

Children's Defense Fund

Children's Rights

<https://www.childrensdefense.org/2007/cdf-issues-report-of-looming-national-catastrophe-of-americas-cradle-to-prison-pipeline/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

WASHINGTON, D.C. The Childrens Defense Fund (CDF) today issued a report on Americas Cradle to Prison Pipeline, an urgent national crisis at the intersection of poverty and race that puts Black boys at a one in three lifetime risk of going to jail, and Latino boys at a one in six lifetime risk of the same fate. Tens of thousands of children and teens are sucked into the Pipeline each year.

Released today at a national Cradle to Prison Pipeline Summit at Howard University in Washington, DC, the report, *Americas Cradle to Prison Pipeline*,SM charges the adults of this nation with failing our children and creating the conditions for the Prison Pipeline to exist.

This report on *Americas Cradle to Prison Pipeline* crisis is a loud siren of alarm and wake up call to action, said CDF President Marian Wright Edelman. **It is time for the adults of every race and income group to break our silence about the pervasive breakdown of moral, family, community and national values, to place our children first in our lives, and to struggle to model the behavior we want our children to learn. Our child and youth problem is not a child and youth problem, it is a profound adult problem.**

CDFs report documents the convergence and accumulation of multiple social and economic risks and a national ethos that too frequently chooses incarceration over healthy child and youth development. ***The Cradle to Prison Pipeline* crisis can be reduced to one simple fact: the United States of America is not a level playing field for all children and our nation does not value and protect all childrens lives equally,** said Edelman.

A glaring example of how poverty and race converge to pull poor males of color into the Cradle to Prison Pipeline is the blatantly unjust charging of six Black high school males in Jena, Louisiana on adult felony charges. White youth who hung three nooses on a White tree in the schoolyard were given a slap on the wrist. A White youths assault on a Black youth resulted in probation only. Poverty and inability to post bail has trapped 17-year-old Mychal Bell in jail for 10 months on adult charges. After trial by a White prosecutor, White judge and all-White jury, Mychals adult felony conviction was just reversed by an appeals court. Mychal remains in jail. This is not an isolated incident.

CDFs report describes the conditions that force many poor infants in rich America into the Prison Pipeline from birth because they enter the world with multiple strikes against them. These are the children of poor single mothers without prenatal care, children who have no access to health and mental health care; whose family and community supports are inadequate to prevent abuse and neglect. They have poor or no early childhood education opportunities to prepare them for school, attend schools that expect and teach little, and exclude and criminalize children at earlier and earlier ages. These are the children with too few positive role models and no alternatives to the streets.

This accumulation of risks and disadvantages prevents poor children from transitioning successfully to productive adulthood but these disadvantages can be overcome and the report offers some initial roadmaps. Individuals and families can open their hearts and homes by being role models and mentors. Pastors and community leaders can create safe havens from the streets. And effective community-based programs can be adapted and expanded. CDFs report calls on adults to:

The report offers a 9-point agenda for families, communities and policy makers at the local, state and national level to begin to dismantle the Pipeline. In addition, the report reveals the faces of children at risk of entering the Pipeline through a series of powerful photo images by 30-year veteran *Time* Magazine photographer Steve Liss. It presents case studies from Ohio and Mississippi by Julia Cass and Connie Curry that demonstrate how poor children are at increasing risk of arrest and criminalization at younger and younger ages for behaviors once handled by schools and community institutions. Finally the report includes brief descriptions of some promising approaches to help keep children out of the Pipeline, research tables and selected state-by-state data of key child indicators.

Some key items in the report, including charts on the number and rate of children living in poverty in America in 2006 and a list of key immediate action steps to protect and rescue children from the Pipeline are available on CDFs website at www.childrensdefense.org/CPPreport_keyitems. A copy of the full report is also available at www.childrensdefense.org/CPPreport.

For more information on CDFs *Cradle to Prison Pipeline* initiative, visit www.childrensdefense.org/cradletoprison.

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