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Why Two-Parent Homes Are Still Better

No, the benefits of in-tact families are not "a myth," as argued by some on the Left.

Lewis Morris · Jan. 14, 2020

A family built around two parents has many advantages. Two-parent families are statistically less likely to be poor. They are also less likely to suffer addictions or engage in criminal behavior. Children who grow up in homes where both mom and dad live under one roof have a greater chance to live successful, well-adjusted lives and create stable familial relationships for themselves.

This is not to say that children who grow up in one-parent homes are doomed to miserable lives, but it's hard to deny that the opportunity for a better life takes a lot more work. One-parent households are predominantly lower income, less educated, and more susceptible to crime and drug problems.

Sociologists, economists, and politicians have struggled for years to find ways to alleviate the inequities dealt to one-parent households. Potential solutions abound, but those suggested by Dr. Christina Cross, a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard University, ignore the core issue and risk making matters worse.

In a shockingly obtuse New York Times op-ed last month, Cross claimed that for black Americans the problem is not a lack of two parents under one roof, but, rather, it's a lack of access to resources compared to white one-parent families. In other words, more taxpayer money will fix it.

Cross points out that black one-parent households have a tougher time than white one-parent households when it comes to getting and maintaining jobs, obtaining a good education, owning property, and so forth. She then makes the cognitive leap that access to resources alone is the problem for one-parent black families because one-parent white families perform statistically better in these areas. The power of a two-parent household among blacks is "a myth" according to Cross. Rather than stepping back and looking at the larger issues that face all one-parent families, Cross chooses to make a racial divide and drive home the tired leftist narrative about a racist system that has it in for black families.

Perhaps one-parent white families do perform statistically better than one-parent black families across all of Cross's data points, but what difference does that make? White or black, they are still more likely to be poor, less educated, and more susceptible to a tougher life.

Ian Rowe, senior visiting fellow at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, takes Cross to task for her misguided analysis. Rowe points to data from the National Center for Education Statistics that shows the proportion of black children living in poverty decreases from 45% for mother-only households and 36% for father-only households to 12% for two-parent households.

Rowe also questions how Cross narrowly cites evidence to play down the importance of two-parent households for blacks while ignoring the broader issue of family structure for children of all races. Why does the problem have to be confined to one race? Non-marital births among white women under 24 numbered 238,000 in 2018, far higher than any other racial cohort.

Cross is right to be concerned about the issue of single-parent families, but by choosing to make a racial argument, she makes it that much more difficult to implement the real solution: A more stable family structure benefitting all children, no matter their skin color.