
FOCUS

The monthly magazine of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies

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Scare-grams and Political Discourse

Serious politicking has begun so early this year that one hardly knows how to sort out (or throw out) the campaign appeals that cross our desks and invade our homes. Many of them are what I call “scare-grams”— they don’t seek to enlighten, they seek to terrorize. They are “chicken little” all over again.

In early May I was surprised by one of these scare-grams in my personal mail. It was from the erstwhile New York Senate candidate Rudolph Giuliani, whose views as New York City mayor I have seldom agreed with. The Giuliani appeal asked me to financially support his attacks on Hillary Rodham Clinton. Hello: I think we’ve got a crazy quilt picture here. His letter is worth a commentary because it represents a new era if not a new low in American political campaigning.

The Giuliani appeal read, in part: “The left-wing establishment is backing Hillary to the hilt because they know that once she’s in the U.S. Senate, she will join forces with ... left-wing allies to push for the most extreme-left agenda we’ve seen in years, including: government-run health care; another Washington power-grab for federal control of education; and higher taxes to pay for ever-expanding big-government social programs.” Give me a break!


As an appeal from Giuliani, the letter is a zero on my political contributions index, but it is a fascinating example of how political consultants are shaping (and misshaping) the debate on important issues in this election year. This letter was no doubt drafted by hired consultants and sent to my middle-class D.C. zip code. Though entertaining in spots, it was crafted to frighten people in middle class neighborhoods. It uses fear phrases like “left-wing establishment” and “big-government social programs.”

Although the letter was “personalized” with “Dear Eddie” (I’ve never met Hizzoner), the consultants who drafted it obviously know nothing about me. They certainly did not know that I believe that the “left-wing allies” it rails against have been, more often than not, allies of less fortunate Americans and people of color. This leads me to wonder whether the political pros who were in Giuliani’s employ assumed that people in middle class neighborhoods are not concerned about social justice or the plight of the poor. The letter is so far off the mark it should have been addressed to “Resident,” rather than “Dear Eddie.” I’m not so naive as to expect much more from the average campaign pitch letter, but I am disappointed that too much political discourse these days not only sounds like a pitch letter aimed at “resident” but fails to seek serious communication with a real live human being.

More and more of the content of campaign speeches and position papers is generated by pollsters and media experts who feel they can pull the wool over our eyes regarding substantive issues during electoral campaigns that rely so much on polling, focus groups, direct mail strategies, fundraising, opposition research, and TV ads. To say that

they are amoral may be a bit harsh, but we know they generally hire themselves out to anyone in both parties who can afford their often hefty fees. This is not incidental to the ballooning costs of running for office.

While many of these political pros can offer advice to candidates on how to project well on television, few are prepared to offer wise counsel on how to improve public education, extend health care to more working families, or stimulate the production of more affordable housing. Sadly, once candidates are elected, many of these same consultants stay on as staff advisors and exert a great deal of influence on public policy issues at every level of government. Chicken little may be worth listening to after all. ■



PRESIDENT



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Hoop Dreams Make College a Reality

A Washington, DC-Based Scholarship Program Prepares Black Inner City Youth for Academic and Professional Success

by David C. Ruffin

Arthur Agee, tall and handsome with an infectious smile, passed the ball to a teammate in the corner and cut to the basket trying to shake a defender. It was a “Hoop Dreams” moment, but I’m not referring to the award-winning 1994 documentary that featured Agee and William Gates, two black Chicago youth aspiring to careers in the NBA. This was June 2000, and Agee was a celebrity guest, playing in the annual Hoop Dreams Scholarship Fund 3-on-3 basketball tournament fundraiser in Washington, DC.

Agee, who didn’t get the call to play in the NBA, provided the inspiration for a scholarship program that helps hundreds of black public high school students realize their dreams of attending college as academic achievers, rather than as basketball stars. That inspiration came to Susie Kay, someone very different from Agee. White and diminutive, Kay is an American government teacher in the Academy of Business and Finance at H.D. Woodson High School. Woodson is a 100 percent black public school located East of Washington’s other river, the Anacostia, in one of the city’s most economically depressed neighborhoods. Kay saw the documentary in 1996 and decided to organize a scholarship fundraiser and call it Hoop Dreams. The name stuck. Kay says, “I was motivated to start Hoop Dreams when I saw many of our outstanding students being denied the opportunity to pursue their dream of a college education because of a lack of financial resources.”

The first year the tournament raised \$4,000 and awarded four \$1,000 scholarships. But it was the start of something big. Hoop Dreams has expanded each successive year. This year, \$500,000 was raised for scholarships to assist 105 students in the class of 2000. Ninety graduating seniors from H.D. Woodson, nearly two-thirds of the class, received a total of \$325,000 in scholarships. Fifteen students from 12 other Washington public schools received \$1,000 grants. Renewal scholarships from a pool of \$160,000 were granted to returning college upperclassmen. Since its inception in 1996, \$1,000,000 in scholarships worth as much as \$10,000 each have been awarded to Hoop Dreams scholars.

But Hoop Dreams does much more than provide financial aid. Its broader goals are to help academic achievers in inner-city schools overcome multiple barriers to gaining admission to college and staying there. Excelling in school is only one of the challenges before these young people. Most have grown up in low-income, single-parent households and live in neighborhoods plagued by crime and drugs. Some carry the internal scars of the abuse they

suffered as young children. Perhaps the most insidious impediment to their academic success is the negative pressure from some of their peers who do not regard high personal aspirations and good grades as “cool.”

Hoop Dreams now offers year-long mentoring programs and internships that help prepare young people for success in college and professional careers after graduation. In addition, through a donation from the Princeton Review, the program provides the six-week Princeton Review Course to juniors and seniors. Low Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores have been a major barrier to college admission for many African Americans. With the help of the review course, the SAT scores of Hoop Dreams students have improved by 35 to 200 points, with an average increase of 100 points.

Coach, Cheerleader, and Friend

Hoop Dreams is volunteer-driven and mentors who donate their time are at the heart of the college and career prep program. Students are paired with Washington professionals to give them one-on-one exposure to successful people in a wide range of fields. Part coach, part cheerleader, and full-time friend, mentors provide important advice on adjusting to college life, studying, and avoiding pitfalls. This is all very important because many of the students come from families in which no one has attended college.

More than advisors, mentors develop strong friendships with the students and take them to their places of work, sporting events, museums, plays, and tours of college campuses. As much as anything, mentors show students what is possible after college. Being an attorney, accountant, congressional aide, sports marketing specialist, TV news anchor, or investment broker becomes within their realms of possible occupations. Through it all, there is the informal sharing of life experiences, with mentors serving as a sounding board and as another adult to turn to for guidance and support.

Internships supplement the mentoring element of Hoop Dreams. This school year, 40 students were placed in paid, after-school jobs with “A” list companies and government agencies. Students not only get the opportunity to earn money for college, but they learn valuable interpersonal and work-place skills in a professional setting. At each placement, adult volunteer counselors take the students under their wings to ensure a successful internship. But the educational process goes both ways. Mentors and internship

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Hoop Dreams

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supervisors, many of whom are white, broaden their perspectives through their relationships with the students.

Another component of the mentoring program features seminars given by a diverse group of business leaders. These sessions have been presented by Abe Pollin, CEO of Washington Sports and Entertainment; Garry Crowder, Director of Global Marketing at The Tiger Fund, the world's largest hedge fund; and Lockheed Martin vice president Donella Brockington. Reggie Aggarwal, the 30-year-old CEO and founder of Cvent.com and President of the Indian CEO High Tech Council, shared with the students his eight rules for success. One session included executives from three major high tech companies: Sanju K. Bansal, co-founder and COO of MicroStrategy, David Holtzman, then Chief Technical Officer of Network Solutions Incorporated, and Michael Scott, CEO of UrbanLink.

Commitment, Persistence, and Energy

At the center of Hoop Dreams is its founder, Susie Kay, the daughter of a naval captain, who early on became involved with programs that help low-income black youth. As an undergraduate at American University, she was a leader in the Big Buddies program that paired AU students with young people from Washington's Anacostia neighborhood. After graduation, she worked for the Close Up Foundation that brings high school students to Washington from across the nation. But she noticed that few of the Close Up students were from low-income communities. While at Close Up, Kay considered joining the Teach for America program, but then she thought, why teach in an under-resourced urban school somewhere else when there were schools right in Washington that needed teachers? So she decided to take a job teaching at H.D. Woodson for one year. That was ten years ago.

One of the main reasons Hoop Dreams is so successful is Kay's commitment, persistence, and energy in her recruitment of volunteers, solicitation of internship slots, and financial contributions from Washington area corporations. Among Hoop Dreams supporters are founding sponsor George Newstrom, senior vice president of EDS and lead sponsors Pat McGettigan, founder and chairman of Landmark Systems and Jon Leddecky, a co-owner of the Washington Capitals Hockey team. Leddecky combined with his partners Ted Leonsis and Raul Fernandez to contribute \$100,000 this year. Other major donors include US Airways, NBC4 (Washington's NBC affiliate), Sallie Mae, The Phillip Graham Foundation, the Hecht Department Store chain, Coca-Cola, KPMG, Black Entertainment Television, Inc., and Phyllis McClure. Many financial donors also contribute internships.

Kay doesn't just go after the money. She will go to practically any lengths to recruit mentors for her program. That's how this writer got involved. Last January, I was walking through the lobby of the Capital Hilton Hotel and saw a gathering of young people and adults at a registration table for "Hoop Dreams." I stopped to see what it was all

about, and Kay introduced herself, gave me the short version of the program's goals, and somehow extracted a promise from me to come back to learn more. I did return and was paired up with Jabaar Majors, a soft-spoken 17-year-old Woodson senior, who was a Hoop Dreams intern at the Arlington, Virginia, brokerage firm of Friedman, Billings, Ramsey & Co., a job that has inspired him to pursue a career as an investment portfolio manager after he earns an MBA.

Jabaar was applying for scholarships from the Jaycees and the Jackie Robinson Foundation. As an editor, I suggested that we work on application essays. In helping Jabaar identify the reasons he deserved a scholarship, I learned that he had won awards for his academic performance. But what really convinced me to take an interest in Jabaar was that he sold his video game system to concentrate more on his school work. I felt that any young person willing to make that kind of commitment was worth my time. We worked up a first draft of his essay and spent the time after the formal session getting to know each other. By the end of the afternoon, the conversation moved to a nearby bookstore, where I loaded Jabaar up with some books I felt he needed to read and a video of the "Jackie Robinson Story."

We agreed to meet at the Air and Space Museum the following Sunday to review his second essay draft. This was followed by a tour of the museum, which he hadn't visited since he was very young. After we went over the third draft in my office, I took the occasion to show him what I do for a living. I went over the steps of editing a policy magazine and even threw in a dime tour of the Joint Center. It hasn't all been imparting wisdom and advice. Some of the time we just hang out. We watched the Wizards' basketball team in some of their lesser moments, and Jabaar joined me and my nephew to see the movie "Shaft." And you can bet we'll stay in close touch when he starts as a freshman at Norfolk State University in the fall.

With Hoop Dreams' celebrated success comes the natural pressure to extend the program to help more of Washington's needy and deserving students. Nothing would delight Susie Kay more. But she is also wary of compromising the individual attention that each student who participates in the program now receives. Kay has taught or personally knows each of the more than 300 students who have been awarded scholarships over the last five years. If other schools become full Hoop Dreams partners, organizational changes will be required. Some changes have already taken place. Until recently, the program operated exclusively on a volunteer basis, and Kay, its unsalaried executive director, was able to directly oversee each element of the operation. But owing to its dramatic expansion over the last 18 months, Hoop Dreams has hired three paid staffers. To further accommodate its growth, the program will probably need to become more structured and compartmentalized. These are issues that Kay and her chief sponsors and volunteers will wrestle with over the summer while they prepare for the Hoop Dreams class of 2001. In the meantime, members of the Hoop Dreams class of 2000 are attending college freshman orientation weekends and preparing to matriculate in the fall as they take the next step toward making their dreams come true. ■

Black Enterprise 100: Growth and Diversity

The Nation's Largest Black Companies Experienced Expanded Revenues and Are Represented Among Many Sectors of the Economy

by Frank McCoy

Business past is not necessarily corporate future. But understanding how earlier entrepreneurs fared can help contemporary CEOs set their courses. With that in mind, *FOCUS* deconstructs the most recent *Black Enterprise* magazine Industrial/Service 100 list. The list appears in this year's June issue of the publication. For each company, the list provides the name of its chief executive, the year it was started, the number of employees, the type of business, the dollar amount of the company's 1999 sales, and its rank on the list. To see how black business has changed, we decided to go behind the numbers and review the BE 100 lists published in June 1990 and June 1980, which offer comparable information for 1989 and 1979.

Why this approach and those years? One, they provide a 20-year perspective on entrepreneurial movements, even if each list is only a snapshot. Two, no business operates in a vacuum. Today's achievements are part of an African American entrepreneurial continuum. It stretches from unknown 17th century artisans, both slave and free, who sold their skills or wares, to the 18th century boat builder Paul Cuffee, to Frederick Douglass, abolitionist and founder of the *North Star* newspaper in 1847, to the fashionable splendor created by the hair care products of Madame C. J. Walker, the first black woman to become a millionaire during the opening of the 20th century, to Reginald F. Lewis' triumph as America's first black owner of a billion-dollar business a decade ago.

Entrepreneurs in all eras of our history must be examined in the context of their own times. They create businesses based upon current laws and trend with the capital, skills, and materials available. In 1999, as the U.S. economy reveled in its eighth straight year of soaring stocks, low unemployment, nearly flat inflation, and high consumer confidence, the revenues of the leading black entrepreneurs reached new heights. Last year, the total revenues for the Black Enterprise Industrial/Service 100 list grew 13.5 percent, from \$7.7 billion in 1998 to \$8.8 billion in 1999. The number of workers the 100 firms employed also grew 13.4 percent to reach a total of 67, 647.

The top black companies have been represented among a variety of business sectors, including publishing, entertainment, food and non-alcoholic beverages, beer/alcohol, construction, hair care, oil/petroleum-related, manufacturing, broadcasting, transportation, computer sales, and information technology. Over the last 20 years, the roster of top black companies has been headed by firms from different sectors. At the end of 1979, entertainment legend Motown Industries led the BE 100 with revenues of \$65

million. Number 100 that year, Bob Harrison Ford-Mercury, grossed \$5.2 million. Motown and its 1989 list-topping successor, The Gordy Co., are both gone today. But they've been supplanted by the impressive multimedia enterprises of Rush Communications (No. 15 on the BE Industrial/Service 100 list this year) with \$150 million in revenues and New Orleans rapper Master P. (a.k.a. Percy Miller). The latter's No Limit Enterprises, a newcomer to the BE 100 list at number 25, grossed \$110 million last year.

Ten years ago, the global food distributor TLC Beatrice International Holdings Inc., was top earner with a historic \$1.5 billion in revenues. United Ready Mix, a concrete maker, held 100th place in 1990 with \$7.3 million. This year's number-one firm, World Wide Technology, had 1999 revenues of \$413 million, 535 percent higher than the revenues of Motown in 1979, while \$25 million RPM Supply Co. Inc, a Philadelphia electrical supply firm, held 100th place on the new BE 100 list.

High Flyers

The ascension of World Wide Technology, Inc., was singular. In 2000, as the world's markets continued to be roiled by the impact of the Internet and high-tech firms, it is fitting that WWT, a Missouri distributor of information technology products, became the first high-tech company to lead the BE 100. It is also fitting that two high-tech firms are among the rookies on the list, marked by the dramatic entry of brothers Steven Roberts and Michael V. Roberts. Although they work together, Michael is the CEO of two firms on the BE list. Roberts Wireless Communication (No. 94) with revenues of \$28 million, is the first African American-owned Sprint PCS affiliate. The brothers' other company, Roberts Broadcasting Co. (No. 83), is a television broadcaster which had revenues of \$32 million.

Black CEOs are positioning their companies for 21st century success through a deft combination of strategic planning, expansion, and debt repayment. World Wide Technology, Inc., was among several firms that made huge leaps in revenues that provided solid platforms for future growth. Its list-rocking jump, due to revenues rising 105 percent to \$413 million in 1999 from \$201 million the previous year, wasn't the biggest advance on a dollar basis. That honor went to Washington Cable Supply Inc., a Lanham, Maryland, electrical and telecommunications equipment distributor (No. 7), that grew 185 percent, from \$74 million in 1998 to \$212 million last year.

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Other high flyers included Capsonic Automotive Inc. (No. 39), which designs and makes molded parts in Elgin, Illinois. It drove revenues up 133 percent to \$70 million in 1999. As CEO of Automotive Carrier Services (No. 24), which transports new trucks and cars, Louisville, Kentucky, entrepreneur Alice Houston thinks the strong economy is likely to favor her \$112 million firm at least for the next six months.

Diversity and Adversity

Staying on the BE list wasn't easy. Every year, firms depart the list for reasons ranging from poor sales to bankruptcy. And this year, just to make the list, a company had to have revenues of at least \$25 million. Black companies in the construction and petroleum sectors were hurt by adverse circumstances related to public policy and global economics. The number of black-owned construction firms grew from eight in 1979 to 13 in 1989. But as a result of the 1989 Supreme Court ruling in the *City of Richmond v J.A. Croson Co.* case, many state and municipal minority business set-aside programs were deemed to be unconstitutional. So, last year only six construction firms made the list. In 1979, there were 11 petroleum suppliers, distributors, and importers. But because of dramatic fluctuations in oil prices over the last 20 years, only United Energy Inc. made the list this year.

Two historic companies were sold and another suffered financial implosion. The BE 100's oldest firm, food processor company C. H. James & Son (Holdings) Inc., which was founded in West Virginia in 1883, was sold to Taylor Farms Inc. And in Dallas, 29-year-old Pro-Line Corporation, a cosmetic and hair-care product manufacturer, was purchased by Alberto Culver. Detroit's Thomas Madison Inc., an auto industry steel fabricator, declared chapter 11 bankruptcy in 1999. Last year, however, saw the return of Dick Griffey Productions/ADPIC after an absence. The Sherman Oaks, California, firm grossed \$61 million in 1999 from a blend of music publishing and mineral brokering.

Growing consistency was also observed. In 1980, discounting the automobile dealerships on the list, there were 56 industrial/service companies spread among the broad sectors of publishing, entertainment, food and non-alcoholic beverages, beer/alcohol, construction, hair care, oil/petroleum-related, manufacturing, broadcasting, transportation, computer sales, and information technology. Ten years later, 73 firms comprised those sectors, and at the end of 1999, 86 companies made up the group. This consolidation reflects the growing maturity of African Americans' elite businesses.

In 1979, there are 268 industrial/service companies on the three lists; the other 32 were automobile dealerships. But turnover was fierce during the 20 years, and only nine firms appear on all three lists. Five of those companies make their money the old-fashioned way—in the black community. These include Johnson Publishing Co. Inc., Essence Communications Inc., and Earl G. Graves, Ltd. (the publisher of *Black Enterprise*) which produce publications that inform

African American audiences. Since then, however, the big three have ruled publishing without serious black-owned rivals. The two other black customer-based firms among the nine were Inner City Broadcasting Corp., which owns a New York City radio station with a mostly black audience, and Super Pride Markets, formerly Community Foods Inc., which serves a black customer base in Baltimore.

Three among the other survivors provide goods and services to a multiracial and multiethnic clientele. They are H.J. Russell Construction Co., Inc., and Gourmet Services, Inc., both based in Atlanta, and Beauchamp Distributing Co., based in Compton, California. Gourmet Services and Beauchamp Distributing are food and beverages companies. The Michigan-based Bartech Group, Inc., has succeeded by selling a variety of services and products to the auto industry.

Other firms on the list demonstrated the diversity of the black business community. The high-volume, competitive food and non-alcoholic beverages sector has grown from nine companies in 1979 to 15 last year, including supermarkets, manufacturers, caterers, and distributors. Nine firms were among manufacturers that are not suppliers of the big three automakers. While computer sales have exploded nationwide since the mid-1980s, just four firms in this category have appeared on the BE 100 list in the last 20 years. The standout among them is Sayers Computer Source (No. 14), owned by former NFL star running back Gale Sayers. The company earned revenues of \$161 million last year. And Washington area communications firms BET Holdings II, Inc., (No. 6) and publicly traded Radio One, Inc., (No. 29) have grown into powerful media giants.

These highlights show that the sweep of change on the BE 100 Industrial/Service list has been dramatic, and that black business has gone from analog to digital, from primarily black-oriented to increasingly general market, and from lone entrepreneur with an idea to M.B.A. with a plan. But the ascension is not surprising, and it is only a harbinger of future strides. Optimism springs from the ever-larger—but never large enough—numbers of black men and women who graduate from business schools and thousands of others who are deciding annually to take what they learned in corporate America to the boardrooms of their own firms. And it's one more indicator that in the 21st century, the real black power will be economic. ■

Minority Business RoundTable

The accompanying article is a reminder, if any were needed, that black business ownership has long since evolved from so many "mom and pop" enterprises. With greater size comes the potential for greater clout. In order to help give minority-owned businesses of all kinds better leverage over public policy making, the Joint Center, with a grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce and support from AT&T, established the Minority Business RoundTable. Membership in the MBRT is limited to 200 of the largest African American, Asian American, Hispanic American, and Native American, businesses based on revenues. With the Joint Center continuing to serve as a resource to the MBRT, the new organization will function as a focal point for minority CEOs to collaborate in analyzing and formulating more effective public policies. For more information, contact MBRT Executive Director Roger A. Campos at 202-789-3534.

Disarming Moms March

The Million Mom March Drew 750,000 Who Demanded Uniform National Common Sense Gun Control and Safety Laws

by David C. Ruffin

In the March 1999 issue of FOCUS, we ran a piece entitled “The Gun Wars” in our Political Report. The article reported that five major American cities had sued gun manufacturers for hundreds of millions of dollars to recover some of the huge costs in public safety, health care, and emergency services resulting from gun violence. The article stated that in 1998 there were 36,000 firearm-related deaths in America, according to the National Center for Health Statistics. The cities that filed the lawsuits were Atlanta, New Orleans, Miami, Chicago, and Bridgeport (Connecticut).

The lawsuits generally charged gun manufacturers with producing products that are inherently dangerous while failing to fit them with safety features. The cities also claimed that the marketing strategies of the manufacturers make guns readily accessible and are designed to undermine gun control measures. We update our “Gun Wars” article with this piece on the Million Mom March on Washington held in May, which demanded broader gun control and safety measures.

Standing on a grassy spot on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., the mother of Gifford Riess asked a man standing near her at the Million Mom March on May 14 if he was tall enough to pin her daughter’s picture on a high bare space on the accordion-like Tapestry of Hope. The Tapestry consisted of several eight-foot-high foam panels, each about five feet wide. Handing him the picture with one hand and holding an ornate lavender parasol in the other, Gifford’s mother watched as the helpful stranger stretched to pin the photo in place. She was a member of the New Orleans contingent of the March. Her daughter Gifford, the attractive policewoman framed in her photo, couldn’t make the event because she had been killed the previous year. But Gifford’s picture shows a face full of life and hope. The bill of her officer’s cap shines from out of the photo like her smile, tinged with pride. When asked how she died, her mother said Gifford’s boyfriend shot her with her own service weapon. She was 24.

Gifford’s was but one of countless photos, handwritten messages, funeral programs, T-shirts, stuffed animals, and other mementos left at the Tapestry as testaments of love for those lost to gun violence. Some of the items were simple, like the green scrap of paper with this statement written across it: “Arion Mathews you are not forgotten.” It was pinned to the Tapestry by a burly, gray-haired Hispanic man. A T-shirt had the picture of Derrick Wynn on it and these words: “Howard University class of 1996,” and “I miss

you—love Mom.” Derrick didn’t live to see his graduation; he was shot on November 9, 1995. There was a photo of David Joseph Curran, age six, shot by his father, also pictured, in a murder-suicide. The shooting occurred on the same day David’s father bought the gun he used, lying about his history of mental illness during the purchase. The family of Rickia Isaac came up from Liberty City, Florida, to leave her picture. She’s smiling and dressed for Sunday. In 1997, some time after the picture was taken, Rickia was killed by a stray bullet. She was five.

These are the kinds of tragedies that the estimated 750,000 people who assembled at the March hope to prevent in the future. Addressing the thousands of mothers, fathers, grandparents, and children who came to Washington from all over the country was an impressive array of politicians, celebrities, and those who have lost family members and friends. The speakers included Marian Wright Edelman, president of the Children’s Defense Fund; Mary Ann Viverette, chief of the Gaithersburg, Maryland, Police Department; Dr. Michele Ervin, a Howard University emergency room physician; Sarah and Jim Brady of Handgun Control, Inc.; Patty Neilson, a Columbine High School teacher; and several entertainers, including Suzanne Douglas, Bette Midler, Susan Sarandon, and Emmylou Harris. Also on the stage were members of Congress Constance Morella (R-Md.) and Bobby Rush (D-Ill.) and Maryland Lieutenant Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend and her sister, Kerry Kennedy Cuomo, the founder of the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Human Rights, named after their father, who was shot to death by an assassin in 1968. Actress, comedian, and talk-show host Rosie O’Donnell was the mistress of ceremonies. Similar local marches and rallies were organized in dozens of communities across the nation.

The goals of the March did not include banning guns, but focused on vigorous enforcement of existing gun control laws, urging Congress to enact new statutes requiring all gun owners to be licensed and registered, and mandating that manufacturers equip guns with safety features such as safety locks, loaded-chamber indicators, and other child-proofing devices. The marchers demanded that prospective gun owners be required to wait for a sensible “cooling off” period (one common proposal is three days) and undergo a background check before buying a gun, and that handgun purchases be limited to one per month. Pro-gun legislators, with the backing of the National Rifle Association, have been able to block a less inclusive gun control measure from being enacted during this Congress.

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Moms March

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Back at the Tapestry of Hope, the mother of Daniel Curtis Green, Jr., saw me taking names and tugged at my elbow. She pointed to the black and white Prayer Temple Baptist Church funeral program with a picture of her son on the front—a young black man in an Army uniform who was killed in 1996. She didn't ask who I was or whom I was writing for. She just wanted her son's life and his death to be acknowledged, if only by a stranger. But there were no strangers at the Tapestry. Everyone who gathered there seemed to connect with one another in a shared sense of loss and grief.

Many silent reminders pinned to the Tapestry illustrated that the victims aren't only those whose lives were shortened by guns, but also the shattered families and friends left behind. One of those left behind was Tionna Vines, an 11-year-old black girl who knelt by a pink sign that said, "I miss you Daddy." She lost her father in 1991 when she was one. A not-so-fashionable blue and brown paisley print tie had a small photo of a middle-aged, bespectacled white man sitting on his porch reading a newspaper. Pinned to the tie was a simple: "I love my Dad."

The shooting death of David Schulz, a 13-year-old math and science whiz with an IQ of 140, was another devastating family tragedy. A picture of David shows him wearing the blue uniform of the Leonard Hall Junior Naval Academy. Beneath the picture was a letter from his parents, Ritchie and Sarah, written in the present tense as though he were only away on a long trip and they were catching him up on family news. Part of

the letter read: "As you know, when you died your sister was fighting a battle with cancer. At that time, we thought a child with cancer was the worst possible thing that could happen to our family. December 10, 1993, proved me to be so very wrong." They went on to say that his sister won her battle over cancer and now has a 4.0 grade point average at Cazenovia College in Pennsylvania and recently competed at the Intercollegiate Horse Show Association National in Atlanta. They close with this: "You live in our hearts every day," and lament "the beautiful 20-year-old man you would have turned out to be." There was no mention of David's brother, who, at age 16, accidentally shot and killed David with a neighbor's unlicensed Mac 11 assault pistol.

There were many reminders of what firearms do to communities. A professionally printed color poster was pinned to the Tapestry with 13 pictures of Latinos of various ages. The youngest was Jessica Cortez, 9, with a toothy smile and lacy pink dress. A caption read: "Since 1990 more than 50 families have lost members to gun violence" in Santa Cruz County.

Rep. Morella (R-Md.) warned that remembering the thousands who are killed by guns every year will come to nothing if the marchers' efforts go no farther than the March itself. She exhorted them to lobby their members of Congress to gain passage of strong gun control legislation. But as one marcher said, "We can't let what we do in May be the end of it. We have to remember in November, and come election time, we have to vote for those who support our goals and against those who oppose what we're trying to do. We won't really succeed until we make some changes in Congress, in state legislatures, and in governors' mansions." ■

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TRENDLETTER

POLITICAL REPORT

As this updated Joint Center Fact Sheet shows, black and Hispanic children are still disproportionately represented among the nation's poor.

Children Living in Poverty

- Between 1979 and 1998, the number of children under age 18 living in poverty increased from 10.3 million to 13.5 million.
- In 1998, 18.9 percent of the children in the United States lived in poverty, that is, in families with incomes below the federal poverty line (in 1998 it was \$16,600 for a family of four). African American and Hispanic children were more than twice as likely (about 35%) to be as poor as white children (15.1%).

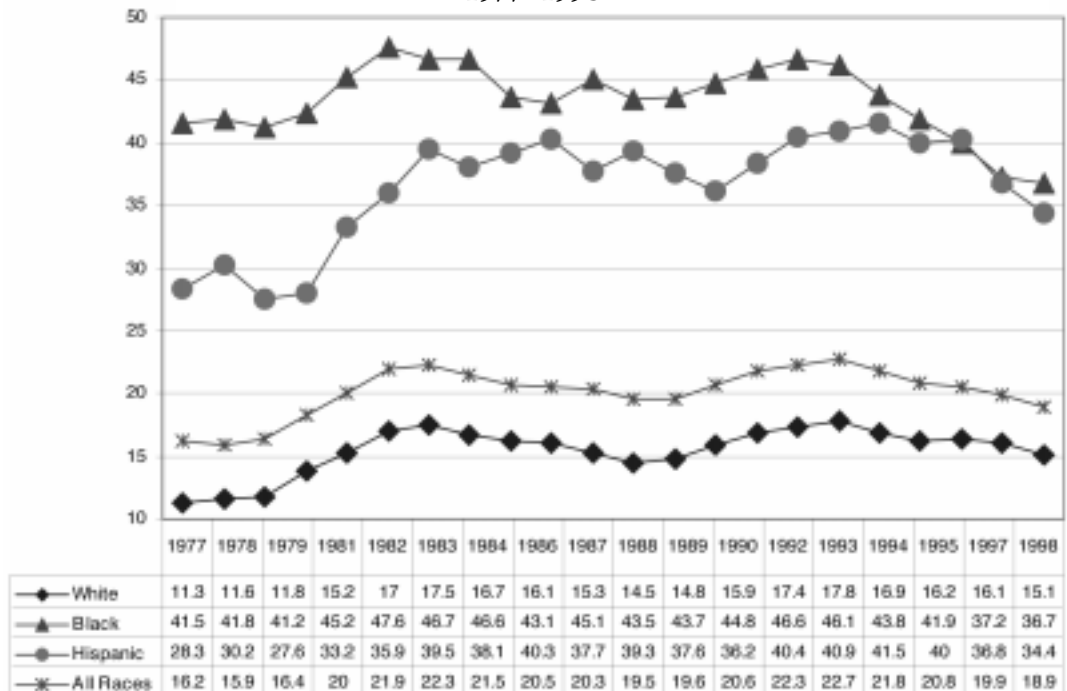
- For black children, the poverty rate was lower in 1998 (36.7%) than in 1977 (41.5%). In contrast, during this 20-year period, the poverty rates rose for Hispanics from 28.3 percent to 34.4 percent, for non-Hispanic whites from 9.9 percent to 10.6 percent, and for all children as a whole from 16.2 percent to 18.9 percent.
- Poverty rates rose for children in most racial and ethnic groups from 1977 until about 1982–83, and then declined for much of the 1980s. Poverty then rose again to new peaks for all groups in 1992,

reaching 47 percent for black children, 40 percent for Hispanic children, 17 percent for white children, and 22 percent for children of all races. From 1993 to 1998, poverty rates among children declined.

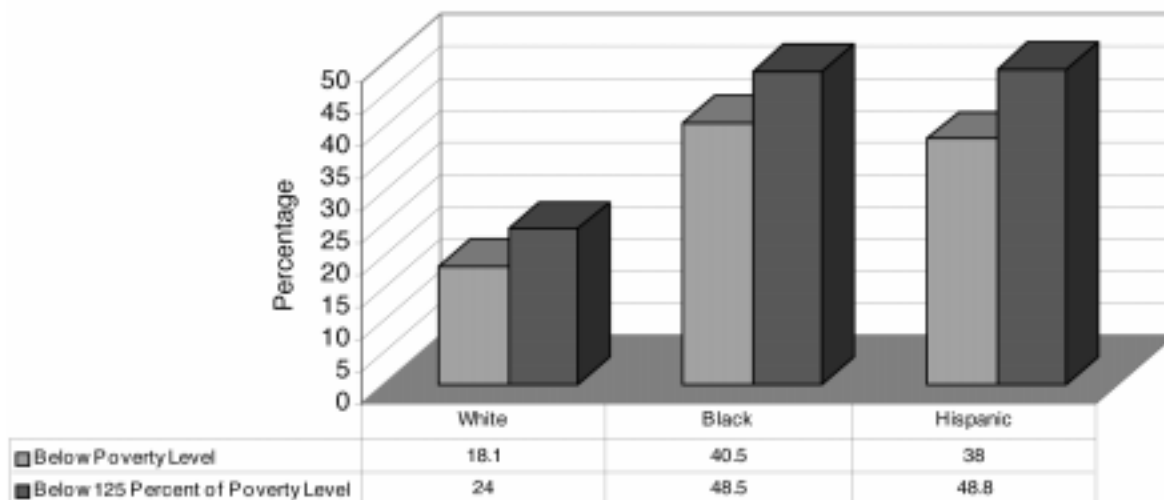
Children Under Age Six

- In 1998, 42 percent of all young children (ages 0 to 6) lived in or near poverty. From 1977 to 1998, the poverty rate for these children grew by 20 percent—from 18 percent to 22 percent. In 1998, nearly half (48%) of African American and Hispanic children in

Percent of Children Under 18 Years Old Living Below the Poverty Level: 1977–1998



Percent of Children Under Six-Years Old Living Below the Poverty Level and Below 125 Percent of the Poverty Level in 1998



this age group lived below 125 percent of the poverty level, and almost a quarter (24%) of their white peers did so.

- Ten percent of America's young children live in extreme poverty, that is, in families with incomes below 50 percent of the poverty line. (In 1998, this meant below \$6,401 for a family of three.) Among young children, the extreme poverty rate is growing faster than the overall poverty rate. Research indicates that extreme poverty during the first five years of life has especially harmful effects on children's future life chances compared to less extreme poverty experienced later in childhood.
- A majority of all poor young children, 65 percent, live with at least one parent who is employed. Only one-sixth of poor children of all ages (17 percent) and 36 percent of poor young children live in families that rely solely on public assistance for income.

- The poverty rate for young children is much higher in cities (30 percent) than in suburbs (16 percent). However, poverty rates among young children grew much more rapidly in the suburbs (by 50%) from 1975–79 and from 1993–98 than in the cities (by 31 percent). The rate of growth was also higher among whites (25 percent) than among African Americans (18 percent).

HUD Best Practices

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has announced its 2000 Best Practices initiative. Its purpose is to identify individuals in communities across the country who are using HUD's programs to accomplish something new or innovative. HUD's philosophy about this, according to its official announcement, is that "if you or someone in your community has already taken the initiative, found that success, made a difference, then HUD believes you should be recognized and rewarded. HUD wants to honor your

achievements, but even more important, your unique approach or well-planned actions, which can help other communities that face challenges similar to your own." Examples of "best practices" will be selected from areas such as community development, homeownership, fair housing, economic development, youth empowerment, and affordable housing.

Even if your organization is not in the running for a HUD award this year, you may want to attend the upcoming annual Best Practices and Technical Assistance Symposium, being held August 7-10, 2000, in Washington, DC, at the Washington Hilton and Towers. Advance registration is now open. Visit the HUD Best Practices web site for more detailed information at <http://www.hud.gov/bestpractices/>. ■



For more information on this and related topics, visit our website.

ECONOMIC REPORT

by George Cave

High Incarceration Rates for Black Men: Economic Implications

Before rejoicing too much over reports of low unemployment, policymakers would be wise to consider the countervailing effects of rising incarceration rates on the ability of black men to participate in the economy, support black families, and contribute to their communities. The strength of the national economy has been responsible for the dramatic decline in jobless rates for most groups since the early 1980s. But because of record high rates of imprisonment among African American men, recent unemployment figures, indicating a 30-year low in black male unemployment, paint a very misleading picture of the true economic status of black men.

Because its definition excludes those in prisons, the unemployment rate generated by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) masks the impact of incarceration on the economic well-being of African Americans in two ways. First, it hides the unemployment of men who could not find work before they were locked behind bars; and second, it completely omits the disemployment of men who were working before they entered prison. Incarcerating a man who has a job disemploys him, creates a job vacancy for someone else, and renders the man involuntarily idle in a way not captured by the unemployment rate.

The official unemployment rate is the number of “unemployed” divided by the size of the “labor force.” It is based on the Bureau’s Current Population Survey each month. Survey respondents who did not work during the week they were surveyed, but who had looked for work during the four preceding weeks, would be counted as unemployed. The “labor force” is defined as noninstitutionalized civilian household members who are employed, plus the unemployed.

Incarcerating a man who otherwise would be counted as unemployed thus hides his unemployment by removing him from both the numerator (the number of unemployed) and the denominator (the size of the labor force) of the official unemployment rate. Incarceration includes confinement in federal prisons, state prisons (which account for the majority of inmates), and local jails, which continue to account for about one-third of inmates. To counteract the statistical effect of incarcerating a man would require putting him back into both these places in the unemployment rate calculation.

As incarceration rates rose disproportionately among black men over the last two decades, the economy outside prisons and jails absorbed non-incarcerated blacks into the ranks of working Americans. This left fewer black men to be counted as unemployed in labor force statistics. Thus, the high rate of incarceration has been a factor in producing low unemployment statistics for black men in a strong economy.

Incarceration and Unemployment Rates for Men in Selected Years

Year	Official unemployment statistics for men ages 20 and older		Official incarceration rates for men ages 18 and older		Black men's index of economic idleness
	Black unemployment rate	White unemployment rate	Black incarceration rate	White incarceration rate	Sum of unemployment and incarceration rates
1980	12.4 %	5.3 %	—	—	—
1983	18.1	7.9	—	—	—
1985	13.2	5.4	3.5 %	0.5 %	16.7 %
1990	10.4	4.3	5.2	0.7	15.6
1995	8.8	4.3	6.6	0.9	15.4
1996	9.4	4.1	6.6	0.9	16.0
1997	8.5	3.6	—	—	—
1998	7.4	3.2	—	—	—
1999	6.7	3.0	—	—	—
2000	6.9	2.9	—	—	—

Sources: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rates for non-Hispanic African American men peaked in the early 1980s at 18.1 percent and have fallen steadily since then, to below seven percent today. White non-Hispanic men's unemployment has also fallen, though not as dramatically. There seems to be a strong inverse correlation between rising black incarceration rates and declining black unemployment rates. If incarceration rates and unemployment rates are added together to produce a more meaningful statistic—a combined index of economic idleness—that index would show little actual improvement in idleness among black men since the 1980s.

In 1985, the incarceration rate of black men was 3.5 percent, and their rate of unemployment was 13.2 percent, for a total index of idleness of 16.7 percent (see table). In 1996, the latest year for which official incarceration rates are available by race and sex, black males' incarceration rate rose to 6.6 percent, while their unemployment rate dipped to 9.4 percent, for a total index of idleness of 16 percent.

Of course, published data do not line up precisely. The treatment of the Hispanic ethnic category, as well as inclusion of 18- and 19-year-olds, varies between the Justice Department statistics and those of the BLS. However, simple addition of the two rates still captures trends in their interrelationship.

Catastrophe in the Making

Both incarceration rates and unemployment rates measure economic idleness and economic marginality. Although some may counter that prison inmates can be employed, most prisoners work only on prison maintenance tasks and do so for less than a dollar an hour.

The growth in black male incarceration in recent decades is shocking.

The black imprisonment rate rose 40 percent between 1980 and 1985. According to the Department of Justice, on a typical day in 1985, 310,000 black men (about 3.5 percent of all black men) were in prison or jail. The figure for incarcerated black men more than doubled by 1996 to 714,000, fully 6.6 percent of all black men. The parallel figure that year for white men was 760,000, or 0.9 percent of all white men. Thus, even though black men are only about 12 percent of the male population, they accounted for roughly half of all incarcerated men. The proportion of black men incarcerated is about eight times greater than the proportion of white males incarcerated. For Hispanic males, the proportion incarcerated is about 3.5 times the white male proportion.

The reasons for racial disparities in incarceration are complex, and some are disputed. However, the effect of the "War on Drugs" is not in dispute. A 1997 Department of Health and Human Services survey found that the representation of African Americans among monthly drug users (13 percent) was roughly proportional to their percentage of the population. Whites represented 74 percent of users and Hispanics 9 percent. However, African Americans are severely over-represented among those arrested, convicted, and incarcerated for non-violent drug possession. Specifically, they are 35 percent of those arrested for drug possession, 55 percent of those convicted, and 74 percent of those sentenced to prison. These disparities are due, in part, to the fact that African Americans are more likely than whites to live in areas where drug sales take place on street corners and where drug policy emphasizes law enforcement rather than drug treatment.

Eventually, if incarceration rates decline or the economy cools, unem-

ployment rates will rise to reflect some of the lasting economic impact of incarceration. As men are released from prisons and jails, some who had been employed before their convictions will join the ranks of the unemployed. This is due to several reasons. Incarceration prevents some men from maintaining or developing occupational skills, especially with the recent discontinuation of rehabilitation measures (such as college courses) in favor of "get tough" punishment in some prison systems. Incarceration brutalizes many men, in effect teaching them to be more hardened and effective criminals. At the same time it strips away the "soft skills" employers seek such as communication skills, and the ability to cooperate and negotiate with others, skills necessary to participate as the member of a team. When the economy weakens and employers can exercise more choice in hiring, they tend to avoid ex-inmates. In addition, by delaying or preventing black men from forming families, incarceration reduces some men's desire for stable employment.

As the boom in prison construction continues and the population of imprisoned Americans approaches two million, high levels of incarceration for black men can be expected to have a devastating impact on black male unemployment, on black families, and on the black community. Because incarcerated black men are dropped from official labor force statistics, official unemployment rates do not reflect any of the sociological or economic devastation caused by incarceration. But when incarceration declines or the economy enters a recession, official unemployment statistics will reveal their effect on black males in particular and on the national economy in general. As a society, what we are witnessing is a national catastrophe in the making. ■