wallman, 2009). The National Association of Colored People (NAACP) noted that in 2007 the racial juvenile population (ages 10-17) in America was 78% white, 21% Hispanic, 17% African American, 1% American Indian and 5% Asian American (www.naacp.org/advocacy/justice/criminal-justice_juvenile_arrests_092809).

pdf. While the U.S. Census Bureau (2000) seems to validate a decline in the juvenile population, there is an urgent need to be concerned about the welfare of these children. These children are more vulnerable than adults because they are poor and thus more likely to be uninsured (Schwartz & Howard, 2009). Table 1 provides statistics on the number of uninsured children v. all children by family poverty level (with the majority of uninsured children (42%) in impoverished families under 100% of the poverty level).

While nearly 60% of all children in America are white, only 38% of them are uninsured. Minority uninsured children represent over 58% of the youth uninsured, but represent only 40% of the total children population (Table 2).

The United States proudly boasts its position as a world leader, yet in a nation of such great wealth and power why is it that 8.9% of the child population does not have access to health care? This means that children in families in which health care is not affordable are not able to see physicians for preventive health care visits/well visits, nor can their parents afford to take them to see a medical doctor when they are ill. Unfortunately for this population, Emergency Room or Urgent Care Facilities become the primary source of medical care. The consequence is that this population of children is left without a primary physician to oversee their growth and development, treat underlying conditions before they become problematic, or suggest routine health care maintenance to prevent illness (i.e. vaccina-

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