



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on May 12, 2015

Baltimore Riots Fueled in Part by Disastrous Government Welfare Programs

With many Americans wondering why so much alienation exists in cities such as Baltimore, Maryland, perhaps one answer is a reaction to decades of federal government programs that have been driving the destruction of the American family.

The Family Research Council's Marriage and Religion Research Institute has released a report highlighting the startling statistic that only 16 percent of teenagers in Baltimore between the ages of 15 and 17 have been raised in an intact, married family. Baltimore is one of the five least "intact" counties in the entire United States. Bishop E. W. Jackson, a senior research fellow for the Family Research Council, related this depressing fact to the recent senseless rioting and looting in the city. "Boys ... are inculcated with the values of the streets," he explained, adding that "race and poverty become an excuse for criminality." The crisis in the African-American community, Jackson contends, is in "marriage and family."



That crisis has been building for years, and it is not restricted to the African-American communities of the country, although the rates of illegitimacy and single-female households are higher there than in other ethnic groups. Since 1960, there has been a three-fold increase in the number of children growing up in single-parent families. According to Mary Parke, in her article "Are Married Parents Really Better for Children?," in 1960, only 22 percent of black children were in single-parent homes (almost always with the mother); however, by 2001, this figure had soared to 53 percent. Among white Americans, the rate was a mere seven percent in 1960, but had increased to 19 percent by 2001. And these distressing numbers are still rising.

In their article for the Heritage Foundation entitled "How Welfare Harms Kids," Patrick Fagan and Robert Rector explained how this accelerating trend has affected the incidence of violent crime and burglary. They show that growing up in a single-parent family on welfare triples the probability that a young black man will engage in criminal activity. It is instructive that the explosion of illegitimacy and single-parent homes has occurred since 1960. It was in 1964 that President Lyndon Johnson led Congress to enact the bundle of government programs designed to conduct a war on poverty in his so-called Great Society.



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What is the role that welfare, by whatever name it is called, has played in inflicting such damage on the American family? And why has the destruction of the family in American society contributed so greatly to the creation and continuance of an American underclass, seething with anger and resentment?

According to Fagan and Rector, welfare “has made marriage economically irrational for most low-income parents. It has transformed marriage from a legal institution designed to protect and nurture children into an institution that financially penalizes nearly all low-income parents who enter into it.” Welfare pays for non-work and non-marriage — and thus, not surprisingly, we get more of both.

It is not so much that young women are likely to choose to have children outside of marriage simply to get welfare benefits, but that the cornucopia of benefits an unmarried woman receives provides an economic incentive to remain single. This hinders the formation of a new family, with children deriving the financial, emotional, and spiritual benefits of having two biological parents. According to a study by sociologists Gary Sandefur and Sara McLanahan, children who do not live with both biological parents are twice as likely to be poor, to have a birth outside of marriages themselves, to have behavioral and psychological problems, and to not graduate from high school. They noted that the poverty rate is 26 percent for those raised in a single-parent home, compared to only five percent for those raised in a two-parent home.

Some on the Left have countered that the problem is poverty, not the incidence of single-parent households. These progressives claim the solution is to transfer even more wealth to the poor. Interestingly, however, in Sweden — which has an even greater developed welfare state than the United States — children growing up in single-parent homes with little to no income disparity still have many of the same social problems associated with the single-parent homes in the United States.

In most cases, a single-parent family is missing the father, not the mother. We have all heard many of the heroic stories of single women raising children under extremely difficult situations, and we can applaud them. Yet, one needs no study conducted by a university sociology professor to know that boys raised without a father in the home are more likely to commit crimes. While a discussion of all the reasons would require more than a short article, the simple fact is that boys raised by only a mother do not have a male role model — at least not a positive one. The role models found in inner city conditions such as in Baltimore are far too often angry young men in gangs, who deal drugs and commit robberies, murders, and rapes. Many impressionable boys and young men think the gang leaders are examples of how a man is supposed to act: commit various crimes, and consider adolescent girls and young women not as potential wives, but as someone to be “conquered.” And, if the female gets pregnant, the young man feels no financial responsibility, because he thinks the government will provide her with everything a young mother needs. But though the government can provide diapers and baby formula, it cannot give the wise counsel of a loving father.

For the teen-aged girl and the young woman, the lack of a father in the home also has negative consequences. Without the role model of a loving father and husband who supports the family, the female growing up in these conditions may think criminal behavior is simply masculine behavior.

We have truly reaped what we have sown. During the Great Depression, even President Franklin Roosevelt, hardly an example of a limited government politician, called welfare “the dole” and a “narcotic.” Baltimore is only one of many cities in America in which the multigenerational welfare state has created conditions ripe for what has been witnessed recently. It is probable that with the effects of the Great Society only expanding though both Democrat and Republican administrations, there will be more Baltimores.



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It is not that politicians are ignorant of the causes of the degeneration of the American family, and with it, the conditions that create the explosive atmosphere in cities across the country. Instead of changing course, many liberal activists prefer to throw gasoline on the fire, in order to advance an agenda, hoping to use such resulting alienation for their own political ends.

Photo of Baltimore protests: [Veggies](#)



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