



# BETWEEN a ROCK and a HARD PLACE

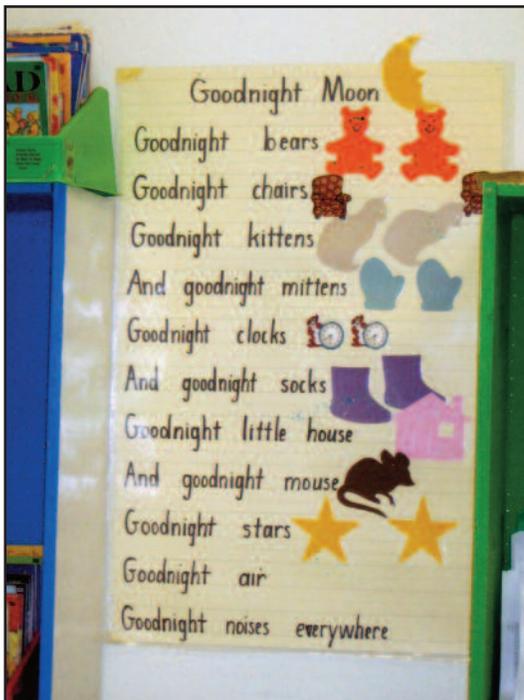
## RACE AND CHILD CARE IN MISSISSIPPI

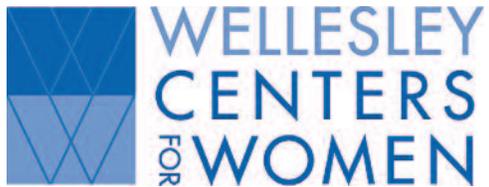
A Report by

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## A Note From The Author

In my 35 years as a political scientist, I have focused on three areas of study—political conservatism, the welfare system, and race. In this project, I was able to bring those three areas together, to form a framework for the examination of the child care subsidy program in Mississippi. It has been a challenging and enlightening five years of travel, reading, conducting interviews, and mining historical and contemporary narratives. I have come to feel that I am, in part, a citizen of Mississippi.

The process of writing this report has been unusually long because, due to an unpredictable interruption, the release was suspended for eighteen months. For that reason, I have written an Afterword to bring the report up to date. I urge the reader to pay close attention to the Afterword for a full picture of race and child care in Mississippi.

Early on in the research I saw that there is a troubling aspect of Mississippi culture I had not expected. Mississippians seem to be unusually fearful of criticizing the system, its policies, its culture, and its powerful leaders. Retribution is a palpable concern, especially for those who rely on the state for their livelihood. For that reason, I decided that I would give my interviewees the protection of promising not to quote them directly. Only a sense that this promise would put them at ease made me give up the rich possibility of direct quotation.

Having conducted 20 interviews, and one focus group, and travelled throughout the state, I feel that the openness and insights I encountered have given me a good understanding of the child care system in Mississippi. I have interviewed child care providers, academics, attorneys, preachers, and advocates. I have sat in on provider trainings and a two-day meeting of experts and specialists on child care from across the state. I have met with the top leadership of the Mississippi Department of Human Services. In all of these interviews, I have had the opportunity to ask questions that have given me invaluable information and helped me to clarify points of confusion.

But perhaps my greatest privilege has been to talk with the child care providers themselves. I have seldom envied them. Their job is dauntingly important, extremely difficult, and fraught with the tensions and stresses of working with adults and children who are living in poverty. The more I encountered those who work on the front lines of child care in Mississippi, the more I grew to admire them.

A striking fact — that the child care subsidy program in Mississippi is almost entirely an African American program — made me especially sensitive to issues of race and structural racism. This report is a case study of how structural racism works on the ground. It is an examination of the individual and institutional actions and policies that maintain white dominance in Mississippi.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“**B**etween a Rock and a Hard Place: Race and Child Care in Mississippi” was written over a two-year period beginning in 2009. During that time, Mississippi was suffering the effects of the massive national recession that had begun in 2007. The recession hit the state hard, at a time when parts of it were still recovering from the destruction of Hurricane Katrina. Even before the recession and the hurricanes, Mississippi had placed at or near the bottom of all states’ rankings on health, housing, education, employment, and child welfare and at or near the top on poverty. For the low income women, men, and families of Mississippi, the challenges have been massive.

Although Mississippi is majority white (60.6 % vs. 37.2 % Black in 2008), its poor are disproportionately African American (55% of low-income households). Its overall poverty rate is 28%. Black people’s median earnings in Mississippi are about \$10,000 less than whites. Approximately 13.9 % of children live below *half* of the poverty level, the highest percentage in the country. According to KidsCount, a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Mississippi’s overall rank in child well-being is 50th out of 50 states. These statistics belie the idea of a “new Mississippi.”

“Between a Rock and a Hard Place” explains how structural racism preserves much of Mississippi’s pre-civil rights power structure and the racial inequality of resources and access. Structural racism impacts subsidized child care for poor and low-income women, especially through shortcomings in the state’s service delivery. Here, as so often, the state disproportionately underserves poor, Black, single mothers.

The report also addresses the link between poverty and child care. It would seem that child care is not at the center of poverty, but it is certainly at the center of leaving poverty. Research over several decades has taught us that the most important factor in raising a family out of poverty is education for the adult wage earner, in this case a low-income single mother. If she cannot access decent quality child care, a living wage will not be within her reach. Congress has recognized the role of education and training and built it into

“welfare reform,” but gives the recipient a maximum of five years to complete the process of obtaining what she needs to become self-sufficient.

Mississippi has erected multiple arbitrary and punitive barriers that limit low-income women’s access to child care: (1) the tone of state literature about welfare and child care programs is hostile; (2) state literature paints the benefit as a gift and the recipient as a suspect; (3) arcane rules and paperwork make accessing child care benefits overwhelming;

(4) administration of the process is often chaotic, with lost paperwork and inaccessible case workers; and (5) mothers must re-qualify for the child care subsidy twice a year, rather than once a year, as in some states. If a mother misses a deadline, the state removes her child from child care and places the mother at the end of the waiting list.

Child care is a crucial building block for the development of young children, not just a necessity for a mother who is trying to pull her family out of poverty. Recent research has shown that the benefits of good quality child care carry over into later life and predict greater economic success. Quality child care should be a high priority in Mississippi. Although the state has made efforts to improve the quality of its child care settings (e.g., developing the Mississippi Child Care Quality Step System), some argue that the state effort is not adequate.

Mississippi is a conservative state, not friendly to liberal programs for the poor. It reflects the growing national political sentiment of negative attitudes toward single mothers, especially mothers of color. This report places implementation of subsidized child care in Mississippi in the context of the national frame that distinguishes “deserving” from “undeserving” low-income single mothers. Those single mothers who are widowed or in economic distress because of physical disability, are “deserving” of state support, while those who choose or do not have the option to marry the father of their children are “undeserving.” In Mississippi, many white voters have supported this frame, supporting a Republican Party focused on “family values.” The deserving vs. undeserving fram-

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ing of poverty is consistent with the increasing dominance of the Republican Party in Mississippi.

Because many white people in Mississippi think of welfare as a “Black” program, its image is doubly stigmatized—by the negative stereotype of welfare recipients and by the widespread belief that recipients are African American, who many white Mississippians believe are inferior to whites. (see box on p. 5) Mississippi’s Republican Governor Haley Barbour did not make the low income people of Mississippi a priority.

Although leaving children of color behind is no longer a matter of explicitly racial policies, it is the *de facto* practice in the implementation of Mississippi’s subsidized child care. By creating daunting barriers for low-income mothers in accessing subsidies for child care, Mississippi is disproportionately leaving their children behind. The expression “*It’s a mindset*”—I heard used so often in Mississippi by those trying to describe the system—refers to an insidious form of white supremacy among many of Mississippi’s white businessmen, land owners, and politicians.

White Mississippi elites claim that they apply a “colorblind” frame to policy-making, yet their color-

blind policies reproduce racial privilege generation after generation. White policy-makers claim that behavior, such as teen pregnancy or failure to marry, explains the racial disparity in the need for social services. From this perspective, because low-income women—especially young, unmarried mothers and even more especially those who are mothers of color—have only themselves to blame for their fate, the white community feels they can morally ignore them.

With the help of the colorblind frame, the political appointees and sub-contractors who implement Mississippi’s child care policies may not understand that they are often acting against the interests of poor people. They may not see that the policies they favor help to maintain their own position in society.

In Mississippi, advocacy for low-income women and children tends to occur only in the non-profit and non-governmental sectors, which are both relatively under-resourced in comparison with other states. No adequately powerful counter-voice exists to offset public policy hostility toward low-income women. Further, racial consciousness is so entrenched in Mississippi that even policies that would appear to ease it turn out to have no impact. Mississippi could be said to be “Ground Zero” for structural racism. So intractable is this form of racism at all class levels that the elimination of Jim Crow laws and practices has failed to eliminate structural racism. Neglect of poor children of color in Mississippi is but one outcome.

Mississippi fought the changes that resulted from the Civil Rights Movement. When the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (1954) declared that “separate but equal” was not a constitutionally valid basis for school segregation, Mississippi responded by establishing all-white “academies” for elementary and secondary school children. Though some racial attitudes and practices have changed in Mississippi, these academies, which exist to this day, are mirrored in largely segregated child care facilities.

The federal government bears a significant share of responsibility for persistent structural racism in Mississippi. Under the Nixon and Reagan Administrations, block grants replaced the hundreds of more specific grants that came from the federal government to the states with “strings” attached: that is, federal monies targeted to specific programs and populations could be spent only for their stated purposes. When block grants freed the states of this sort of federal

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### The Colorblind Frame

In the Right’s view, affirmative action and other programs designed to address institutional racism (and sexism and heterosexism) have become both unnecessary (since racism doesn’t exist except in individual personal action or thinking), and unjust (since they should discount race and consider individual merit alone). Using polemical and divisive tactics, the Right attacks affirmative action as “racial quotas,” “preferential treatment,” and “reverse discrimination.” It cynically takes the language of the Civil Rights Movement, including the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., himself, to argue that individuals should be judged by their merit and character and not by their skin color. It contends that since racism, when it does occur, is between individuals, any remedy should be aimed at those individuals who can be identified as having directly suffered an act of racism. And, it also warns that preferential treatment accorded to a particular ethnic or racial group will create resentment among others (read Whites).

—Nikhil Aziz, *Political Research Associates*

# Race and Child Care in Mississippi

## Racial Attitudes

Racial attitudes are notoriously difficult to measure. There may be social pressure for respondents to conceal negative racial attitudes, and racial attitudes nearly always have both a conscious and an unconscious component. So, the respondent may be reporting his or her racial attitudes faithfully, but carry very different attitudes subconsciously.

I have found that two sources give a reasonably good account of racial attitudes—historical events and contemporary practices. In this report I have attempted to peel back the white racial attitudes that underlie contemporary policies as they affect low-income single mothers and child care in Mississippi.

The colorblind framework that underlies all public messaging from the Department of Health and Human Services and the Mississippi State Legislature can, itself, be an encoded version of racial attitudes. When “fraud” is the demon, rather than “poor Blacks,” yet it is low income Black women who are seen as inclined to commit fraud, the change in semantics seems a thin veil for oldtime prejudice against low-income Black women.

To quote John A. Powell in *Racing to Justice* (2012),

Post-racialists claim to remain blind to growing evidence of the racialized work of structures on one hand and the powerful role of racial anxiety and unconscious bias on the other. They insist on a simple notion of race and racism: either you are a racist or you are not.” (p. 8-9)

Contemporary racial attitudes in Mississippi are far too complex for this sort of simplistic dichotomy.

An excellent source for the history of changing racial attitudes on the part of white Mississippians is a 2007 book by Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution*. The book details how Republican conservatives and the Religious Right used language such as “individual responsibility” and “rights and responsibilities” to signal an agenda of white privilege and protection of the old racial *status quo*. Crespino explains, without over-simplification, how conservatives succeeded in Mississippi by striking a chord with white voters who had historically voted Democratic.

—Jean Hardisty

oversight, state governments were able to regain control of the distribution of federal resources, a process known as “devolution.” In Mississippi, as in other parts of the country, state-level control of resources has usually favored the financially and racially privileged and the politically connected. The Reagan Administration added social service cuts, known as “retrenchment,” that most severely affected the state’s low-income population.

As retrenchment and devolution became the dominant practice in federal funding, Mississippi increasingly lifted federally-mandated protection of racial equality. Block grants now allow the state greater control over distribution of federal funds within the state, enabling it to cater to local and regional prejudices and practices. Block grants have allowed Mississippi to tighten eligibility requirements for child care and other welfare benefits and to increase surveillance of benefit recipients.

Despite the work of truly impressive advocates for the poor and Black legislators who now make up 29% of the Legislature, structural racism in Mississippi is entrenched and destructive for low-income families. And the federal government has backed away from its role as enforcer of civil rights,

seldom suing Mississippi for systemic patterns of racial bias.

Thankfully, for the first time in decades, the Obama Administration seems to understand the importance of quality child care and the use of child care subsidies as a means of addressing poverty. In Mississippi, the Barack Obama Administration’s American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), known as “stimulus funds,” specifically addressed shortcomings in child care delivery systems in a number of states. These “targeted” federal funds came with federal oversight (critics would say they came “with strings attached”) so the state had minimal

discretion over them.

Governor Barbour first denounced stimulus funds, then accepted the money. The funds targeted for child care provision initially allowed Mississippi to reduce its waiting list for subsidized child care from over 6,000 to a few hundred, though the list soon began

to climb again. This one-time-only funding of crucial services will likely create distress when the funding goes away in 2012.

Mississippi has a number of excellent research centers and many scholars who have studied the state’s problems and made recommendations to state

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government for improvements. Most of these recommendations have not been implemented. Nevertheless, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place” ends with a list of recommendations to reform subsidized child care:

## Five Recommendations to Improve the System of Child Care Subsidies in Mississippi:

1. Remove barriers that limit low-income women’s access to child-care subsidies, such as daunting paperwork, a suspicious attitude toward their efforts, and over-hasty cut-offs for minor violations of the rules. These barriers disproportionately affect African Americans because in Mississippi African Americans are disproportionately poor and disproportionately recipients of child-care certificates.
2. Increase state and private resources to the non-profit sector to support advocacy and social service efforts for low-income women and children. This sector is now markedly under-resourced. Mississippi has had solid research for at least a decade about what reforms are needed, but only a strengthened non-governmental sector will be able to press for those reforms.

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*Because power and money speak in Mississippi, only a dramatic redistribution of power and capital will change the future course of the state.*

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3. Improve the transparency and openness of the Mississippi Department of Human Services. Statistics on those served, by race and income status, should be readily available on the Department of Human Services web site. Based on the new census statistics in 2011, these data would enable child-care policy-makers and advocates to know how many low-income Mississippians are not being served.

## WHAT IS STRUCTURAL RACISM?

The word “racism” is commonly understood to refer to instances in which one individual intentionally or unintentionally targets others for negative treatment because of their skin color or other group-based physical characteristics. This individualistic conceptualization is too limited. Racialized outcomes do not require racist actors. Structural racism/racialization refers to a system of social structures that produces cumulative, durable, race-based inequalities. It is also a method of analysis that is used to examine how historical legacies, individuals, structures, and institutions work interactively to distribute material and symbolic advantages and disadvantages along racial lines.

At the Kirwan Institute, we think that identifying and addressing structural racism/racialization is a key civil rights challenge for the 21st century. Our work operates on the premise that opportunities exist in a complex web of interdependent factors, and that to alleviate inequities in any single area, we must first consider the entire structure that supports those inequities.

The Kirwan Institute at The Ohio State University. Access at: <http://kirwaninstitute.org/research/structural-racism.php>.

4. Increase the awareness of the effect of block grants on low-income Mississippians and mobilize the non-governmental sector to oppose block grants. Because the federal Child Care Development Fund is scheduled to be reauthorized in 2011, now is a timely moment for public education on this issue. Additionally, ARRA funds, which have proved helpful because they were “targeted,” should be extended.
5. Improve the efficiency of the subcontractors who deliver child-care subsidies across the state with better regulation of their work and a state demand for high-quality performance.

The ultimate challenge for Mississippi—eliminating structural racism—would take a major reorganization of values, social practices, and the economic barriers faced by low-income people in Mississippi. Because power and money speak in Mississippi, only a dramatic redistribution of power and capital will change the future course of the state.

## INTRODUCTION

In Mississippi, a beautiful and troubled state, approximately 13.9% of children—the highest percentage in the country—live below *half* of the poverty level of \$18,310 for a family of three.<sup>1</sup> All of these children and many more should be receiving a full complement of social services, including subsidized, high-quality child care.

Access to child care impacts poverty in the short term for the mother and in the long term for the child. Research over several decades has demonstrated that the most important factor in raising a family out of poverty is education for the adult wage-earner(s). But if a single, low-income mother lacks child care, her access to school for training, certification, or a degree is severely limited. In addition to education, jobs are a mechanism for raising families out of poverty.

Without education or jobs—both dependent on child care for the children of the aspiring mother—the likelihood of a woman's leaving poverty behind is drastically reduced. Among social policy alternatives, providing quality child care to low-income families is essential to individual, federal, and state efforts to overcome poverty.<sup>2</sup>

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*Mississippi encompasses both the New South and the Old South, a site of economic and racial progress and of poverty and structural racism.*

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For low-income Mississippians, the need for welfare, subsidized child care, and other entitlements is particularly acute. Mississippi encompasses both the New South and the Old South, a site of economic and racial progress and of poverty and structural racism. Since the Civil Rights movement, Black Mississippians have increasingly won political office in the state, and its Black middle class has been growing. Still, a majority

of poor children in Mississippi (55% in 2009) are African American, and there continue to be waiting

“The average American, of any color, sees racism as the intentional, explicit action of one individual against another. The many examples of such racism reinforce this definition daily, and sometimes in very high profile ways, as in the cases of media figures Don Imus, Glenn Beck and Lou Dobbs. A purely individual definition of racism obstructs sustained collective action. If hateful is “just how some people are,” and if we outlawed explicit racism through civil rights laws, then, the logic goes, we’ve done all we can as a society.

But this is only one way in which racism works. It has terrible effects, from lost education to death, but it is enabled by rules and structures that appear on the surface to be race-neutral. In my work, institutional racism refers to discriminatory treatment, unfair policies, practices and patterns, and inequitable opportunities and impacts in discrete entities (such as a school or district). Structural racism is the cumulative effect of the racism of multiple institutions over time. Racial justice, then, connotes equitable opportunities, treatment, impacts and outcomes for all. We need people to work toward not just new attitudes and actions, but also new practices and policies.”

Rinku Sen, Director, Applied Research Center in *On The Issues*, Fall, 2009. Access at: [http://www.ontheissues-magazine.com/2009fall/2009fall\\_sen.php](http://www.ontheissues-magazine.com/2009fall/2009fall_sen.php).

<sup>1</sup> Steve Suitts, “The Worst of Times: Children in Extreme Poverty in the South and Nation” (Atlanta, Georgia: The Southern Education Foundation, 2010), p. 6. For Health and Human Services statistics, see: <http://liheap.ncat.org/profiles/povertytables/FY2010/popstate.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Child care in Mississippi is too expensive for most welfare recipients and many working poor, including two-parent families. Subsidies to pay for child care are allotted by the state on a preferential basis. First to be granted these subsidies are those who are receiving TANF grants, but are trying to leave welfare. In this, and all cases, a co-pay is required, with the exception of Head Start, a federal program that serves children from birth to five, and does not require a co-pay.

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lists for subsidized child care. Many white Mississippians view the welfare system as a “Black program,” and thus it is, in their eyes, stigmatized. Of welfare recipients in Mississippi, 88% are African American.<sup>3</sup>

A burning question in studying Mississippi is why welfare is so dominated by Black recipients when many white Mississippians live in poverty and need child care for their children. With some exceptions, social scientists and most activists who work with the poor agree that the explanation lies in the existence, in Mississippi and other states, of structural racism. This report explains how structural racism and “color-blindness” work in Mississippi to preserve the pre-civil rights power structure and the racial inequality of resources and access. Using a case study of child care for poor and low-income mothers, it examines how structural racism affects subsidized child care for poor and low-income women, especially through shortcomings in the state’s service delivery.

## STRUCTURAL RACISM

This report uses the term “structural racism” to describe the current racial order that has replaced the Jim Crow system. Authors quite accomplished in discussing U.S. racism have used other terms: especially “institutional racism” and “systemic racism.” Most recently, sociologist Joe R. Feagin has used the term “a white racial frame” to explain the persistence of racism, even if it is unconscious. All of these terms represent a great leap in understanding racism as it is practiced in the post-civil rights era. That leap takes us beyond an understanding of racism as a set of individual acts and beliefs that result in discrimination and violence. These terms highlight the ongoing forms of racism that persist despite considerable success in eliminating *de jure* racism.

The choice of “structural racism” as opposed to other terms is somewhat arbitrary. It is useful because it implies the *foundational* nature of racism in the U.S. across structures, institutions and organizations. Rather than being a new phenomenon in U.S. society, racism was present among white people at the beginning of the construction of a national identity. Structural racism is found throughout the United States.

Jean Hardisty

<sup>3</sup> Percentage provided by Jill Dent, Ph.D., Director, Office for Children and Youth, Mississippi Department of Human Services, by email, 10/1/2010.

## MISSISSIPPI DEMOGRAPHICS

Mississippi, along with Georgia, Alabama, southwest Tennessee, and other parts of the South, is part of “the Black Belt.” While this term originally referred to the rich black soil of this region, it is now primarily used to designate areas of the South with a concentrated Black population. After the Civil War and the brief period of Reconstruction, much of Mississippi returned to white domination. Mississippi is majority white (60.5 % vs. 37.2 % Black in 2008).<sup>4</sup> Black people’s median earnings in Mississippi are about \$10,000 less than whites. Since 2007, the subprime and foreclosure crisis has hit Black homeowners disproportionately hard.<sup>5</sup>

Health and child well-being indicators paint a depressing picture of Mississippi. Black Mississippians die, on average, four years sooner than the state’s whites.<sup>6</sup> In 2009, according to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Population Health Institute at the University of Wisconsin, Mississippi ranked 50th in U.S. health, when calculated by county and state.<sup>7</sup> According to KidsCount, a project of the widely-respected Annie E. Casey Foundation, Mississippi’s overall rank in child well-being has been 50th out of 50 states every year from 2002, when the statistics were first collected, until 2010.<sup>8</sup> The ranking is based on a number of grim statistics:

- 30% of children live in poverty (percent of children living in families with income

below \$21,027 for two adults and two children);

- 12.4 % of births are low-birth weight babies (babies born fewer than 5.5 pounds);
- the infant mortality rate is 10.6 % per 1,000 births; and
- 45% of children live in single-parent families (often an indicator of need for work support and other benefits).<sup>9</sup>

Along with Mississippi’s dismal record in providing child care for its poor residents, housing, employment, health care, and education indicators contribute to the state’s rank as last in the country in child welfare. Disproportionate Minority Confinement (DMC) is still a reality in Mississippi, despite years of attempts by the state to address it (a mandated effort).<sup>10</sup> Racial and class discrepancies in incarceration for drug possession, for example, leave many poor women without help from their child’s

father. Poor Mississippians continue to bear the greatest brunt of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.<sup>11</sup> In Mississippi, such factors contribute to an overall poverty rate of 28%, the highest in the United States.

Further, poverty measures are themselves notoriously problematic. The federal poverty rate created in the 1950s was based exclusively on three times the cost of food and adjusted for family size. Though the price of food has changed little or declined in the subsequent half-century, housing, healthcare, and

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<sup>4</sup> <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/28000.html> (2009).

<sup>5</sup> “Tough Times in Mississippi: Housing and poverty, a census snapshot” (New York, New York: Center for Social Inclusion, December, 2009), pp. 5-7.

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Burd-Sharps, Kristen Lewis, and Eduardo Borges Martins, “A Portrait of Mississippi: Mississippi Human Development Report, 2009” (available from: Mississippi State Conference NAACP, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Patrick L. Remington, Bridget C. Booske, “Country Health Rankings: Mobilizing Action Toward Community Health,” (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Population Health Institute, University of Wisconsin, 2010). Accessed at: <http://www.rwjf.org/pr/product.jsp?id=55508>.

<sup>8</sup> See: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/acrossstates/Rankings.aspx?loct=2&by=a&order=a&ind=137&dtm=10657&tf=14>.

<sup>9</sup> “Overall rank for Mississippi and how it measures up on 10 indicators of child well-being,” Kids Count at: [http://www.datacenter.kidscount.org/OneState\\_Results.aspx?loc=26&DT=Percent](http://www.datacenter.kidscount.org/OneState_Results.aspx?loc=26&DT=Percent). Accessed on 2/12/10.

<sup>10</sup> Saliba D. Mukoro, “The State of Disproportionate Minority Confinement (DMC) in Mississippi’s Juvenile Detention Facilities,” *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1: April, 2005, pp. 23-31.

<sup>11</sup> Natalie Chandler, “Recovery funds missing lower-income residents, report claims,” *The Clarion Ledger*, September 5, 2007, p. B1; Gary Pettus, “Katrina 3 Years Later,” *The Clarion Ledger*, August 31, 2008, p. A1; Ana Radelat, House Dems hold hearing into Barbour’s use of storm grants,” *The Clarion Ledger*, May 9, 2008, p. B1.

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transportation costs have skyrocketed. But, since then, the measure has been updated only for inflation. According to Columbia University's National Center for Child Poverty:

Current poverty thresholds are too low, arguably arbitrary, and they do not adjust for differences in the cost of living within and across states. Further, the definition of resources under the current poverty measure is based solely on cash income. So while the measure takes into account a variety of income sources, including earnings, interest, dividends, and benefits, such as Social Security and cash assistance, it does not include the value of the major benefit programs that assist low-income families, such as the federal Earned Income Tax Credit, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing and child care assistance. Therefore, the way we measure poverty does not tell us whether many of the programs designed to reduce economic hardship are effective because the value of these benefits is ignored.<sup>12</sup>

And finally, income *inequality* can be as telling a statistic as the poverty rate. While Mississippi has for decades been a "poor state," it has always had a wealthy white elite, made up of plantation owners, business owners, and white politicians. Among the states, its income inequality is one of the nation's worst. Between the late-1990s and the mid-2000s, Mississippi has had the greatest increase in income inequality.<sup>13</sup> These statistics belie the idea of a "New Mississippi."

Since Marion Wright Edelman hosted Robert Kennedy in May 1967 on a "tour" of poverty in the Mississippi Delta, many state and federal programs have attempted to bring social and economic change to the state. It was only the pressures brought by the Civil Rights Movement that sufficiently mobilized the federal government to enforce an end to the worst abuses of the Jim Crow system. Even then, federal policies continue to have mixed results in achieving justice in the South.

### Native Americans

Of Mississippi's population, .5% is Native American. The largest and only federally recognized band is Choctaw, who live primarily on the Choctaw reservation system, made up of 35,000 acres throughout the state. The counties with the highest percentages are Neshoba, Leake, and Newton counties.<sup>14</sup>

The 1975 Congress passed the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, giving the Choctaw more control over their education and social service programs. Economic development soon followed, with industry and casino resorts, and resulted in a decline in unemployment from 70% to less than 3%.

The Choctaw participate in the federal Head Start program, receiving \$2,296,476 from the federal government. The Choctaw Head Start Annual Report of 2008/2009 reports that 73% of income eligible children were served, with an average annual enrollment of 99%.<sup>15</sup> The Choctaw also provide early child care services designed to respect Indian traditions.<sup>16</sup>

### Immigrants

As a percentage of Mississippi's population, foreign-born immigrants have increased from 0.8% in 1990 to 2.1% in 2008, an increase of 115%. They pay taxes, maintain businesses, and bring buying power to Mississippi.<sup>17</sup> Though relatively speaking, immigrants have not dramatically increased in the state (which ranks 43rd in increased immigrant population), a full-throated attack on immigrants, is supported by Lieutenant Governor Phil Bryant. Bryant, who plans to run for Governor in 2011, has supported an Arizona-like anti-immigrant bill. Governor Haley Barbour concurs.<sup>18</sup>

The 1996 Welfare Reform Act denies social services to undocumented immigrants, and even to legal immigrants. It would seem that immigrants in Mississippi have a very limited impact on the child care subsidy program.

<sup>12</sup> Vanessa R. Wright, Michelle Chau, and Yumiko Aratani, "Who are America's Poor Children?" (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Children in Poverty), January, 2010, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Jared Bernstein, Elizabeth McNichol and Andrew Nicholas, "Pulling Apart: A State by State Analysis of Income Trends," (Washington, D.C.: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and Economic Policy Institute), April, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/28/28099.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Choctaw Nation Head Start Annual Report, 2008-2009, accessed at: <http://www.choctawnation.com/files/hsannualreport.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> "Native Americans: A Southern Survey" in: *We are Here Forever: Indians of the South* (Durham, North Carolina: *Southern Exposure*, vol. XIII, no. 6), pp. 96-97.

<sup>17</sup> Sid Salter, "Mississippi: Group offers immigrant snapshot," *Clarion Ledger*, 8/8/10. Also see: "Appendix Table 1: Number and Share of Children Age 0-8 with Immigrant Parents by State, 1990-2008" in: Karina Fortuny, Donald J. Hernandez, and Ajay Chaudry, "Young Children of Immigrants: The Leading Edge of America's Future," (Washington D.C.: The Urban Institute, August, 2010), p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> "Bryant discusses Miss. immigration bill," *Clarion Ledger*, August 3, 2010.

# MISSISSIPPI'S WEB OF STRUCTURAL RACISM AND MASK OF COLORBLINDNESS

Mississippi could be said to be a strong, if not the strongest, example of how structural racism works. Sometimes called “institutional racism” or “systemic racism,” structural racism consists of a web of practices and circumstances that underlies current racial inequality.<sup>19</sup> Through the frame of structural racism, it is possible to examine the racial discrimination that exists despite stated commitments to equal opportunity by government, public and private institutions, and individuals. Structural racism thrives in Mississippi decades after the end of state-enforced racial segregation. What Black child-care providers and the poor mothers and children who depend on them face is not the brick wall of racial exclusion, but an unofficial cobweb of stereotyping that holds the *status quo* in place. Certain pillars of discrimination can be identified, such as a lack of capital accumulation among Blacks, inferior primary and secondary education available to Black children, differences in the quality of housing by race, and lack of prenatal and early health care for the developing body and brain of young children. Devastating differences by race, such as these, lie at the heart of the “stealth racism” that now characterizes Mississippi’s treatment of its Black families.

When the Civil Rights Movement was at its height (1955-1968), its goal was to sweep away the Jim Crow practices of racial segregation. As defined

by historian Isabel Wilkerson, Jim Crow, originally a nineteenth-century minstrel figure, would become shorthand for a meticulous set of laws and codes that enforced the southern racial caste system. The Jim Crow system persisted from the 1880s to the 1960s.<sup>20</sup> In Mississippi, segregation ruled nearly every aspect of life: housing, work, and school, as well as leisure, dining, and use of public facilities. Overturning the most brutal practices of Jim Crow required a monumental struggle.<sup>21</sup> But many impediments to success

for African Americans and other people of color remain strong. Economic, political, social and power relations between races in the South continue to be fraught with inequalities, indignities, and danger.

Structural racism occurs without the explicit policies and language of pre-civil rights days. Racism has, for the most part, “gone under-

ground” and now operates in a much more subtle way. Although Blacks are not denied entry to formerly all-white colleges and universities, their middle and high school experiences are so far inferior to those who attend predominantly white public and private college preparatory schools that, at each level, they still find themselves on a very uneven playing field.<sup>22</sup> Not only education, but housing, health care, nutrition, and “connections” all favor white, middle-class students. White privilege continues to determine many of the outcomes of Black people’s lives.<sup>23</sup>

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*What Black child care providers and the poor mothers and children who depend on them face is not the brick wall of racial exclusion, but an unofficial cobweb of stereotyping that holds the status quo in place.*

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<sup>19</sup> See: Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006); Leslie G. Carr, “Color-Blind” Racism (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1997); David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2009); Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: N.Y.: Routledge, 1994); Michael K. Brown, Martin Carnoy, Elliott Currie, Troy Duster, David B. Oppenheimer, Marjorie M. Shultz, and David Wellman, *White-Washing Race: The Myth of a Color-Blind Society* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003); Joe R. Feagin, *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing* (New York: Routledge, 2010); and Joe R. Feagin, *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration* (New York: Random House, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Random House, 2008).

<sup>22</sup> *Update/Miles To Go: Mississippi: Improving Education and the Economy from the Start* (Atlanta: Southern Education Foundation, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> Excellent sources on white privilege include: David R. Roediger, *Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002); Karen Weekes, ed., *Privilege and Prejudice: Twenty Years with the Invisible Knapsack* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010); Paula S. Rothenberg, *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism* (New York: Worth Publishers, 2002).

## BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

Bias-based violence against Black people too is not over in Mississippi, though there is much less of it than in the past.

Structural racism is made up of: (1) the lingering effects of past discrimination and oppression; and (2) current policies. In Mississippi, the following nine examples of historical racial discrimination, resulting from both federal and state policies, illustrate systematic impediments to the success of Black people today:<sup>24</sup>

- Malnutrition, unemployment, and lack of medical care for workers in the Delta in the 1960s was aided by federal policies that paid wealthy plantation owners not to grow cotton, but instead to leave fields fallow (resulting in idle workers and all income going directly to the landowners);<sup>25</sup>
- Housing programs and education benefits extended to white veterans after World War II were largely unavailable to Black veterans via the GI Bill;<sup>26</sup>
- Black land ownership was undermined by the tenant farmer arrangement that succeeded slavery;
- Black farmers were systematically neglected and underserved by the Department of Agriculture;<sup>27</sup>
- The historic and systematic absence of generational wealth to be passed on to the next generation has left the overwhelming majority of Blacks without inherited wealth;<sup>28</sup>
- Segregated schools, followed by white flight to all-white “academies” after the Civil Rights Act passed, guaranteed Black children a lesser educational experience and more sanctions in school;<sup>29</sup>
- Real estate redlining, prominent in so many parts of the country in addition to the

### “POST RACIAL” AMERICA?

By electing an African American to be President, some politicians, judges, and media pundits have asserted that America has now officially overcome racism and that the work of the Civil Rights Movement is completed.

It is important to resist the urge to embrace this oversimplified interpretation of the 2008 Presidential Election. To be sure, significant work still lies ahead. Notwithstanding the election of President Obama, the severe challenges facing African Americans remain daunting. Racial minorities in the United States continue to suffer deplorable public schools, chronic unemployment, substandard housing and healthcare, intense residential segregation, and striking rates of incarceration. Clearly, discrimination has not been eliminated, as some contend; rather, it remains an integral component of complex and enduring social and political systems that promote racial inequality.

“Post-Racial America? Not Yet” NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, 2009

South, assured whites access to prime real estate that is far more likely to hold its value over time;

- Job stratification, which mirrors educational stratification, confines Blacks to the lower rungs of employment and, because Mississippi is a “right to work” state, virtually denies union membership to workers, especially Black workers;
- Programs such as affirmative action, intended to level the playing field, have not been widely implemented in Mississippi.

In all of these cases, the white power structure—made up of white business, political, and social leaders—vehemently denied that Black people in Mississippi

<sup>24</sup> This compendium is not a comprehensive list of the elements that underlie structural racism.

<sup>25</sup> James C. Cobb, *The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp.196-197. Bruce J. Shulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>26</sup> “Negro G.I.s in South Seen Shorn of Rights.” *New York Times*, June 2, 1947, p. 16; Neil P. McMillen, ed., *Remaking Dixie: The Impact of World War II on the American South* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1997); Jennifer E. Brooks, *Defining the Peace: World War II Veterans, Race, and the Remaking of Southern Political Tradition* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> In 1997, 400 African-American farmers sued the United States Department of Agriculture, alleging that they had been unfairly denied USDA loans due to racial discrimination during the period 1983 to 1997. “The case was entitled “Pigford v. Glickman” and in 1999, the black farmers won their case. See: <http://nationalaglawcenter.org/assets/crs/RS20430.pdf>. In November, 2010, a second group of Black farmers, known as Pigford II, won a second settlement.

<sup>28</sup> Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro, *Black Wealth/White Wealth: New Perspective on Racial Inequality* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Thomas M. Shapiro, *The Hidden Cost of Being African American: How Wealth Perpetuates Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Marianne Hill, “The Economic Status of African Americans in Mississippi,” Jackson, Mississippi: Center for Policy Research and Planning; Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning, Working Paper 2008-01, February, 2008.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas J. Espenshade and Alexandria Walton Radford, *No Longer Separate, Not yet Equal: Race and Class in Elite College Admission and Campus Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

## Race and Child Care in Mississippi

were suffering and needed, much less deserved, state assistance. Individuals make the policies that result in structural racism. In Mississippi leadership is held tightly in the hands of white men.<sup>30</sup> For the most part, these white decision-makers take pride in the Civil War rebellion to preserve the culture and economy of the South, both based on slavery<sup>31</sup>; and many feel, as a result of the successes of the Civil Rights Movement, the loss of a way of life that they had found more orderly, pleasant, and beneficial.<sup>32</sup>

Since the Civil Rights Movement, the pressure of changed laws and changing racial attitudes has shaped the words and actions of white decision-makers in Mississippi—as elsewhere. They are more likely, for example, to make public statements in support of racial equality and against white racial superiority or continued segregation. But, for the most part, they are not likely to embrace the concept of structural racism, which would require actions to overcome racial inequality, make major changes in multiple institutions, enforce state and federal civil rights laws, and bring about other structural and cultural changes.

Instead, conservatives, libertarians, and some white liberals see contemporary U.S. society as one of equal opportunity. They claim that, with all doors to success open to anyone willing to work hard and live an “upright” life, racial discrimination and other widespread manifestations of racism are in the past, though racism may continue, in a limited way, on an individual basis. In this “colorblind” frame, white decision-makers do not have to share their power or scrutinize the institutions and assumptions that have enabled them to attain power and influence. These individuals may not understand that they are acting against the interests of poor people and people of color. They may not see that the policies they favor help to maintain their own position in society. From a progressive perspective, structural racism provides an invaluable way to illuminate a more subtle form of

racism, in which white supremacy is viewed as *common sense*. When the income, unemployment, and education gaps between whites and African Americans is stark, as it is in Mississippi, it is easy for whites to assume that this gap demonstrates their own superiority.

In this colorblind frame, because a person or institution must treat everyone equally, without regard to an individual’s resources or racial identity, *behavior* becomes the defining characteristic of a person’s worth and trumps all other factors. Therefore behavior such as teenage pregnancy, failure to comply with Department of Human Services (DHS) rules, failure to marry, or drug or alcohol addiction is seen to fully

explain the racial disparity in social and economic outcomes. Individuals, not institutions, must take responsibility for life’s successes or failures.

The result of the colorblind frame is that racial privilege is reproduced generation after generation. In the Mississippi welfare system, because “color-blindness” is the standard, administrators feel no apparent distress about a system in which

Black women disproportionately receive benefits: the fact that Black women so predominantly access welfare benefits is not, they think, the fault of white (or Black) administrators. Adherents of the colorblindness frame view as “fair” policies whose outcomes are heavily influenced by race.

Those who support an analysis that claims that the United States is now “colorblind” would have people ignore both history and contemporary racial practices. The debate between those who analyze society through the lens of structural racism and those who see it as a “colorblind” society is ongoing. The frequent bitterness of this debate stems from the awareness that “the differences are not merely ‘semantics’ or problems of communication; they reflect fundamentally opposing views of the U.S. racial order” that reproduce “white hegemony.”<sup>33</sup>

One aspect of structural racism—difficult to codify, yet prevalent—is the mindset (or political culture)

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*Those who support an analysis that claims that the United States is now “colorblind” would have people ignore both history and contemporary racial practices.*

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<sup>30</sup> The *Blue Book of Mississippi: Official and Statistical Register 2008-2012* (Jackson, MS: Office of Secretary of State), pp. 53-70.

<sup>31</sup> See: [http://www.netstate.com/states/symb/flags/ms\\_flag.htm](http://www.netstate.com/states/symb/flags/ms_flag.htm) for a discussion of the controversial vote over the preservation of the flag of the Confederacy within the flag of Mississippi.

<sup>32</sup> See: Jason Sokol, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006).

<sup>33</sup> Woody Duane, “What is Racism? Racial Discourse and Racial Politics,” *Critical Sociology*, vol. 32, Issue 2-3, p. 267.

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of Mississippi's conservative ruling class, which has long contributed to the intransigence of poverty in the state. Mississippi's cultural conservatism reflects the Republican conservatism across the country (though it also can apply to Democrats in the South), but it is unique in the South to the extent that the history of the South is unique. Slavery, plantation politics, and the Civil Rights Movement have all left an indelible stamp on Mississippi. The key to the persistence and perniciousness of structural racism as it applies to African American welfare recipients is the systematic demonization of them, and even of their children, in the media, behind closed doors, and in politicians' rhetoric.<sup>34</sup> Further, racial consciousness is so entrenched in Mississippi that even policies that would appear to ease it turn out to have little impact. Although food stamps, now known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), for instance, rose 27% in Mississippi between 2007 and 2009, their effectiveness is mitigated (for both Black and white recipients) by the 7% Mississippi sales tax on food. Mississippi is one of only 10 states that apply the state's full rate of sales tax to the purchase of food without providing some offset relief to the poor and low-income citizens.<sup>35</sup> While a food tax is universally regressive, since food is a necessity, the poor disproportionately feel its impact.<sup>36</sup>

The inequalities that characterize Mississippi exist today, despite the election of 13 Black Senators of 39 Senators and approximately 36 of 120 Representatives serving in the Mississippi Legislature. There is a Black caucus in which Black (primarily Democratic) politicians collaborate to increase the political impact of Black elected politicians.

Given the presence now of Black legislators, why can't these new politicians of color change the course of Mississippi? The answer is complex. Legislators in Mississippi have no staff, which makes less difference

if they have individual resources that can be mobilized to maximize their effectiveness. Further, board attorneys, private industry, lobbyists, and the state hierarchy—primarily white—control the flow of policy information. A great many policy decisions rest with each county's Supervisors, with most state money going through them. In other words, the County Board of Supervisors reallocates state monies. They too have no staff. This "informal, old (white) boys' state governance," with the Governor at the top, sets the tone, with women virtually excluded.<sup>37</sup>

Speaking about the Delta, Minion K. C. Morrison addresses the issue of African American political

power in his comments on a 2006 book by Sharon D. Wright Austin:

Austin shows that power remains elusive for African Americans because it is, and always has been, significantly determined by economic power or wealth; and that while political offices have

been vacated, hardly any of the wealth has been reallocated. So it is not so complicated after all — whites remain the power base in the Mississippi Delta. And for African Americans, even when there is some favorable change, other factors and circumstances conspire in such a way that their real conditions only get worse.<sup>38</sup>

It can be difficult for an observer to see how structural racism works. By studying child care in Mississippi, this report examines one example of the policies and attitudes of structural racism. Leaving African American children behind is no longer a matter of explicitly racial policies. In 2008, 90% of Mississippi children receiving child care subsidies were African American, the highest percentage in the country.<sup>39</sup> This statistic might lead a researcher to conclude that the state is taking adequate care of its poor

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*Many poor whites avoid welfare because of a perceived stigma associated with receiving welfare benefits and their perception of it as a "Black program."*

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<sup>34</sup> Lucy Williams, "Decades of Distortion: The Right's 30 Year Assault on Welfare," (Somerville, MA: Political Research Associates, 1997).

<sup>35</sup> Gary Pettus, "Miss. Food stamp recipients up 27% in just 2 years," *Clarion Ledger*, 12/15/09, p. A1.

<sup>36</sup> Sid Salter, "Low-income families fall into poverty gap," *Clarion Ledger*, 2/8/04, p. G1.

<sup>37</sup> This portrait is an amalgam of several interviews with people knowledgeable about decision-making in Mississippi.

<sup>38</sup> Minion K. C. Morrison, "Foreword" in: Sharon D. Wright Austin, *The Transformation of Plantation Politics: Black Politics, Concentrated Poverty, and Social Capital in the Mississippi Delta* (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 2006), p. xii.

<sup>39</sup> See: [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ccb/data/ccdf\\_data/08acf800\\_preliminary/table11.htm](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ccb/data/ccdf_data/08acf800_preliminary/table11.htm).

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The fact that these women carry on, holding their families and themselves together despite living in a world where the cards are stacked against them, is a testimony to their endurance, resourcefulness, and abiding love for their children. They share this with poor people across the globe. Far from being demonized, they should be studied for clues to their remarkable ingenuity, practicality, and strength. Facing the temptations of drugs, alcohol, and illegal means of earning income, they resist as well, if not better, than would many of their critics if in similar circumstances.

Black children: since only 37.2% of the population of the state is Black, surely the state is favoring Black families in its distribution of this scarce commodity. Another way of reading this statistic, however, is through the lens of structural racism: because Black children are disproportionately poor in Mississippi, they are disproportionately recipients of welfare benefits. Many poor whites avoid welfare because of a perceived stigma associated with receiving welfare benefits and their perception of it as a “Black program.”

Within Mississippi structural racism is real, though conservatives and others denounce it as a fabricated and one-sided concept.<sup>40</sup> Examples include:

- the state places numerous barriers in the path of low-income mothers who are striving to balance and perform their roles as mothers and providers;
- Black women who bear children at a young age outside of marriage are demonized, often even within the more conservative Christian congregations of the African-American community; and
- lower wages and life-time earnings, occupational segmentation, lack of wealth escalators such as retirement and pension plans make wealth accumulation nearly impossible for single mothers.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Stephan Thernstrom and Abigail Thernstrom, *America in Black and White: One Nation Indivisible* (New York, N.Y.: Touchstone Press, 1999).

<sup>41</sup> Mariko Chang and C. Nicole Mason, “At Ropes End: Single Women Mothers, Wealth and Assets in the U.S.” (New York: NYU Wagner: Women of Color Policy Network, 2010), p. 5.

# CHILD CARE FOR POOR CHILDREN COMES TO MISSISSIPPI

Policy makers who value child care do so for two reasons. First, it allows the single mother to go to work. This original motivation for child care's inclusion as a welfare benefit stemmed from the realization that a welfare-to-work policy could not succeed if the mother did not have access to child care. As a result, a subsidy for child care was first included as a welfare benefit in 1988. Second—and now the more popular and widely accepted reason—high-quality early child care has long-term benefits for the child.<sup>42</sup>

Given the documented benefits of child care for both mother and child, why do we not have federally funded child care, above and beyond the rather meager allotments to welfare recipients in welfare benefits and child care subsidies, and in the equally meager federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)? Universal federally funded child care—optional, and available to all—would be beneficial, regardless of a parent's class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. In the absence of a universal child care program, too many people associate subsidized child care with the negative images associated with “welfare.”

In a tragic example of missed opportunities, there have been two moments in recent U.S. history when a universal child care program, sponsored by the federal government, could have transformed child care, especially for poor children and their mothers. Both occurred at the national level.

From 1965 to 1967, a child care effort was sponsored by President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty

and overseen by R. Sargent Shriver, Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). The premiere child care program was in Mississippi and was known as the Child Development Group of Mississippi (CDGM). It was set up on the model of “maximum feasible participation.” In this case, the empowered participants were poor families, primarily Black. In its first two years, CDGM served 6,000 to 12,000 preschool children and 2,200 adults in a genuinely creative experience. It was the most controversial of all state Head Start programs in the South, and OEO

threatened it with closure at the time. As eloquently documented by Polly Greenberg in *The Devil Has Slippery Shoes*, it was ultimately sidelined by a more moderate agency created as an alternative, Mississippi Action for Progress (MAP).<sup>43</sup> Among the forces arrayed against CDGM was Senator John Stennis (D-MS), a vehement critic of

maximum feasible participation, who threatened to kill all OEO funding. Since President Johnson needed Stennis's support for the Vietnam War, they made a deal that ended maximum feasible participation and gutted CDGM.<sup>44</sup>

From 1970 to 1971, Senator Walter Mondale (D-MN), Representative John Brademas (D-IN), and Edward Zigler, then Director of the Office of Child Development, worked prodigiously to craft a federal child care bill that passed the House and the Senate in 1971.<sup>45</sup> President Richard Nixon vetoed the bill just as he was about to take his famous trip to China and was under attack by the Republican Party's right wing

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*In the absence of a universal child care program, too many people associate subsidized child care with the negative images associated with “welfare.”*

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with Phyllis Glink, Executive Director of The Harris Foundation, July, 2010. Also: Vandell, D. L., Belsky, J., Burchinal, M., Steinberg, L., Vandergrift, N. and NICHD Early Child Care Research Network (2010), Do Effects of Early Child Care Extend to Age 15 Years? Results from the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development. *Child Development*, 81: 737–756. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01431.x. Issue published online: 13 May, 2010.

<sup>43</sup> Polly Greenberg, *The Devil Has Slippery Shoes: A Biased Biography of the Child Development Group of Mississippi* (CDGM) (Washington, D.C: Youth Policy Institute, 1990).

<sup>44</sup> David C. Carter, *The Music Has Gone Out of the Movement: Civil Rights and the Johnson Administration, 1965-1968* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), p. 135.

<sup>45</sup> For the full story, see: Edward Zigler and Susan Muenchow, *Head Start: The Inside Story of America's Most Successful Educational Experiment* (New York: BasicBooks, 1992).

<sup>46</sup> Edward Zigler, Katherine Marsland, and Heather Lord, *The Tragedy of Child Care in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 34-39.

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for planning the trip and for supporting child care.<sup>46</sup> In a veto message written by right-wing speechwriter Pat Buchanan, Nixon said: “The bill would commit the vast moral authority of the national Government to the side of communal approaches to child rearing over against the family-centered approach.”<sup>47</sup>

Although the Clinton White House held an all-day conference on child care in 1997, whipping up enthusiasm and hope for a universal child care bill, the Monica Lewinsky scandal broke soon afterwards. It distracted the White House and doomed the possibility of passing such a bill.<sup>48</sup>

## The Right Wing Fights Back on Child Care

The political Right does not, as a rule, support welfare programs because it sees low-income women—especially young, unmarried mothers and even more especially mothers of color—as “undeserving” and accuses them of having only themselves to blame for their fate. As the Right gained power in the 1970s, culminating in the presidency of Ronald Reagan, the clichés about women on welfare began to take root in the public mind, allowing for a full-scale attack on welfare recipients and their children that continues to this day. As long as many people could view these women as the “undeserving poor,” the larger community need feel little moral compunction about ignoring their needs.

Meanwhile, programs that gave children (age birth to five) a child care and preschool experience were proliferating. In the 1960s and 1970s, a rightist critique of child care emerged, largely influenced by Phyllis Schlafly, founder and head of the Eagle Forum, a right-wing women’s group. The claim that child care “put the child under the influence of the government” was a centerpiece of Schlafly’s activism. Schlafly lent a woman’s voice to other right-wing organizations opposing child care, especially the John Birch Society and the American Conservative Union. Schlafly saw

child care as a “feminist plot,” designed to instill relativist values in young children and make them comfortable in questioning the authority of their parents. For Schlafly’s followers, especially the many who did not need child care subsidies, keeping one’s child at home was the superior choice. She strongly advised mothers to stay home with their young children, and to be home in later years when the children returned from school. If that meant that the mother didn’t work, then, from this perspective, the family should just make do without her paycheck.<sup>49</sup>

Schlafly’s arguments were a response, in part, to the predominantly white middle-class women who, in the 1960s, were beginning to enter the workforce, broaden their stereotypical roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers, and agitate for affordable child care. Of course, low-income women had been in the workforce for many decades, trying hard to support their families in low-wage jobs, usually without benefits.

For these women, staying at home with their children had not been an option.

The national ascendance of the political Right of the late 1970s and 1980s largely won white voters over to the view that there are “deserving” and “undeserving” poor. Opposition grew to welfare benefits for the “undeserving” poor, supported by the stereotype of welfare recipients

who lived on welfare and had additional children out of wedlock in order to increase their welfare payments. The Heritage Foundation, perhaps the Right’s premiere think tank, ran articles throughout the 1970s arguing that welfare benefits interfere with the free market system.<sup>50</sup> During the 1980s, the Right expanded on this theme to characterize welfare itself as a destroyer of moral character and personal responsibility.<sup>51</sup> From there, it was a short ideological step for Ronald Reagan to popularize the image of the “welfare queen.” He chose as his favorite example Linda Taylor, a Chicago welfare recipient who allegedly defrauded the Illinois Department of Welfare of \$8,000. Reagan told this story at every opportunity,

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*Schlafly saw child care as a “feminist plot,” designed to instill relativist values in young children and make them comfortable in questioning the authority of their parents.*

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<sup>47</sup> “The Nation: Child Care Veto,” *Time Magazine*, Dec. 20, 1971

<sup>48</sup> Zigler et al., op. cit., pp. xii.

<sup>49</sup> Phyllis Schlafly, ed., *Who Will Rock the Cradle?: The Battle for Control of Child Care in America* (St. Louis, Missouri: Eagle Forum, 1989)

<sup>50</sup> Newt Gingrich, *Window of Opportunity* (Waltham, MA: Reed Business Information, Inc., 1985), pp. 84-115; “Johnson’s State of the Union Message Endangers Freedom and Individuality,” *Human Events*, Jan. 23, 1965, p. 9.

<sup>51</sup> Lucy Williams, “Decades of Distortion: The Right’s 30-Year Assault on Welfare” (Somerville, MA: Political Research Associates, 1997); Walter E. Williams, “Government Sanctioned Restraints that Reduce Economic Opportunities for Minorities,” *Policy Review*, vol. 2, number 7, 1977, pp. 10-19.

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and, with each telling, the amount increased until Reagan was telling audiences that Taylor had defrauded the Welfare Department of \$150,000.<sup>52</sup>

This story is typical of the Right's demonization of welfare recipients as a central part of its campaign against liberal and feminist social welfare programs. In Mississippi, a conservative state, welfare has never been popular with white voters. The stereotyping of welfare recipients is consistent with the state's long history of individualism and racism. The tone set by the Governor's office over the last three decades has been one of hostility to welfare benefits and the single mothers who often need them.<sup>53</sup> In his 2008 Inaugural Address, Governor Barbour said: "Much of the state has the strongest economy and the highest employment ever, but some areas are suffering, especially in the Delta and Southwest Mississippi, where we must not only improve education and workforce skills but also combat and reduce the scourge of illegitimacy. It is virtually impossible for significant economic progress to take root where there has been major decline in the family structure."<sup>54</sup>

### The Right's Double Standard on Child Care

The Right's "family values" agenda supports a model of the heterosexual nuclear family in which the mother stays at home and raises the children, and the father works to support the family.<sup>55</sup> In this worldview, children should be taught by the parents, so that they absorb "correct" values and attitudes. A central value is likely to be reverence for God and church, making church-based day care the only "safe" form of day care. Even better, the mother and child spend their days together until the child reaches school age, when the mother and father carefully monitor the school curriculum and teachers, or home school their children.

Ironically, in the view of the conservative Right, a low-income single mother dependent on TANF benefits should *not* stay at home with her children.

She should actively pursue employment in order to pull herself and her children out of poverty. Ideally, she should marry and form a standard, heterosexual family. This argument implies that a poor and unmarried young woman simply should not *have* those children. Such a return to the model of family life that was characteristic of middle-class white families in the 1950s has gained increasing traction in public opinion since Ronald Reagan popularized it in the 1980s.<sup>56</sup> Because the rise of the Right in the late 1970s and 1980s was built on the theme of "family values," its message resonated with those who had been and remain strongly opposed to feminism and the reforms feminism has produced.<sup>57</sup>

During the George W. Bush Administration, the "cure" for low-income single mothers was for them to marry. The belief that the main predictor of poverty is the single status of a mother is still alive and well in policy circles. Even President Barack Obama favored "marriage promotion" as part of a package to address poverty, though he eliminated it from the federal budget in 2011, replacing it with other programs to support marriage.<sup>58</sup>

A second double standard promoted by the Right is the demand, now built into federal welfare legislation, that TANF recipients go to work at a time when unemployment is above 9% in every state (11.2% in Mississippi) and state child care subsidies are being cut. Because of insufficient funds, states ration child care subsidies in three ways: (1) by creating priority populations that steer subsidies to those who are most likely to leave welfare; (2) by limiting outreach efforts so that low-income people do not even know that the subsidies exist; and (3) by creating waiting lists.<sup>59</sup> In Mississippi, the waiting list as recently as 2008 was over 6,000. Were it not for stimulus funds from the Obama Administration that have temporarily increased child care subsidies, TANF recipients would remain irretrievably caught between a rock and a hard place.

<sup>52</sup> Michael Lind, *Up From Conservatism: Why the Right is Wrong for America* (New York: Free Press, 1996), p. 193.

<sup>53</sup> "In 1991, Republican challenger Kirk Fordice defeated incumbent Ray Mabus after Fordice "aired television attack ads with stark images of Black welfare recipients." Michael Shanahan, "Bush Rhetoric Hits Welfare," *Star Tribune*, April 26, 1992, A1.

<sup>54</sup> Speech available at: [http://www.statedesk.com/index.php/site/comments/haley\\_barbours\\_2008\\_inaugural\\_address](http://www.statedesk.com/index.php/site/comments/haley_barbours_2008_inaugural_address).

<sup>55</sup> "The Right" here represents the conservative movement that successfully took over the Republican Party during the years of Ronald Reagan's Presidency. It is not synonymous with the TEA Party movement. See: Jean Hardisty, *Mobilizing Resentment: Conservative Resurgence from the John Birch Society to the Promise Keepers* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1999).

<sup>56</sup> Kathryn Edin and Joanna M. Reed, "Why Don't They Just Get Married? Barriers to Marriage among the Disadvantaged," *The Future of Children*, vol. 15, (no. 2), Fall, 2005, pp. 117-137.

<sup>57</sup> Jerome Himmelstein, *To The Right: The Transformation of American Conservatism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>58</sup> Monitor Editorial Board, "Obama needs to act on marriage promotion," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 10, 2009; Monica Potts, "Daddy Issues," *The American Prospect*, March 8, 2010.

<sup>59</sup> Gina Adams and Monica Rohacek, "Child Care and Welfare Reform," in: Isabel V. Sawhill, R. Kent Weaver, Ron Haskins, and Andrea Kane, eds., *Welfare Reform and Beyond: The Future of the Safety Net* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2002), pp. 189-196.

# THE SOUTHERN STRATEGY

In the last three decades, the Republican Party's "Southern Strategy" has shaped an increasing portion of Mississippi politics. The Southern Strategy is a Republican political plan most thoroughly sketched by Kevin Phillips in his 1970 book, *The Emerging Republican Majority*. Phillips suggests that the Republican Party could make substantial inroads with whites in the South, especially if it appealed to conservative southern social values.<sup>60</sup> For many decades, Mississippi, as so many southern states, had been entirely dominated by Democrats at all levels of government. But with the lure of the 1964 Presidential candidacy of Republican Barry Goldwater (known as "Mr. Conservative") and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by a Democratic Congress, the Republican Party began its ascent among whites in Mississippi. It took a number of years and included some setbacks, but the last time a Democratic Presidential candidate won in Mississippi was when Jimmy Carter narrowly won the state in 1976.<sup>61</sup>

With the election of Ronald Reagan as President in 1980, the New Right took control of the national Republican Party, and its message and agenda were reflected in Mississippi politics. The Republican themes of "family values" and "states' rights" appealed to southern whites. Mississippi Senator Trent Lott, Majority Leader of the Senate from 1996 until 2001, was an architect of the Republican Party's move to the Right.

By 1980, the Republican ideological agenda had a firm grip on Mississippi whites. The result was a transformation of the southern white message from "Blacks are inferior" to "Blacks are lazy and not part of the mainstream family-oriented culture." If they were, they could take advantage of the opportunities that exist in American culture to pull themselves up by their bootstraps.<sup>62</sup>

Mississippi's Republican Governor Haley Barbour,

who took office in 2004 and was reelected in 2007, is cut from the cloth of the Republican Right. He is known nationally for three things: serving as Chairman of the Republican National Committee from 1993 until 1997 (including the year when Republicans captured both houses of Congress); being a corporate lobbyist in Washington as a founder of Barbour and Rogers, L.L.C.; and responding to Hurricane Katrina in 2005, after he had been elected Governor of Mississippi. In that case, he was compared with Mayor Rudy Giuliani in his tough-minded talk on looting, and his unwillingness to blame the federal government for its poor response.<sup>63</sup>

Although, in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, federal money flowed into the state for housing reconstruction and assistance to those displaced by the hurricanes and for non-profits devastated by the flooding, Republican

Governor Haley Barbour has diverted the money for rebuilding housing to the expansion of the Biloxi Port.

Barbour's is a form of conservatism that defies the principles of the "old" Republican Party. He seems to lack any vestige of the "old Republican" ethic of *noblesse oblige* — the obligation of the wealthy to at least minimally provide for the poor. For Barbour, poverty is best addressed by economic development and the protection of business interests so those interests will not leave Mississippi. His is a form of "trickle down" economics that we last saw with Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush.

Low-income mothers and their children in Mississippi have become prime examples of the Republican "war on the poor." Although the employment of their mothers or caretakers is an important path out of poverty, child care, for the Barbour Administration, seems to be a burdensome necessity, to be provided *if* the mother conforms to strict policies of reporting and compliance with state rules.

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*By 1980, the Republican ideological agenda had a firm grip on Mississippi whites.*

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<sup>60</sup> Kevin P. Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1969).

<sup>61</sup> Jere Nash and Andy Taggart, *Mississippi Politics: The Struggle for Power, 1976-2008* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2009).

<sup>62</sup> Joseph Crespi, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 269-275.

<sup>63</sup> Peggy Noonan, "After the Storm," *Wall Street Journal*, September 1, 2005.

# FEDERAL BLOCK GRANTS AND STRUCTURAL RACISM

A change in federal policy that was critical to advancing structural racism was the evolution of block grants during the Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan Administrations. Previously, hundreds of different federal grants to the states came with “strings” attached — that is, the federal grants to the states were targeted to specific programs and populations and could be spent only for their stated purposes. Often, the specific purposes were designed to secure a better life for low-income people and people of color. Many states and federal politicians, especially in the South, resented these grants as “government interference” and a violation of “states’ rights.”

If the states could be freed of such federal oversight, they could regain control of the distribution of federal resources. In the South, as in other parts of the country, state-level control of resources usually favors the financially and racially privileged and those with political connections. Though block grants began under Richard Nixon, who developed a “New Federalism” plan known as “revenue sharing” or “fiscal federalism,” the use of them accelerated under Ronald Reagan, whose “dream” (as he referred to it) was to pursue devolution (giving increased power to the state governments to spend federal money as they see fit) and retrenchment (cutting the amount of federal grants that go to the states).<sup>64</sup>

These two exceptionally conservative administrations had good reason to support the return of more power to the states: In many cases, including in Mississippi, state governments tend to be more conservative than the federal government. The swing to states’ rights is often called “the devolution revolution.” But increased power to the states has been particularly

problematic in the South, with its history of slavery and state-sanctioned racism.

Further, a state could file for a special exemption or exception to the usual requirements of a Block Grant, which the federal government usually granted. In many cases, the requests for exemptions varied according to the party and ideology of the Administration in power at both the state and federal levels.

While for the most part conservative federal Administrations have promoted and granted conservative exemptions, the Clinton Administration extended to the states’ governments the most punitive policies toward the poor — those subsequently contained in the “Welfare Reform” law.

As retrenchment and devolution increasingly gained a grip on public policy, a number of liberals predicted a disaster for the poor, especially in the South. Representative Shirley Chisholm, the first Black woman elected to Congress, testified to a Congressional Committee in 1981:

The (House Democratic) caucus believes that any budget proposal which gives states total discretion to ‘establish their own priorities’ for social service programs would be a disaster for the poor.

We come to that conclusion on the basis of historical patterns in this country...

We would urge the committee to remember that the poor would clearly be endangered by a block Grant system of social service funding. The probability that funds would be shifted from survival programs to programs that appeal to the middle-class voters or local power structures is all too great.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> See Richard A. Musgrave, “Fiscal Federalism,” in: James M. Buchanan and Richard A. Musgrave, eds., *Public Finance and Public Choice* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 155-175. For the opposing argument, see: Wallace E. Oates, “On the Welfare Gains from Fiscal Decentralization,” *Journal of Public Finance and Public Choice*, vol. 2-3, 1997, pp. 83-92.

<sup>65</sup> Shirley Chisholm, “A Report from your Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm,” Spring, 1981, p. 1.

# Race and Child Care in Mississippi

Subsequent events have proved this analysis to be accurate. In Mississippi, as in other states, one result of the Reagan cutbacks was to allow the state to tighten eligibility requirements for low-income people to receive assistance.<sup>66</sup> In a 1987 assessment of Mississippi's response to federal cutbacks, Lewis H. Smith and Robert S. Herren wrote:

The most immediate, direct, and severe impact of Reagan's cuts were felt by the low-income portion of the state's population, particularly the working poor. However the state was both unable and unwilling to replace any reduction in federal funding for federal programs, such as food stamps or AFDC or for any programs perceived as "federal" rather than "state." In fact, the greater control given to state officials in some areas resulted in movement away from

programs in which benefits were targeted to special (often poor) groups and toward programs which benefited a majority of the population and consequently a broader political constituency.<sup>67</sup>

Though federal laws codified genuine gains during the Civil Rights Movement, the federal government has, more often than not, taken a hands-off position in enforcing and advancing those gains. For instance, the federal government allows Mississippi to keep statistics on its subsidized child care program that are not transparent, making research into the workings of Mississippi's structural racism difficult. There are, for example, no statistics available from the Department of Human Resources on: (1) the rate of, or reason for, sanctions for welfare recipients, or terminations in the child care certificate program, and (2) racial statistics on recipients served, which are

Federal Head Start/Early Head Start Programs	MS Child Care Program (CCDF/TANF)
Annual grants are made directly to local programs with a <b>multi-year funding commitment</b> . The MS HS/EHS funding level is about <b>\$6000/child</b> .	Certificates (ie. vouchers) are issued to eligible parents who use them to buy their care from providers who get reimbursed monthly. Parents must re-apply every 6 months. Reimbursement for services is only 58% of the state market rate for child care – making certificates an <b>unpredictable and unreliable revenue</b> stream for child care services.  The MS certificate program funding level is about \$3000/child.
Grant funds support staff development including higher levels of education, quality improvement, and cost of living wage increases for staff.	Child care reimbursement rates are inadequate to support any of these.
Free	Parents required to pay based on a sliding scale set by DHS
Parents are not required to work	Parents are required to work
Parents are not required to file for child support	Single parents are required to file for child support
Eligibility determined each program year	Eligibility re-determined every 6 months
Income eligibility is 100-130% of federal poverty level	Income eligibility is 85% of the state median income (about 200% of FPL)
Head Start serves 3 & 4 year olds; Early Head Start serves pregnant moms and children birth to 3	Certificates serve children birth to 12 years of age
Programs typically operate six hours/day and closed in the summer	Centers typically operate full-day and full-year to meet the needs of working parents.
Programs must meet comprehensive and rigorous federal Performance Standards	No minimal standards apply.

<sup>66</sup> George E. Paterson, Randall R. Bovbjerg, Barbara A. Davis, Walter G. Davis, Eugene C. Durman, and Theresa A. Gullo, *The Reagan Block Grants: What Have We Learned?* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press, 1989), pp. 18-21.

<sup>67</sup> Lewis H. Smith and Robert S. Herren, "Mississippi," in: Richard P. Nathan, Fred C. Doolittle, and Associates, *Reagan and the States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 209.

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available at the federal level, but not at the state level.

This information is unavailable on the Mississippi Department of Human Services website, presumably because the Department of Human Services so frequently places children with subsidy vouchers in, and then removes them from, child care facilities — a process known as “churning” — that keeping accurate track of subsidized children is very difficult. Since the technology exists to maintain these statistics, the political will to keep them is obviously lacking. Most important, the process of churning is harmful (and sometimes traumatic) to young children, and harmful to parental employment, because low-wage workers seldom have flexibility in their schedules to take time off to care for their children.

When asked to estimate the difference between the cost to the state of requiring that mothers renew their child care subsidy status semi-annually rather than annually (to prevent fraud), the Director of Mississippi’s Department of Health and Human Services, Donald Thompson, responded that he thought it would be about equal.<sup>68</sup> This seems a weak justification for a practice that creates hardship for poor and low-income mothers.

An example of the contrast between federal programs that mandate the means and manner of their expenditure and those designed at the state level is the difference between subsidized child care for TANF recipients and the Head Start program in Mississippi. As the chart above demonstrates, Head Start (created in the political climate of 1965) has rigorous quality standards, no parental requirements other than income eligibility, and is funded at approximately twice the level of child-care subsidies. State-controlled child-care subsidies, on the other hand, have only minimal quality standards, whatever parental requirements the state may choose to add, and are dramatically underfunded.

In the area of child-care subsidies for low-income families, the only real relief in Mississippi has come with the Barack Obama Administration’s American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) stimulus funds. These targeted federal funds left minimal discretion to state governments. Although Governor Haley Barbour first denounced stimulus funds (on Fox News’ Sean Hannity TV Show), he then accepted them. The funds targeted to child-care provision allowed Mississippi to reduce its waiting list for subsidized child care from over 6,000 to a few hundred, though it is climbing once again, and the stimulus funds are temporary.

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Obama made a point, during his presidential campaign, to say that he has a Zero to Five Plan for early childhood education. It has six components: 1) Early Learning Challenge Grants; 2) increased support for Head Start, whose budget has been depleted; 3) Universal Pre-School; 4) support for the Child Care Development

Grants Program; 5) Child and Development Care Tax Credits; and 6) a Presidential Early Learning Council. Given the opposition to Obama’s initiatives in Congress, the entire Zero to Five Plan is unlikely to become law. But according to Libby Doggett, Executive Director of Pre-K Now, a D.C.-based advocacy organization:

To have a President who is not only talking about early childhood education in quite some depth but who does it with facility and passion is totally unprecedented.<sup>69</sup>

The lesson seems clear: left alone, Mississippi’s conservative politicians would prefer no federal oversight of the money they need to cover the state’s budget. To the extent that the federal government abdicates its responsibility to protect and promote the welfare of all people, it bears a good deal of responsibility for the lack of uniform protection.

<sup>68</sup> Interview by the author with Mr. Donald Thompson at MS DHS offices, September 30, 2010.

<sup>69</sup> Anna Weinstein, “Obama on Early Childhood Education,” accessed at [http://www.education.com/print/Obama\\_Early\\_Childhood\\_education/](http://www.education.com/print/Obama_Early_Childhood_education/). Also see: Sharon Lerner, “He’s the first president to care about it, at least,” *Slate Magazine*, 2/17/10, accessed at: <http://www.slate.com/id/2244888/>.

# MISSISSIPPI'S BARRIERS TO CHILD CARE FOR LOW-INCOME MOTHERS

Research has now established a positive correlation between high-quality childcare and the higher cognitive/academic achievement of 15-year-olds.<sup>70</sup> Of particular note in terms of breaking the cycle of poverty is the pre-eminent study, The HighScope Perry Preschool Study, which compared adults at age 40 who had and did not have a preschool program, and found that those with a preschool program “had higher earnings, were more likely to hold a job, had committed fewer crimes, and were more likely to have graduated from high school than adults who did not have preschool.”<sup>71</sup> A 2010 study on adult earning power finds a distinct difference between adults who received quality child care and those who did not. The earning power of those who had quality child care is significantly higher than those who had not had that advantage.<sup>72</sup> A number of sources give different estimates of the increased income and savings to the state through higher adult income.<sup>73</sup>

Surely such research results from the social sciences would cause policy makers to focus on quality early childhood education as a central means of addressing poverty. Instead, both federal legislation and state government place numerous barriers in the path of mothers who want child care they can trust, as they juggle work, school, and child care.

- **Some of the barriers faced by low-income mothers of color stem from the federal**

### legislation creating “welfare reform,” officially The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (PRWORA).

In its brochure giving information about applying for TANF support (general welfare benefits), the potential recipient in Mississippi is almost immediately informed of one of the most burdensome and disruptive provisions of “welfare reform” — the federal requirement that the low-income mother assist the state in seeking child support from the absent father of each child. While it is understandable that state employees, trying to stretch scarce dollars, would like

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*When the mother is forced to “turn him in to the state,” he may easily become hostile and alienated from the family.*

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to tap the resources of the father, revealing his name to the state authorities can often create friction, and even a complete break, between the mother and father. In a number of cases, the father is not entirely “absent” and may even be making a genuine effort to

support his family. But, when the mother is forced to “turn him in to the state,” he may easily become hostile and alienated from the family.<sup>74</sup>

The TANF applicant may also be put at physical risk because the requirement that she name the father and personal information about him may cause him to become violent, especially if she is an ongoing victim of her partner’s violence. This requirement can place the single mother at increased risk for domestic violence.<sup>75</sup> TANF also imposes work requirements (with some exceptions, including caring for a child under twelve months old). If the recipient fails to par-

<sup>70</sup> Vandell, D. L., Belsky, J., Burchinal, M., Steinberg, L., Vandergrift, N. and NICHD Early Child Care Research Network (2010), “Do Effects of Early Child Care Extend to Age 15 Years? Results From the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development. *Child Development*,” 81: 737–756. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01431.x. Article first published online: 13 May 2010.

<sup>71</sup> <http://www.highscope.org/content.asp?contentid=219>.

<sup>72</sup> Raj Chetty, with John Friedman, Nathaniel Hilger, Emmanuel Saez, Diane Schanzenbach, and Danny Yagan, “How Does Your Kindergarten Classroom Affect Your Earnings? Evidence from Project STAR,” (Working Paper: Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, July 2010).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> This question is central to the research of the “Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study,” Princeton University and Columbia University. See: <http://www.fragilefamilies.princeton.edu/ffpubs.asp>.

<sup>75</sup> Timothy Casey, Jill Davies, Annika Gifford and Anne Menard, “Not Enough: What TANF Offers Family Violence Victims” (Washington, D.C.: Legal Momentum and National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, March, 2010).

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ticipate in the work requirement program, she will receive a “full sanction.” That is, her TANF case will be closed and her access to food stamp benefits (now known as the SNAP program) will also be eliminated.

A woman who risks alienation or even abuse from her child’s father and meets work requirements will receive meager TANF payments of no more than \$110 per month for the first person, another \$36 for the second person, and \$24 more for each additional person.<sup>76</sup> If the single mother does not meet the federal requirements, she will be removed from the rolls.

- **Mississippi communicates hostility to welfare recipients**

In 2010, when research for this report was conducted, the tone of the literature put out by the Mississippi Department of Human Services (DHS) spoke volumes about the state’s attitude toward TANF recipients. In its brochure on child support, titled “Why It Pays to Cooperate!” the pamphlet from the Division of Child Support Enforcement of DHS tells mothers:

If you fail to keep appointments, provide the requested information or fail to appear for court or genetic testing and you are a recipient of TANF benefits, your TANF case will be closed. If you do not cooperate with the Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE) and you are not a TANF client, your child support will be closed.

If you participate in the food stamp program, you will not be able to receive food stamp benefits unless you cooperate with DCSE in establishing paternity for any child(ren) born out of wedlock and in obtaining support for the child(ren).<sup>77</sup>

In the Mississippi brochure on TANF benefits, one section is written in red ink and all capital letters:

**REMEMBER THERE ARE TIME LIMITS ON RECEIVING PUBLIC ASSISTANCE. IN ORDER TO SUPPORT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY, YOU MUST BECOME SELF-SUFFICIENT THROUGH EMPLOYMENT. IT IS YOUR PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ALL TANF WORK PROGRAM SERVICES AVAILABLE TO HELP YOU FIND AND KEEP A JOB BEFORE YOUR 24**

**AND/OR 60-MONTH TIME LIMITS RUN OUT. YOU ARE ALSO RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR ATTITUDE AND ACTIONS TO HELP YOUR FAMILY BECOME SELF-SUFFICIENT.**<sup>78</sup>

This state-generated material did not communicate any state consideration or respect for low-income women or their children. The tone reflected the stereotype: these are women who have no interest in becoming self-sufficient. There was no word of regret that resources make it impossible to serve all eligible children. State materials implied that benefits were a gift and the recipient was suspect. Such language surely contradicts the traditional liberal view of government as providing easily accessible services to people in order to meet basic needs.

When I met with the MDHS leadership, I pointed out the hostility of the material the Department published and carried on its web site. Very soon after, all this material was taken down and replaced with very neutral, short, and uninformative content — primarily featuring phone numbers to call.

Since MDHS serves low-income single mothers, the vast majority of whom are Black, hostility on the part of state employees is a transparent mask for negative stereotypes and racial attitudes. Although the material quoted here did not refer to race, it clearly refers to a group of women who, DHS administrators assume, are prone to disobey the rules, especially by committing fraud, and it lays out various threats if they do so. While such language is not as overtly racist as previous manifestations of racism in Mississippi, its message is clear: the recipients make up an “other” against whom the state may obstruct access to the very services needed to improve their circumstances under the guise of “protection against fraud.” There is no reason to assume that the attitudes and practices at MDHS have changed, despite the “cleaning up” of the web site.

- **Mississippi imposes a semi-annual renewal requirement.**

In order to retain a child care subsidy, the mother must apply—by mail or in person—to the Designated Agent (the DHS subcontractor) by supplying her address, any change in income, and other information. This must be done *twice* yearly. There

<sup>76</sup> Requirements for the receipt of TANF benefits can be accessed at: [www.mdhs.state.us/ea\\_tanf.html](http://www.mdhs.state.us/ea_tanf.html).

<sup>77</sup> “Why It Pays to Cooperate!”: Published by the Division of Child Support Enforcement, Mississippi Department of Human Services, 2005. Accessed at: [www.mdhs.state.ms.us](http://www.mdhs.state.ms.us).

<sup>78</sup> “Division of Economic Assistance: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families,” MS Department of Human Services: access at: [www.mdhs.state.ms.us/ea\\_tanf.html](http://www.mdhs.state.ms.us/ea_tanf.html).

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are nine Designated Agent districts.

This semi-annual requirement for recipients of child care subsidies can be burdensome, especially if the mother/caretaker has limited formal education and therefore is not comfortable with paperwork and mail requirements. In Mississippi, some recipients have so much difficulty filling out the forms and getting them to the designated agent that child care workers sometimes help them with the forms, or send them in on the mother's behalf by certified mail, to prove they have been sent and received. A slight tardiness in getting the documentation to the local Department of Human Services office can result in the child care subsidy being abruptly terminated. Providers then must wait until the parent's certificate is re-issued by the Designated Agent before they can be reimbursed for their care for the child.

Many providers "carry" children during this process rather than terminate services for the family. As a result providers often provide services for which they are not reimbursed. Asked directly if this is frequent, one child care provider quickly replied, "It happens all the time."

The arcane rules and paperwork demanded of mothers or caretakers is a barrier in itself.<sup>79</sup> The designated agent could presumably access this information electronically, as is done in many states with welfare's health care provision.<sup>80</sup>

- **Designated agents vary in administrative quality and efficiency.**

Once submitted, the forms go to an office that often is chaotic and that may lose the forms or demand additional information from the client, sometimes information that the client says she included. The level of efficiency of the nine offices in Mississippi depends to a large extent on the quality of the work of each subcontractor. Here again, women receiving disorganized service are primarily Black.

In a report analyzing the Mississippi Child Care Development Fund, The John C. Stennis Institute of

Government at Mississippi State University argues that the current administrative system for the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) is a program with many problems related to the state's use of designated agents:

...problems primarily occur as a result of the implementation process of the designated agents at the service delivery level. Specifics of the service delivery system, such as client and provider interactions with the designated agents, their practices and accessibility were the most problematic areas at each stage of the process... Parent responses would indicate that rather than encouraging economic independence and promoting stable child-care, the subsidy system as it is currently being operated is creating more barriers to these goals than providing supports.<sup>81</sup>

- **Parents who cannot afford quality child care, but are not receiving TANF benefits, are not served.**

Parents who are too poor to afford child care, but are not receiving TANF benefits because they are already working, are at the bottom of the priority list. They need child care as much as do those receiving TANF benefits. But they do not improve the "welfare to work" statistics that states seek in order to get rewards from the federal government. Those who are judged as "trying to get off welfare" are favored to receive child care subsidy benefits.

The underlying problem is that the state does not provide enough money to cover the needs of Mississippians who should be served with child care subsidies. Mississippi does meet the requirement to match federal child care money (CCDF), but does not add a state-funded program, which is desperately needed in order to approach the unmet need. The state has used TANF money for child care, but not to the extent that would begin to serve all eligible children. Nor is this the ideal solution to the dilemma.

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*Since MDHS serves low-income single mothers, the vast majority of whom are Black, hostility on the part of state employees is a transparent mask for negative stereotypes and racial attitudes.*

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<sup>79</sup> Sawhill et. al, op. cit., p. 193.

<sup>80</sup> Sarah Lueck, "Mississippi's 'Face to Face' Rule Blocks Coverage of Eligible People, Not Fraud," Washington, D.C: Center on Budget Priorities, March 25, 2009. Accessed at: <http://www.cbpp.org/cmc/index.cfm?fa=view&id=2740>.

<sup>81</sup> W. Martin Wiseman, C. Denise Keller, Joe Adams, and Keith A. Smith, "Mississippi Child Care Development Fund: Program Implementation, Evaluation, and Impact Analysis," (Mississippi State, MS: Mississippi State University John C. Stennis Institute of Government), January 7, 2005, p. 43.

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- **An assumption of criminality underlies an emphasis on fraud.**

In sync with the view of welfare recipients as “lazy” and “out to defraud the system” is the “enforcement” theme of human services provision in Mississippi. The tone of criminality associated with welfare recipients is ultimately in the hands of the Governor, who appoints the Director of Mississippi’s Department of Human Services (DHS). A harsh and hostile DHS Director (who has no Board of Directors to act as a check on his or her leadership) can serve to legitimize white resentment of the “Black” welfare program by implying that without vigilant policing, welfare fraud would be rampant.

The state’s record of regard and care for poor Mississippians has been mixed, to say the least. Perhaps anchoring the punish-the-poor end of the spectrum is the governorship of the late Kirk Fordice (1992-2000). Fordice was the first Republican governor of Mississippi since Reconstruction and a self-declared conservative. In 1995, he appointed as head of the Department of Human Services Col. Don Taylor, a “man of military bearing,” who focused the bulk of his efforts in office on eliminating fraud.<sup>82</sup>

Taylor was particularly proud of a system he brought to Mississippi that tracks where a food stamp recipient lives and where she uses food stamps. Known officially as Integrated Business Intelligence (BI) and more popularly as “location intelligence,” this system — originally developed and used in Louisiana — can detect “unusual activity” in the use of food stamps. According to the *Clarion Ledger*:

The Department (DHS) won’t publicize all of the patterns it looks for, but red flags include frequent whole-dollar amount transactions at a specific store, which might indicate that an employee is trading cash for food stamp benefits. Mapping can give other indications of fraud, such as clients driving long distances, past other food stores, to visit a particular merchant that shows many unusual

transactions. The new system has already been a boon to investigators...<sup>83</sup>

Although welfare and subsidized child care advocates and civil libertarians have expressed privacy concerns, there is no evidence that their protests have slowed the state’s use of the new location intelligence. The use of the system underscore the emphasis that the Mississippi DHS places on policing low-income people with ever-more sophisticated systems of surveillance in order to detect fraud.

Because DHS has no Board of Directors, it acts as an arm of the Governor’s Office. Working with CCDF, a federal Block Grant, the Governor and DHS leadership have the power to pursue an agenda of

reform and advocacy for Mississippi’s poor, or to prioritize the prevention of fraud. Though no longer under the leadership of Col. Don Taylor, Mississippi DHS still seems reluctant to reduce its emphasis on pursuing fraud.

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*The state’s record of regard and care for poor Mississippians has been mixed, to say the least.*

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- **Mississippi has insufficient child care advocacy resources.**

Without an ally in state government, low-income women and children must rely on the non-profit and non-governmental sector for support from organizations that will advocate for them. But this sector is weak in Mississippi, with under-resourced, small organizations trying to counter both state power that is increasingly centralized in the Governor’s office, and a system that notoriously lacks transparency. This lack of a powerful counter-voice allows public policy hostility toward low-income recipients to go unchecked.

Because Mississippi is such a poor state, it often attracts the attention of national foundations, especially those whose mission is to improve the life circumstances of the neediest people. Although the resulting support benefits local reform and advocacy organizations, it can also subject on-the-ground organizations to cycles of feast or famine as they become increasingly reliant on national foundation funding.

<sup>82</sup> Roy Maynard, “Fighting poverty in Jesus’ name...and with taxpayer funds?” *World Magazine*, 1998. Accessed at: <http://www.leaderu.com/socialsciences/poverty.html>.

<sup>83</sup> Hannah Smalltree, “Location intelligence helps Mississippi fight fraud, hurricanes.” *Clarion Ledger*: 8/30/2006. Also see: Bud Douglas and Elizabeth Matlack, “The Road to GIS at Mississippi’s Department of Human Services,” *Directions Magazine*, Sept, 4, 2005.

## MISSISSIPPI IS NOT ALONE

**G**rim as circumstances are for poor and low-income people in Mississippi, especially if they are African American, many of the conditions faced by single African American mothers are similar in other states. Scholars and activists in Mississippi have criticized the tax structure of Mississippi, with its emphasis on a very large (and regressive) sales tax, but increasing income and real estate taxes to improve services for welfare recipients is a political third rail right now—not just in Mississippi but across the country. It is politicians who could raise taxes and create a sustainable base of resources for poor people, but as politicians they are loath to do so.

The second decade of the 21st Century promises a “perfect storm” of budget dysfunction and racial inequity for nearly every state:

- Taxes will not keep up with demand for services and federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) money will no longer be granted by the federal government to narrow the gap;
- Even the best-intentioned employees of the state bureaucracy will face limitations in how effective they can be;
- Structural racism of the sort found in Mississippi can be found in liberal Massachusetts and any other state in the country;

- Progressive activists in Mississippi work on the front lines of racial prejudice. They are doing the best they can. Some may collaborate in the neglect of the poorest in Mississippi, but their effort is, for the most part, sincere and as effective as is possible.

Mississippi exists in the national public mind as a backwater of poverty and bigotry. A great deal of this demonization is statistically justified. But the South is a complex region, embodying many contradictions, and many negative statements about Mississippi could be countered with a related positive statement. For example, Mississippi’s education system has been widely criticized as

under-serving its poor students, but the state also has some of the South’s most respected colleges and universities. Thanks to the Civil Rights Movement, these are now racially integrated.

Further, the nation’s child care system is a patchwork system, made up of uncoordinated programs with various funding streams and little ability to “catch” the many low-income families that fall between the cracks of federal, state, and private programs. Quality child care is not guaranteed in such a chaotic system.

Nevertheless, Mississippi is unquestionably under-serving its poor, Black single mothers and their children. In this, it also is not alone.

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*The second decade of the  
21st Century promises a “perfect storm”  
of budget dysfunction and racial  
inequity for nearly every state*

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# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Low-income single mothers and their children face constant challenges just to negotiate their lives. With grit, initiative, luck and hard work, they can survive and even lift their families out of poverty. But they cannot do so without some social services that will help them overcome the very tough problems caused by poverty. One central problem is the need for child care for their children while they work or attend school.

The federal government, for all its stinginess in the current “welfare reform” legislation, does recognize this fact. It has provided necessary (if not sufficient) subsidies through three programs — TANF, the Child Care Development Fund, and ARRA funds. Unfortunately, the provision of child care subsidies in Mississippi occurs within the context of the state’s structural racism and a national “war on the poor” that has stigmatized both welfare benefits and the poor women who access them.

Well-intentioned administrators of welfare benefits are able to make some difference in how difficult it is to access services. But, in general, the delivery system is uneven and often hostile. Time and again, it does not put the welfare of the low-income child first. Because Mississippi has the highest poverty rate in the country, its children deserve more care and attention, rather than less, if Mississippi is to overcome its deep problems.

Much of the delivery of child care to poor women is riddled with inefficiencies and exists within a context of structural racism. A transformation of services to single, poor, African-American mothers and their children will not come quickly or easily. But some steps are clear and their benefit to all concerned, including the state of Mississippi, are obvious. Below are five recommendations that would transform the child care subsidy system in a significant way.

### Five Recommendations to Improve the System of Child Care Subsidies in Mississippi

1. Remove barriers that limit low-income women’s access to child care subsidies, such as loss of paperwork, a suspicious attitude toward their efforts, and over-hasty cut-offs for minor violations of the rules. These barriers disproportionately affect African-Americans because in Mississippi

African-Americans are disproportionately poor.

2. Increase state and private resources to the non-profit sector to support advocacy and social service efforts for low-income women and children. This sector is now markedly under-resourced. Mississippi has had solid research for at least a decade about what reforms are needed, but only a strengthened non-governmental sector will be able to press for those reforms.
3. Improve the transparency in the child care certificate program so that the operation and financing of this program can be more thoroughly evaluated. This would assist in identifying where improvements in services could be made and cost efficiencies could be improved.
4. Increase the awareness of the effect of block grants on low-income Mississippians and mobilize the non-governmental sector to oppose block grants. Because the federal Child Care Development Fund is scheduled to be reauthorized in 2011, that would be a timely moment for public education on this issue. Additionally, ARRA funds, which have proved helpful because they were “targeted,” should be extended.
5. Improve the efficiency of the subcontractors who deliver child care subsidies across the state, with better regulation of their work and a state demand for high-quality performance. Mississippi could, as some states do, use an impartial body, such as the Mississippi Child Care Resource and Referral Network, to choose subcontractors (Designated Agents).

Though these are difficult times, when money is scarce and unemployment high (11.2%), with political will, determination, self-awareness, and compassion, Mississippi could be a state that sees welfare benefits and child care assistance as a hand up for struggling women and their children.

For important and revealing developments in Mississippi since 2010, please go on to read the Afterword (2013) that follows.

## AFTERWORD (2013)

In the three years since the completion of this report in 2010, there has been both progress and retrenchment in Mississippi. Some of the players and decision-makers have changed. The major recession of 2008 is slowly abating. Congress has gone into an almost complete gridlock, which, when combined with the “sequestration” of funding, has caused almost all programs to cut their budgets by 20 percent.<sup>1</sup> The Department of Justice has intervened in Mississippi politics at least twice to prevent the most blatant racial abuses of political and financial power.

“Between A Rock and A Hard Place” reviews the difficulties faced by low-income women who need a child-care certificate (a welfare benefit that provides federally-funded assistance with child care costs on a sliding scale) in order to work or attend school. The report is a case study of one aspect of Mississippi’s structural racism that maintains a *status quo* that is race- and class-based. In the last three years, child care for low-income Mississippians remains virtually unchanged. Barriers persist, causing many of the needs of low-income women and children, especially those who are Black, to remain unmet. Structural racism keeps the powerful in place, stigmatizes the powerless as unwilling and slow, and yet avoids the overt racial segregation of the old Jim Crow system.

### Political and Economic News

After Haley Barbour retired from the governorship of Mississippi in 2012, he was succeeded by former Lieutenant Governor Phil Bryant, whose signature issues are opposition to abortion and to the Affordable Care Act (sometimes known as “Obamacare”).<sup>2</sup>

Barbour did not run for the Republican nomination for the presidency in 2012, as many had predicted.

Little has changed in Mississippi’s poverty. It is still the state ranked first in state poverty, with 20 percent of Mississippians receiving food stamps.<sup>3</sup> The state’s median household income is \$36,919. Over twenty-three percent of Mississippians live below the poverty line (up from 22.4% in 2010) although it should be noted that 16 other states also experienced an increase in percentage of people living below the poverty line.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Mississippi had the tenth highest unemployment rate in the country (8.6%) in 2012, and *Time* magazine named Mississippi the worst state for women, based on a number of reliable sources collected by the women’s web site iVillage.<sup>4</sup> Legal Momentum, a Washington D.C.-based advocacy organization, ranked Mississippi second only to Arkansas in compilation of its 2011 Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Misery Index.<sup>5</sup>

The state was hit hard by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, followed by the national recession, which created unusual hardship.<sup>6</sup> Yet, of those who are very low-income, only *ten percent* receive Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funds. These shocking statistics coincide with an increasingly hostile attitude nationally toward welfare recipients, who are seen as unwilling to work and dependent on taxpayer-funded programs.<sup>7</sup> These attitudes are particularly strong in the southern states.

The Obama Administration was unable to repeat stimulus grants that helped Mississippi weather the recession. Future stimulus money is unlikely since

<sup>1</sup> Budget sequestration involves setting a hard cap on the amount of government spending within broadly-defined categories; if Congress enacts annual appropriations that exceed these caps, an across-the-board spending cut is automatically imposed on these categories, affecting all departments and programs by an equal percentage. The amount exceeding the budget limit is held back by the Treasury and not transferred to the agencies specified in the appropriation bills. In 2011, the Congressional Debt Reduction Committee did not come to agreement on any plan, activating the sequestration plan. The sequestration went into effect on March 1 of 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Emily Lane, “Bryant supports ‘Heartbeat’ measure,” *Clarion Ledger*, January, 11, 2013; “Mississippi Governor: Left’s mission ‘is to abort children,’” Associated Press, *Politico.com*, April 25, 2012; Jennifer Haberkorn, “Mississippi judge dismisses case against health reform law,” *Politico.com*, February 4, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Julianne Malveaux, “Made Visible: Women, Children and Poverty,” *Washington Informer*, March 22, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Meghan Gibson, “Woes for Women: Top 5 Worst U. S. States for Women,” [www.newsfeed.time.com](http://www.newsfeed.time.com), March 23, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> “A TANF Misery Index,” Press Release, April 9, 2013 (Legal Momentum: Washington, D.C.). “In TANF, the sum of the percent of poor families (or children) not receiving TANF, and the percentage gap between TANF benefits and the poverty level, can be used as a misery index that summarizes in a single number” how well or badly TANF is performing in alleviating family poverty.” (emphasis in original)

<sup>6</sup> [www.money.cnn.com/2012/09/20/news/economy/income-states-poverty/index.html](http://www.money.cnn.com/2012/09/20/news/economy/income-states-poverty/index.html).

<sup>7</sup> Neil deMause, “How the State of Georgia Declared War on its Poorest Citizens,” posted on *Slate.com* on December 26, 2012. Also see: Liz Schott, “Georgia’s Increased TANF Work Participation Rate is Driven by Sharp Caseload Decline,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, March 6, 2007..

## BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

Republican Congressional members, who tend to be hostile to stimulus grants, hold veto power in Congress.

### Progress in Mississippi Child Care Certificate Administration

There have been some small victories for child-care advocates in the past few years, though the child-care system retains many of the flaws documented in this report. Just before leaving office, Governor Haley Barbour eliminated the role of the Planning and Development Districts (PDDs) in administering the child care certificate program. PDDs have been one of the greatest sticking points in the administration of human services benefits to poor Mississippians. They have been the source of constant complaints from women seeking child care subsidies and are considered a bastion of cronyism and self-dealing for the white political power structure.<sup>8</sup> Further, the Department of Human Services eliminated the requirement that parents receiving subsidies re-apply for those subsidies twice a year. Though parents still have to prove their eligibility every six months, they now have to go through the whole reapplication process only once a year.

In some cases, what looks like progress can be illusory: appearances can be deceiving, and gains can be short-lived. The hostile language that appeared in 2009 on the website of the Department of Human Services has been taken down. This is not necessarily an indication of a reduction in DHS's negative attitude toward benefit recipients, but it indicates an unwillingness to be so blatant in expressing that attitude.

Mississippi is implementing a "quality improvement" push to improve the quality of child care through a quality rating scale. This effort is in keeping with an increasing amount of research demonstrating that child care without an educational component is less effective in building successful adults. Standards for such a push for better-quality child care are often established by academics or state bureaucrats, who too often lack experience with the *context* of low-income child-care settings. As a result, standards (usually not accompanied by the money necessary to implement them) can devastate the child care providers in low-income communities. An evaluation of this push is forthcoming from the Mississippi Low Income Child Care Initiative.

### Further Developments in Child Care for Low-Income Mississippians

Illustrating how difficult it can be to achieve progress in Mississippi, the Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) has attempted to implement a program of fingerprinting the recipients of child-care certificates. The state made all the arrangements for a program requiring that mothers who have a child-care certificate must first go their local MDHS office to have their fingerprints taken, get trained in how to use the fingerprint machines, and then have their fingers scanned every day at the child care center when they pick up and when they drop off their children for day care. Only those using child-care assistance would be fingerprinted. This new system is modeled on one implemented in Louisiana.

Mississippi launched pilot programs in 20 child care centers in Hinds, Rankin, and Madison Counties and plans to pay Xerox Corporation, and its subsidiary, Affiliated Computer Systems, approximately \$12 million over the next five years to manage the finger scanning process. Parents and child care providers had no say in the choice of Xerox or in how the process is managed. Further, opponents argued that this system is stigmatizing and humiliating for certificate holders, is based on unproven "fraud," and will spend far more money than it will save. Child care employees must teach the parents to use the scanners and, if the scanners break, the child care facility is responsible for their repair. The *Jackson Free Press* has reported that Gov. Phil Bryant, Lt. Gov. Tate Reeves, and former Gov. Haley Barbour all received substantial campaign contributions from Xerox.<sup>9</sup>

The fingerprinting program was scheduled to go into effect across the state on October 1, 2013. Providers would have to register and attend training by August 30. But on August 15, Hinds County Chancery Judge Denise Owens issued an injunction against the program, saying that child care providers in the program (1,300 centers of the state's 1,650) would be irreparably harmed if the injunction wasn't issued. It is not clear at this time if MDHS will abandon its plan to implement the program. Certainly this injunction is a major victory for child care providers, children, and low-income parents, and child care advocates, who had fought its implementation tirelessly with rallies and petitions. The state has already

<sup>8</sup> All Directors of the ten District Offices are white. Only one is a woman. 2012 Directory of Mississippi's Planning and Development Districts," (Mississippi Association of Planning and Development Districts, Jackson, MS). Also see: Letter to the Editor, *Clarion Ledger*, September 3, 2013, accessed at: [www.clarionledger.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=201330904301](http://www.clarionledger.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=201330904301).

<sup>9</sup> R.L. Nave, "Follow the DHS Scanner Money," *Jackson Free Press*, October 3, 2012. Accessed at: [www.jacksonfreepress.com/news/2012/oct/03/following-the-dhs-scanner-money](http://www.jacksonfreepress.com/news/2012/oct/03/following-the-dhs-scanner-money).

## Race and Child Care in Mississippi

spent \$1.7 million dollars in federal stimulus money to buy 1,700 scanning machines.<sup>10</sup>

Because serious problems with transparency still characterize the reporting at MDHS,<sup>11</sup> it is unclear how many children are currently on the waiting list for a child care certificate. Certainly there are not nearly enough child care certificates to go to all who need them (the number of children eligible, but not receiving certificates is estimated at over 8,000).<sup>12</sup> But the prospect of being fingerprinted may cause parents not to use the program, and the state may, indeed, save money — not by eliminating fraud, but by having a chilling effect on applicants and thereby getting the numbers of those who participate down.

MDHS has not improved with a new Administration. The new Director of MDHS is Rickey Berry, a close associate of the former Director, who worked under the direction of Gov. Haley Barbour. Jill Dent, former and current head of the Child Care Division, is fully backing the fingerprint program, and is claiming that it is needed and necessary.

The Mississippi Legislature is in the process of considering state-funded child care. Mississippi is the only southern state that does not provide child care. This would be an enormous step forward, were it not fraught with problems. According to Carol Burnett of the Mississippi Low Income Child Care Initiative, more than 90 percent of the child care providers now receiving child care subsidies in Mississippi would not qualify to provide child care under this proposed legislation because they lack the prerequisite “quality” standards.<sup>13</sup> But these child care centers provide child care in the context of the communities they serve. They know the families of their children, the norms of the neighborhood, the struggles of the families, and therefore, the needs of the children. Mississippi early child care legislation is currently stalled in the state Legislature.

### A Future Hard to Predict

What can we make of these recent developments in child care and the continually grim statistics that document poverty in Mississippi? The obvious answer is that Mississippi continues to be a deeply “red” state, dominated by the ideology of the most conser-

vative wing of the Republican Party. For many white people, personal responsibility, free enterprise, law and order, and rugged individualism are paired with right-wing social policies, an active legacy of racism, and a commitment to traditional values. There is little room in this ideology for services to low-income single mothers of color and their children. Hostility to the federal government includes federally-funded child care and is augmented by suspicion of the motives and actions of those who live in poverty.

But Mississippi is no longer the state described by Nina Simone in her iconic 1964 civil rights anthem, “Mississippi Goddam.” It is crucial that non-Mississippians, especially those who are liberals and progressives, not caricature the state, and thus miss important developments here. Rumbblings of change are appearing. A solidly “red” state, its white population votes Republican across class, despite how that vote may affect its economic and social interests. Nevertheless, Barack Obama carried 56 percent of the combined Black and White 18-to-29-year-old vote in 2008, indicating a crack in the young, white vote. Black and White leaders, coming together across race and class, may begin to form powerful coalitions of resistance.

Such coalitions will likely be helped by the arrival in Mississippi of The Kellogg Foundation, a huge national resource that has targeted two areas—Mississippi and the New Orleans region—as places where they intend the “stay for a generation,” making grants to improved early childhood education. According to the Director of the program, William Buster, in order to make change Kellogg and others must invest in vulnerable children, especially children of color who are living in poverty. In 2008, Kellogg had created the SPARK Program (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids) in Mississippi to increase young children’s readiness to enter school. Buster notes several instances of Black and White collaboration as hopeful signs of change in Mississippi.<sup>14</sup>

Grassroots groups such as the Steps Coalition and Turkey Creek Community Initiatives are gaining respect and a degree of effectiveness in influencing Mississippi policies. The NAACP, the ACLU, The Mississippi Center for Justice, The Center for Social

<sup>10</sup> Jimmie E. Gates, “Judge Halts Fingerprint Scan System,” *Clarion Ledger*, August 16, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Although admittedly a dated example, in 2005, Dr. Marty Wiseman, Director of The Stennis Institute at Mississippi State University, had to file Freedom of Information Act requests just to get answers from the Mississippi Department of Human Services about its use of child care certificates. Editorial, *Clarion Ledger*, February 6, 2005, p. G4.

<sup>12</sup> This number is an estimate from Jill Dent, Director of the Office for Children and Youth at the Department of Human Services, which oversees the program. Jeff Amy, “Child care operators protest finger-scanning rule,” *Associated Press*, October, 10, 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Carol Burnett, July 4, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with William Buster, February 6, 2013.

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Inclusion, The Children's Defense Fund and other legal and political organizations do important progressive work on the ground and on a shoestring. Northern-based foundations have brought resources into Mississippi, in part to build a stronger network of progressive groups to better challenge the *status quo*. Organizing against the plan to fingerprint mothers who receive child care certificates was an example of the skill and determination of progressive activists in Mississippi. From rallies to lawsuits, Mississippi activists showed how formidable they can be when they mobilize.

For those of us who believe that improvement in the lives of Mississippians depends on empowerment of Black and white Mississippians from the ground up, child care is a crucial component. We learn more every year about the development of a child's brain and what an enormous difference it can make to the future life of a child if that development is nurtured and expanded in the earliest years.<sup>15</sup> Child care is not the only key to breaking through the barriers standing in the way of low-income Mississippians, but high-quality early child care is an intervention that holds the possibility of changing outcomes for low-income children.

Nevertheless, child care should not be pursued as a panacea that allows the state to neglect the needs of low-income adults. A plan to lift Mississippi as a state calls for an across-the-board reform of state services, which flows out of an ideology and political vision that is hard to come by in Mississippi. Even its most reform-minded citizens are now conditioned to expect little from state government.

That reality does not mean that Mississippi will not turn itself around. Many Mississippi organizations continue to work to fight structural racism. Child care providers and their clients continue to struggle for change and improvements. Although politicians show little tolerance for rebellion and the demands of the poor, people of good will continue to fight for justice in Mississippi and do whatever they can to improve the chances of its low-income residents.

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example: Heckman, James J., Rodrigo Pinto, and Peter Savelyev, "Understanding the mechanisms through which an influential early childhood program boosted adult outcomes," (Accepted for publication in a forthcoming issue of *American Economic Review*); Heckman, James J., "Schools, Skills, and Synapses," *Economic Inquiry* (vol. 46, no. 3, pp. 289-324, 2008); Neuman, Susan B., *Changing the Odds for Children at Risk: Seven Essential Principles of Educational Programs that Break the Cycle of Poverty* (New York, N.Y: Teachers College Press, 2009); Rose, Elizabeth, *The Promise of Preschool: From Head Start to Universal Pre-Kindergarten* (New York, N.Y: Oxford University Press, 2010).

## APPENDICES

### I. A Note on Usage

I have followed several conventions that I believe to be correct, but which may strike some readers as odd. First, I use the terms “Black” and “African American” interchangeably, as I found the terms used in Mississippi. I capitalize the identification “Black” but not “white” out of respect for the struggle of African Americans in this white-dominated country. I have done so through most of my career.

I use the terms “low-income” and “poor” interchangeably because I believe it is nearly impossible to tell the difference, and many statistically “poor” women would not self-identify as poor. Out of respect for that position, I use “poor” cautiously.

As mentioned earlier, I have not used attributed direct quotes from my interviewees when it was clear to me that this would cause them to be less honest in their statements. This decision was a judgment call, but I truly believe that it improved the quality of the information I was privileged to get from them.

And finally, I have brought a feminist and womanist lens to my study of low-income women and children in Mississippi, but have not explicitly discussed that lens. I focused on the aspects of the struggle of low-income women to provide child care that relate to race. Power holders in Mississippi are a white, male elite. The nobility and strength of the women who stand up to that power structure, who survive in a world of scarce resources and arbitrary dictates, itself defies traditional notions of women as subservient and “the weaker sex.”

### II. Some National Resources on Structural Racism and Welfare Benefits

Race Forward (formerly Applied Research Center)  
Legal Momentum  
Colorlines Magazine  
Institute for Southern Studies  
Haas Diversity Research Center,  
University of California at Berkeley  
Political Research Associates  
Southern Poverty Law Center  
Highlander Center for Research and Education  
Institute for Social Inclusion

# BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

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Beth Orlansky  
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Jackson, MS

Cassandra Welchlin  
Center for Social Inclusion  
New York, NY

Mr. William Buster  
Director, Mississippi and  
New Orleans Programs  
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Dr. Marianne Hill  
Mississippi Economic Review  
Jackson, MS

Roberta Avila  
Steps Coalition  
Biloxi, MS

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Phyllis Glink  
The Harris Foundation  
Chicago, IL

Dr. Nancy Marshall  
Wellesley Centers for Women  
Wellesley College  
Wellesley, MA

Dr. Jill Dent  
Director, Division of  
Early Childhood Care and Development  
Mississippi Department of Human Services

Donald Thompson  
Executive Director  
Mississippi Department of Human Services  
Jackson, MS (2010)

Richard Berry  
Executive Director  
Mississippi Department of Human Services,  
Jackson, MS (2013)

I also held in-depth interviews with eight child care providers, whose names I have not listed because I promised them confidentiality. I have given my reasons for this promise in the “A Note from the Author” early in this report.

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