

# *The Washington Times*

Article published May 17, 2008

## **Single-parent "baggage"**

May 17, 2008

By Darryn "Dutch" Martin –

As a product of a poverty-stricken single-parent home, I know first-hand about the negative baggage that growing up poor and fatherless can breed.

Numerous studies note that children born and raised in fatherless, single-parent homes are much more likely to live in poverty, experience depression, have trouble in school and get in trouble with the law than are children raised in married, two-parent households.

Unfortunately, strong marriages and intact families increasingly seem the exception to the rule these days. With high divorce rates and almost 40 percent of all American children (about 70 percent of black children) born out of wedlock, the intact American family appears to be on a slippery, downward slope.

**A new study finds that the burden of broken families is borne by all taxpayers, regardless of their own family status. In analyzing government expenditures on welfare, health care, education and criminal justice as well as lost tax revenues, Georgia College & State University economist Ben Scafidi suggests divorce and single parenthood cost taxpayers approximately \$112 billion a year.**

**Professor Scafidi's report makes no formal policy recommendations, but he notes that reducing these costs "is a legitimate concern of government, policymakers and legislators."**

**This study was commissioned by the Institute for American Values, Institute for Marriage and Public Policy, Families Northwest and the Georgia Family Council. These pro-family groups have some suggestions. They hope this study will prompt lawmakers to invest more money in programs to bolster and strengthen marriage like those found in Oklahoma and Texas.**

Typically, the report has its critics, but do the critics have any solutions to the problem of broken homes?

Syracuse University economics professor Tim Smeeding advocates increased investment in job creation. Commenting on the Scafidi report, he told the Associated Press: "I have nothing against marriage - relationship-building is

great. But alone it's not going to do the job. A full-employment economy would probably be the best thing - decent, stable jobs."

"Full employment" does not mean everyone has a job. The international Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development has instead suggested full employment occurs when the unemployment rate ranges between four and 6.4 percent. The United States had a 5.1 percent unemployment rate in March of 2008 and has been at or below 6.4 percent since April of 1994. Between 1994 and 2006, however, the U.S. Census Bureau reported "little variation" in the number of single-parent households.

Professor Smeeding added: "A high number of African-American men have been in prison - that limits their future earning potential and makes them bad marriage partners, regardless of what kind of person they are. A marriage program doesn't address that problem at all." Striving for intact families may be the solution.

A report by Professors June O'Neill and M. Anne Hill of Baruch College found black children in single-parent households were twice as likely to commit crimes as those in families with a father and 70 percent of juvenile hall residents and 43 percent of prison inmates came from fatherless homes.

In her criticism, University of Michigan sociologist Pamela Smock advocated greater investment in education to improve the economic prospects for children from fragmented families. However, the District of Columbia public schools rank near the top of the list in per capita student spending but at the bottom on student test scores and graduation rates. Considering this, it's obvious spending money does not automatically create opportunity - it just adds to the \$112 billion Scafidi study total.

**But Mr. Scafidi makes an important point: "Because of the very large taxpayer costs associated with high rates of divorce and unwed childbearing, and the modest price tags associated with most marriage-strengthening initiatives... programs even with very modest success rates will be cost-effective."**

**Granted, the jury may still be out on whether or not government-funded pro-marriage, job-creation and education programs will counter the corrosive effects of divorce and single parenthood. There is no question, however, that divorce and single parenthood are bad for children, families and communities, and they cost American taxpayers a bundle.**

*Darryn "Dutch" Martin is a member of the national advisory council of the Project 21 black leadership network.*