

Children of Color Count as Much as Caylee

Recently, a criminal jury acquitted Casey Anthony of murdering her 2-year old daughter Caylee while convicting her of the lesser charge of lying to police investigators. Anthony has been released from jail amidst an avalanche of animosity by observers of the case. Whether Casey Anthony was guilty of murdering her little girl has been the subject of a national discussion. Over the past year, the case of Casey and little Caylee has dominated news coverage on many television networks, most notably CNN.

Caylee's case begs broader questions: Why do little white girls garner so much more media coverage after going missing than little Black girls? Why does the nation know the names of Jon Benet Ramsey and not, let's say, Diamond Bradley or Yasmine Acree?

BLACK LEADERSHIP

Gary L. Flowers

In a report by Kathy Chaney, writer for the Chicago Defender, the circumstances of four Black girls in Chicago received little, if any media coverage—local or national.

More disturbing was a Scripps Howard report that examined missing child statistics from 2000 to 2004 reported by Thomas Hargrove and Ansley Haman, in *The Capitol Hill Blue*. According to the authors, "For a missing child to attract widespread publicity and improve the child's odds of being found, it helps if a child is White, wealthy, and under 12 years old." Statistics within the

study found:

- White children are only 50 percent of United States missing children, but 2/3 of Associated Press dispatches
- Missing Children under 12 years old are only 1/6 of all cases in America by 2/3 of national news stories
- White children account for 67 percent of Associated Press

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reports, and 76 percent of CNN reports, but only 53 percent of the 37,000 cases reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

Defenders of the disproportionate reporting statistics cite state laws that differ around how evidence in children's welfare issues can be released to the public. Such arguments are refuted by the fact that once children are known to be missing White children are disproportionately featured by national media campaigns. If there were more equity

in national media reporting missing children of any color perhaps the "Amber Law" may have had a name such as Aisha or Asha.

In the case of Caylee Anthony, CNN "Nancy Grace" has nearly focused solely on the case of Casey Anthony since the 2008 murder of the 2-year old. At one point, a one-hour feature was solely devoted to the case.

As a result of the Casey Anthony

case in Florida, "Caylee's Law" has been proposed to: 1) make it a felony for parents/caregivers to not report the death of a child to authorities within an hour, whether or not the death was accidental; and 2) make it a felony for guardians to not notify police of the disappearance of a child within 24 hours.

While "Caylee's Law" will help law enforcement in Florida—and potentially around the nation—the disproportionate level of care to the disappearances and deaths of children of color as opposed to White children cannot be legislated.

We as a nation must value life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for ALL people, regardless of pigment.

Gary L. Flowers is the Executive Director & CEO of the Black Leadership Forum, Inc.

Child Watch: The State of America's Children Report

The Children's Defense Fund has just released a new report, *The State of America's Children 2011*, which paints a disturbing portrait of child needs across our country. With rampant unemployment, housing foreclosures, homelessness, hunger, and massive looming federal and state budget cuts, children's well-being is in great jeopardy. One in five children is poor and children are our nation's poorest age group. Child poverty increased almost 10 percent between 2008 and 2009, the largest single year increase since data were first collected. Fifteen and a half million children are adrift in a sea of poverty, and every 32 seconds another child is born poor. As our country struggles to climb out of the recession millions of our children are falling further behind.

Although there are more poor White than poor Black or Latino children, worsening income inequality and continuing racial disparities have an extra harsh combined impact on poor children of color. Many are pushed off the



CHILD WATCH

Marian Wright Edelman

ing that children, who have no belts to tighten, sacrifice their food and Head Start and other survival needs while asking nothing in sacrifice from powerful billionaires and corporations. Policies, programs, and essential services that we know help children survive and thrive—Medicaid and CHIP (the Children's Health Insurance Program), the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant, WIC (the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children), SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or Food Stamps), Early Head Start and Head Start, the Child Care and Development Block Grant, the Title I Education Program designed to help disadvantaged children, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act programs, Pell Grants, the Social Services Block Grant, and others—are all threatened with federal cuts and/or program changes that will further unravel the already porous safety net provided for poor children.

These looming federal cuts will compound cascading cuts in state and local funding for urgently needed early childhood development, K-12 education, higher education, mental health and other specialized treatment, and services for children in foster care and the juvenile justice system. Family stress has increased while family stability has deteriorated, with lost jobs, reduced unemployment compensation, restricted assistance and public health programs, and more scarce affordable

housing.

We know that poverty impairs children's emotional, intellectual, and physical development and ends up costing our nation billions of dollars in lost productivity and increased health care costs. We know how to give children a healthy start, rescue them from the wolf of hunger, and keep them well-nourished. We know how to give children a head start to help them get ready for and be better able to achieve in school. We know how to provide children a

quality education. Yet how pound foolish to cut early childhood programs, school days, recess, and teachers they need to succeed. We know how to prevent child abuse and neglect, find permanent families for children in foster care, and keep children out of our costly and ineffective juvenile justice system. How foolish to cut the investments that could keep children out of trouble and of jail. To paraphrase what our mothers and grandmothers taught us, if you know better, you should do

better. What is it going to take to get our leaders to get it?

Our vulnerable children must not be sacrificial lambs on the altar of adult politics.

Marian Wright Edelman is a lifelong advocate for disadvantaged Americans and is the President of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF).

Read the rest online at www.theskanner.com



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path of healthy development and into the Cradle to Prison Pipeline. Poor children are more likely to live in fragile families, lag in early childhood development, suffer abuse and neglect, be uninsured and in poor health, be denied a quality education, and experience other gaps that put them far behind non-poor peers. Millions of Black children are facing one of the worst crises since slavery, and in many areas, Hispanic and American Indian children are not far behind.

In the face of these deeply disturbing and growing child needs, some of our political leaders are heedlessly and heartlessly propos-

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Seattle Library's 'Your Next Five Books' ... *in Northwest News*

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Entertainment

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