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RACIAL EQUALITY FOR FEMALE-HEADED FAMILIES

Edward J. O'Boyle, Ph. D.

Mayo Research Institute

The Associated Press last month released a report using data from several sources including the U.S. Census Bureau that demonstrate a persistent racial gap regarding educational attainment, household income, and poverty rates in which home ownership was cited as the key to closing that gap. One can take issue with the role of home ownership in addressing these kinds of disparities across racial lines. Simply put, does promoting home ownership contribute to improvements in education, income, and poverty, does improving education, income, and poverty promote home ownership, or do they exert mutual causality on one another? However contentious that issue may be, what is not questioned is the continued trend toward equality in poverty rates and income deficits among poor female-headed families, whether white or black, and the convergence in poverty rates for married-couple families, whether white or black. The AP report said nothing about these convergences and what they portend especially for the children in these families.

The Census Bureau estimates for poverty in the United States for 2005 – the most recent data available from that source – indicate that the rate of poverty for all black persons was more than twice as high as the rate for all white persons (24.9 percent versus 10.6 percent). These data clearly confirm the findings of the AP report. However, other data from that same source point to equality and convergence. For example, among black married-couple families the rate of poverty was 8.3 percent. Here the relevant comparisons are to the 4.6 percent rate of poverty for all white married-couple families, the 10.6 percent rate for all white persons. and most important of all to the 24.9 percent rate for all black persons. In that context, we observe that the poverty rate for all white persons is *higher* than for all black married-couple families.

These data beg the question ‘Is it home ownership or intact marriage that contributes to lower rates of poverty?’ We are inclined to assert that it is intact marriages that make the difference because in such marriages there typically are two adult wage-earners boosting family income above the poverty threshold, and enabling and encouraging higher educational attainment and home ownership.

Other data from the same Census Bureau report reinforce our assertion. Among all female-headed families (no spouse present) the rate of poverty in 2005 was 28.7 percent. Among whites, the rate for female-headed families was 25.3 percent – virtually the same rate for all black persons and *three times higher* than the rate for all black married couple families. Among black female-headed families the rate of poverty was higher than for similar white families -- 36.1 percent compared to 25.3 percent – but not more than twice as high as for all

white persons (10.6 percent) versus all black persons (24.9 percent). Indeed, these data indicate that poverty strikes white female-headed families *at roughly the same rate* as all black persons (25.3 percent versus 24.9 percent).

Other data regarding female-headed families with small children is even more alarming with regard to convergence across racial lines. Among white female-headed families with one child under age six the rate of poverty was 40.6 percent; among similar families with two or more children under six the poverty rate was 65.2 percent. The comparable figures for black female-headed families were 46.3 percent (one child under six) and 67.2 percent (two or more children under six).

Finally, the Census Bureau poverty report provides information on the average income deficit and surplus for all families in 2005 – for the poor family how far below the poverty threshold, for the nonpoor family how far above that threshold. For the typical poor family the income deficit amounted to \$6,125. For the typical nonpoor family the surplus was \$63,959. Summing the two figures indicates that poor families subsist on annual incomes that in 2005 were \$72,084 below the incomes of nonpoor families. However, focusing strictly on poor female-headed families, this gap closes. The typical poor white female-headed family lives \$8,312 below the poverty threshold. Their black counterparts subsist on income that is \$9,007 below the poverty line.

More than 40 years ago, before he was elected to the United States Senate from the State of New York, Daniel Patrick Moynihan called attention in a detailed report to the serious problems besetting broken black families. At first, he was condemned for implying that there is something intrinsically defective in black families. Since then, however, Moynihan's warnings have been borne out for all broken families, whether white or black. Political correctness and sexual revolution aside, the female heads of broken families are seriously disadvantaged. So too are their children not just in their childhood but later in adulthood as well.

America's shame is that it has agreed on what constitutes an unacceptable rate of inflation, rate of unemployment, and rate of growth in GDP, but not on what makes for an unacceptable rate of poverty. How much higher does the poverty rate have to climb above the current 65 percent for all female-headed families with two or more children under age six before we declare it unacceptable?

Edward J. O'Boyle is Senior Research Associate with Mayo Research Institute located in West Monroe, Louisiana. Since he completed his doctorate in economics from Saint Louis University more than 30 years ago, Dr. O'Boyle has been specializing in economic research and analysis increasingly from the perspective of the human person engaged in everyday activities both as a unique individual and as a community member. In January 2004 the Association for Social Economics conferred on Dr. O'Boyle its prestigious Thomas Divine Award for lifetime contributions to social economics and the social economy.
