



FOCUS[®]

MAGAZINE

IT'S IN OUR HANDS: THE ESSENCE CALL TO ACTION TO SECURE OUR CHILDREN

By Susan Taylor

Over the decades, their little brown faces—tearstained, frightened, and helpless—have been crying out for help. Mostly we have ignored them. And now the statistics are stunning and stinging:

- One-quarter of all black children are living in poverty.
- Of all African American births, 6.6 percent are to girls under the age of 18.
- In some cities, nearly 80 percent of black males are not finishing high school.

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THE CRADLE TO PRISON PIPELINE CRISIS

By Marian Wright Edelman

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) is grateful for the work of the Joint Center Health Policy Institute's Dellums Commission, which highlights some of the very dangerous trends in the status of children of color. Poor children, and especially poor black and Latino children, are coming into contact with the juvenile justice and criminal justice systems at younger and younger ages and for less serious and less specifically defined offenses that used to be handled in the community by school officials, community leaders, pastors, or families. The overwhelming majority of children

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The special theme of this issue is young men of color and the related public policy recommendations of the Joint Center Health Policy Institute's Dellums Commission.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

This issue of *Focus* coincides with the November 15th release of the Joint Center Health Policy Institute's Dellums Commission report on the life options of young men of color. It is not the first time that the Joint Center has focused on the problems of this group or the many, often disparate programs designed to resolve or overcome them. Over the past twenty years, we have examined various aspects of the issue—juvenile justice, education, community-based programs to improve outcomes for African American men and boys, and public policies that affect their condition.



However, through the Health Policy Institute (HPI) and its Commission, headed by former Congressman and Mayor-elect Ronald Dellums, we have raised the issues concerning young men of color to a new level. Under the leadership of Mayor-elect Dellums and HPI director Dr. Gail Christopher, the Commission has operated on two levels—examining the “big picture” or socioeconomic context that shapes the lives of young men of color and identifying the characteristics of programs that work to expand their life paths. In her interview with *Focus*, Dr. Christopher, who is also Joint Center vice president for health, women, and families, discusses the purposes and expected outcomes from the Commission's work.

The articles in this issue highlight some of the major themes of the Commission's work. Operating from the premise that young men of color are assets to their communities, the Commissioners and research consultants identified policies and practices that limit young men's ability to make contributions to their families and households. Two of the articles focus on policies that could improve outcomes in education and employment for African American males, and a third discusses ways to facilitate a positive transition to adulthood for young men of color in foster care. Also addressed in this issue are sexual behavior and reproductive health among male youth of color—areas in which there is evidence of improvement but large gaps remaining in health outcomes. An important finding, as reported here and discussed more extensively in one of the Dellums Commission background papers, is the need for strengthening social networks. One such effort is summarized in the article by Joint Center Board member Susan Taylor, who launched the “Essence Cares” initiative at the Essence Jazz Festival in Houston in July of this year.

This issue of *Focus* just skims the surface of the Commission's work. I hope that *Focus* readers will find the time to look more closely at the research findings of the Commission's twelve background papers and the recommendations in the final report. More importantly, the Joint Center staff and Commission members hope that the information and recommendations will be used by policymakers and policy influentials to change the dynamics in our communities, keeping young men on a positive developmental track. The Children's Defense Fund has already developed a report (outlined in the article by Marian Wright Edelman) that parallels some of our findings, so we know that there are organizations whose efforts will reinforce ours. Such actions would complement the Joint Center's ongoing work with partners and collaborators as described by Dr. Christopher in the interview that follows. Please check our website at www.jointcenter.org for updates on our continuing efforts.

The Joint Center is extremely grateful to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation for providing the resources that made this Commission effort possible and to the Ford Foundation for supporting the added focus on adolescent reproductive health, which led to the creation of a Youth Task Force that both complements and enhances the Commission's work. We also appreciate the time and attention given to this effort by the individual Commissioners. All of them are very busy people; the fact that they were willing to work with us for nearly two years points to the importance we all attach to identifying policies and programs that enable young men of color to achieve their individual potential and contribute to the advancement of their communities and this nation.

MARGARET C. SIMMS
INTERIM PRESIDENT

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1090 VERMONT AVENUE, NW • SUITE 1100
WASHINGTON, DC 20005

TELEPHONE (202) 789-3500
FACSIMILE (202) 789-6390
E-mail: focuseditor@jointcenter.org

www.jointcenter.org

Q&A

BETTER HEALTH THROUGH STRONGER COMMUNITIES: AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. GAIL C. CHRISTOPHER

The Dellums Commission, chaired by former Congressman and Mayor-elect Ronald Dellums, was formed by the Health Policy Institute (HPI) of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies to analyze policies that affect the physical, emotional, and social health of young men of color and their communities and to develop an action plan to alter those public policies that limit life paths for these youth. In this interview with Focus, Dr. Gail C. Christopher, Joint Center vice president for health, women and families and director of HPI, discusses the Commission's work and plans for using momentum created by the Commission to achieve policy reform.



Focus: *What compelled you to ask Ronald Dellums to chair the Commission?*

Dr. Christopher: I knew that we needed an African American male leader with national stature and demonstrated commitment to improving the health outcomes of all people. Former Congressman Dellums' exemplary record in Congress included bold leadership on health issues and it encompassed responsibilities in the area of our nation's security. As chair of the House Armed Services Committee, Congressman Dellums (who is now Mayor-elect of Oakland) demonstrated the type of bi-partisan, strategic leadership this Commission would require. We were extremely honored and gratified when he accepted our invitation.

Focus: *What in your current or past work drew you toward the issues on which the Commission is focused?*

Dr. Christopher: Three primary areas of my career came together in this work. First, I recognized the centrality of institutionalized, structural, and individual racism in the life experience of people of color in the U.S. back in the 1970s when I had a large private health care practice in Chicago. I also directed the Family Resource Coalition of America and worked in the field of child welfare and family support. I gained first-hand insights into the problems of minority youth and families who became part of the child welfare system. Community-based family resource and support initiatives are sorely needed. That work led me to develop a multi-cultural education program and curriculum and training materials for our nation's educators of kindergarten through collegiate levels. The program is called Americans All. Of course, my work in Government Innovation and

Reinvention helped me to know, at a heart level, that change in policy and practice can come from a deeper understanding of the issues. Finally, I have a young adult son. His entire life, I've worked to mitigate, and to teach him how to mitigate, the effect of a society that would limit his life options because he is African American.

Focus: *What do you think the Commission will accomplish?*

Dr. Christopher: The Commission will help the Joint Center Health Policy Institute (HPI) achieve its mission of "igniting a fair health movement that gives people of color the inalienable right to equal opportunity for healthy lives" because it is focused on the inequality, the unfair dynamics of policies that have had a cumulative effect of limiting life options for young men of color. Racial disparities that have a disproportionate impact on persons of color are greatest among men of color. From the lowest life expectancy to the poorest oral health, men suffer disproportionately poor health outcomes and are therefore less available as assets, as partners—indeed as anchors—for families and communities. The Commission will provide a comprehensive, yet laser-like focus on opportunities for leveraging change in specific policies and practices.

For example, the now well-documented cradle-to-prison pipeline is soldered at critical decision points in the criminal justice system. Police officers, sheriffs, and prosecutors can make a tremendous difference in individual and group outcomes if their decisions and their discretion were better informed and, indeed, more humane. Juveniles should be responded to as developing human beings—age appropriately—not as adults. This is one

of many opportunities for more appropriate decision making.

Focus: *Through what means will the Commission reach its goals?*

Dr. Christopher: I believe that the primary vehicles for leveraging change are strategic partnerships or alliances with other groups. We will use the research in the background papers and the policy recommendations in the final report to negotiate commitments from organizations in many sectors—labor, education, criminal justice, health, media, child welfare and, of course, government.

Focus: *How did the Commission conduct its work?*

Dr. Christopher: The work of the Commission was conducted in multiple phases. The first challenge was to identify a diverse group of leaders familiar with African American, Latino, Native American, and Asian and Pacific Islander concerns. Commissioners also needed to represent sectors that could initiate meaningful actions based on the findings of the Commission. Once the members were identified and convened, HPI staff and consultants prepared background briefing materials that "made the case" for this initiative and served as the template for subsequent work. It is important to note that the comprehensive analysis of policies that limit life options for young men of color was the original idea of commissioner Ronald Walters and C. Patrick Babcock, vice president for programs at the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. Patrick proposed the idea and I was eager to design a process for moving on this critical set of issues. Commission deliberations led to the commissioning of 12 background papers.

We also held some public policy forums and meetings on the east and west coasts.

The commissioners worked in subcommittees to reach consensus on recommendations, and we hired a seasoned journalist to compile the final report from transcripts of the meetings and the multiple background papers.

Focus: *Are there any particular experiences during the life of the Commission that stand out in your mind?*

Dr. Christopher: Yes. Perhaps the most outstanding was during our first public forum at Howard University. There we received gentle, but firm, admonishment for not having enough “youth” voices at the Commission. We saw the error of our process and created a youth task force that has added tremendously to the authenticity of our work. The Ford Foundation provided us with funding to focus on reproductive health concerns of young men of color. We are including recommendations of the youth task force in our final commission document.

Focus: *Are there any particular lessons learned that you would like to share?*

Dr. Christopher: Perhaps the greatest lesson from this work is that we can translate the theory of social determinants and health into practical policy recommendations. Men of color have the shortest life spans—particularly African American men. This health disparity, as well as contributing chronic diseases, injuries, and violence factors, are caused, at the root, by inequalities in social, economic, environmental, and behavioral factors. Discrimination, concentrated poverty, and institutional and structural inequalities, often borne of social discrimination, are the determinants of these poor health outcomes. The Dellums Commission is a bold attempt to move from theory to action on this set of complex issues. Other important lessons are: (1) Engage young people—multi-generational perspective is vital; (2) Engage diverse leaders who have ties to key constituencies; and (3) Believe that change and justice are possible.

Also, Congressman Dellums continues to frame meeting the needs of young men of color as a national security issue. I think that’s important in these times.

Focus: *There are many recommendations in the Commission’s final report. Which ones are the most useful or important for policymakers?*

Dr. Christopher: While all the recommendations are important, I think the ones that will remove barriers to health care, health and wellness education, and educational achievement will probably produce the most measurable long-term results. Employment opportunities will help generate immediate short-term economic improvements that will have ripple effects.

Focus: *In the last few years, there has been an ongoing debate regarding the role of personal responsibility, particularly the responsibilities of parents, in addressing many of the concerns raised by the Dellums Commission. What do you believe is the role and responsibility of parents with regard to expanding life options for young men of color?*

Dr. Christopher: You know, responsibility requires the ability to respond. One’s ability and/or capacity are shaped by many intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Multiple social determinants play out in communities of color and support or impede expressions of personal responsibility. Yes, every parent is responsible for the healthy development of his or her child. But access to employment that pays a living wage or the ability to afford safe housing and access to quality health care and/or exposure to environmental violence and/or toxins affect parents’ capacities to be responsible. A democratic government shares the responsibility for the health and well-being of its citizens—as our nation’s founding documents suggest. Rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are built on requisite opportunities for health and well-being.

Focus: *What do you believe is the responsibility of young men of color?*

Dr. Christopher: Young men of color must take responsibility for their individual success. But our nation’s legacy of enslavement as well as racial and gender discrimination are contextual realities for persons of color. Young men must be more like their ancestors—resilient and vigilant about self-determination and self-care.

Focus: *What are your plans for making sure that the recommendations of the Dellums Commission are heard by policymakers and that the action plan is implemented?*

Dr. Christopher: We are working now to establish partnerships, alliances, and strategic relationships with organizations and within targeted states, counties, and cities to ensure ongoing action on the policy priorities identified by the Commission. Oakland Mayor-elect Ronald Dellums has indicated that he hopes to make Oakland a pilot city for implementing many of the Commission’s recommendations. We are hoping he will be instrumental in influencing his former colleagues in Congress and his new mayoral colleagues to take similar actions in their respective jurisdictions and cities.

Focus: *Is there any follow-up work that you think needs to be done beyond the policymaking recommendations made in the Commission’s final report?*

Dr. Christopher: Yes, there is a need for more research on the relationship of violence to substance abuse and mental illness. There is also a need to carefully evaluate barriers to literacy and create ways to overcome these barriers. New research is emerging about the importance of environmental factors, like access to green space, to normal child development. There is a need to use GIS technology to assess the environmental opportunities for children in communities of color—such factors as schools and proximity to green space, and exposure to lead and other contaminants need to be reviewed. We hope to do some of this work at the Joint Center Health Policy Institute.

Focus: *Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future for young men of color and their communities?*

Dr. Christopher: My work on this Commission makes me quite hopeful about our collective ability to be catalysts for positive change. Responses to this articulated imperative have been extremely encouraging. Leaders from many sectors—public, private, academic, and philanthropic—are responding. I am very optimistic.

Focus: *Thank you very much.*

CREATING PARTNERS FOR OUR NATION'S PROSPERITY BY EXPANDING LIFE PATHS FOR YOUNG MEN OF COLOR

In American society today, young men of color face challenges ranging from a justice system that disproportionately incarcerates them to media and entertainment industries that are quick to portray them as worthless individuals with a propensity to commit violent crimes. While a majority of young men of color are successful in both their personal and work lives, a disproportionate number of young men of color are high school dropouts, incarcerated, and/or jobless.

What factors contribute to negative outcomes of young men of color? Who or what is to blame? Is it the child or teenager who made wrong decisions, or perhaps their families who failed to help their children overcome critical obstacles and guide them on a more productive course through life? Or are key elements of our society itself to blame for fueling stereotypical portrayals, glorifying criminal and violent behavior in movies and television, and championing public policies that have built, rather than torn down, many barriers that prevent young men of color from living productive lives?

To address these problems, nearly two years ago the Joint Center Health Policy Institute launched the Dellums Commission to analyze obstacles commonly confronted by young men of color and identify effective policies and practices that can help them enjoy a more successful path in life and become partners in enhancing our nation's prosperity in the context of today's global environment.

The distinguished Commission, headed by former congressman Ron Dellums (Oakland, California's mayor-elect), addressed issues of urgency for young men of color and their communities. These issues are also central to America's future—health, education, family support and child welfare, economic and workforce development, juvenile and criminal justice, and the impact of media representations. The Dellums Commission has produced the first study to identify systemic failures in these areas and offer solutions for problems that threaten the well-being and future of young men of color.

The Commission recommends policy corrections on all government levels—local, state, and federal—to replace or reform laws, policies, and practices that are endangering large and growing segments of the targeted population. As part of the next phase, Com-

mission members are working to coordinate important roles for organized labor, the business community, educators, and the media industry.

The Dellums Commission's vision is for its work to be the beginning of a landmark campaign in our country that will not only create change for young men of color, but launch new coalitions and new partnerships that will serve as the blueprint for addressing the social challenges that our nation must overcome to become a truly Great Society.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE DELLUMS COMMISSION

The following is a broad overview of the Dellums Commission's final recommendations, which pertain to local, state, and federal levels of government, as well as other actors. A complete summary of the Commission's recommendations are provided in its Final Report, released on November 15, 2006.

HEALTH POLICY

- Fund school-based healthcare programs, extend coverage to all uninsured children, and establish universal coverage.
- Provide adequate mental health and substance abuse services and include care for mental illness and substance abuse in any universal medical care legislation.
- Ensure access to culturally competent medical professionals.
- Ensure access to services for health promotion, prevention, and early intervention, including establishing a U.S. Office of Men's Health.
- Without compromising public safety, treat disorders that have manifested in antisocial behaviors outside incarceration, accurately profile the health status and unmet needs of incarcerated youth and adults, finance and monitor strategies to reform correctional health care, and redirect some correctional funds to community-based post-correctional healthcare and support services.

- Require that foster care caseworkers be properly trained to regularly monitor health status and finance programs that will ensure that children in foster care will receive early and periodic assessment and treatment of physical, mental, and oral health.
- Employ models of innovation that successfully address health disparities, such as a community-based empowerment model that enables minority youth to assume personal responsibility for wellness.

EDUCATION POLICY

- Aggressively and creatively stem dropout rates among young men of color; narrow the application of zero tolerance to only serious threats, collect and report demographic data as it relates to suspensions, arrests, and expulsions, and properly test non-English-speaking students before placing them in special education.
- Authorize studies to determine the benchmarks for establishing excellence at underperforming schools, determine and address the special skills needed for teaching minority males to encourage cultural competency, and endorse and fund the replication of successful models for recruiting, training, and retraining men of color as teachers.
- Nationally evaluate the No Child Left Behind Act to determine its fairness and equity in serving young men of color and promote legislative action or litigation to ensure full funding of activities required under the act.
- Invest more financial resources into college readiness programs to increase the number of young men of color in postsecondary education.
- Implement more community-based models for change that target high-risk youth and reclaim former high school dropouts.

FAMILY SUPPORT AND CHILD WELFARE

- Strengthen and expand the role of federal leadership and funding to increase the num-

ber of stable foster homes and increase the incentives for adoption.

- Connect family service agencies with “grass roots” leaders who can help them build community-based family support networks.
- Address the lack of cultural competency in the foster care system, such as the lack of adequate bilingual services.
- Promote positive social network experiences for boys and young men of color by supporting the creation of in-school and out-of-school engagements with positive peer groups.
- Strengthen the assurance that children in foster care will receive early and periodic assessment of physical, mental, and oral health, diagnosis, care planning, treatment, and visitation to monitor and support health and health care.
- Pursue a model of reform like the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, which incorporates and expands the former Independent Living Program (ILP) and expands services for aftercare youth ages 18-21 who have exited foster care at age 18 or after, but have not reached age 21.

WORKFORCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Increase the minimum wage at the federal level or the state and local level.
- Identify, fund, and promote micro- and macro-economic development opportunities in distressed communities by providing access to capital to establish viable business initiatives and ensuring that technical assistance is available to potential entrepreneurs, and provide access to government contracts.
- Vigorously enforce existing anti-discrimination laws in the area of employment, housing, and credit markets.
- Encourage businesses to pursue models of innovation for workforce development, such as the Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection and California’s “Double Bottom Line” initiative.

JUVENILE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

- Provide a continuum of care that begins in detention and continues in the community as part of the transition process; improve alcohol, drug treatment, and ancillary services for inmates and detained youth during incarceration, adequately fund local re-entry programs that are performance-based, and support additional funding of aftercare services to reduce the high rate of recidivism of youth leaving detention.
- Expand youth courts, drug courts, and community-based counseling as alternatives to incarceration for low-risk, nonviolent offenders; strengthen and expand the quality of on-site education and vocational programs and assist inmates in re-entry by effective release planning, including potential employment.
- Mandate better legal counsel for young men of color and strengthen the public defender system.
- Support the call of Justice Kennedy and other prominent justice officials to repeal mandatory minimums, including the mandatory 100-to-1 powder cocaine/crack cocaine ratio and other sentencing requirements that incarcerate nonviolent offenders for long periods.
- Establish effective re-entry programs for juveniles, reducing recidivism by providing education during detention and a “one-stop-service” that provides mental health and social services, drug and family counseling, and employment training and placement for students returning from incarceration.
- Employ models of reform and innovation, such as drug policy reforms presented by Roger Goodman, director of the Drug Policy Project at the King County Bar Association; juvenile justice system reforms authored by Mississippi Representative George Flaggs, Jr.; Massachusetts’ Youth Advocacy Project, which provides comprehensive legal representation and advocacy for youth charged as delinquent and youthful offenders in Boston’s juvenile courts; community courts, such as Brooklyn’s Red Hook Community Justice Center, the nation’s first multi-jurisdictional community court; and community-based engagement efforts

to effectively re-integrate former offenders into society, such as the Family Life Center, based in Providence, RI.

THE MEDIA

- Make state-owned buildings and other facilities available to facilitate engagement—including discussions of news coverage—between media outlets and community groups.
- Media reform activists, foundations, and other nonprofits should organize community-media forums to discuss media practices—including bias and staffing diversity and sourcing—and conduct periodic audits of news coverage.
- The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) should oppose current proposals to further loosen ownership restrictions that would allow media conglomerates to acquire even more broadcasting properties.
- Repeal the 1996 Telecom Act and restore the Fairness Doctrine in broadcasting.
- Pass legislation that would provide subsidies to help finance new minority-owned Internet enterprises and other digital media to promote more diversity in communications and more public service media.
- News organizations should adopt “best practices” proposals such as those produced by the Columbia University Journalism School, and consult journalism-improvement institutes such as the Poynter Institute and the Maynard Institute and media-community engagement institutes such as the UCLA-based Center for Communications and Community.
- Pursue models of innovation such as the National Credibility Roundtables Project of the Associated Press Managing Editors, which is one of a number of Ford Foundation-sponsored media projects designed to promote ongoing communication between the public and the press and to encourage journalists to use what they learn to improve news practices. □

This summary of the Dellums Commission’s work was compiled by Michael R. Wenger, acting vice president of communications at the Joint Center.

PERSPECTIVES

YOUTH PERSPECTIVES

The Joint Center Health Policy Institute has convened a ten-member youth task force on the reproductive health and behavior of young men of color. Its recommendations, informed by the experiences of its diverse members and by forums for young people it has hosted in various cities, will accompany the release of the Dellums Commission's final report. For this feature, Focus asked two youth task force members to give their unique perspectives on public policy issues affecting young men of color and the work of the Dellums Commission.

Young Men of Color and the Child Welfare System

By Christopher St. Vil

A number of public policies negatively influence the life options and well-being of young men of color. In fact, policies have marginalized men of color so much that some researchers have dubbed the phenomenon as a “health crisis.” Throughout their lifespan—in large part due to structural factors—young men of color consistently face obstacles that impede their ability to become functional civic participants of society. Structural explanations suggest that forces outside of the control of the individual dictate opportunities. From this vantage point, racism, the economy, and politics play a major role in shaping (or limiting) opportunities for individuals.

The Dellums Commission has taken on the long-overdue task of analyzing the impact of key public policies on the physical, emotional, and social health of young men of color and their communities. The Commission's background papers have identified policies and practices—such as those found in the prison industry, the media, and the healthcare setting—that have served to limit the life options of young men of color. The Commission will generate a set of recommended actions aimed at reversing the debilitating effects of these policies.

If allowed to persist, the long-term social effects and outcomes of the public policies that disproportionately affect young men of color will have disastrous implications not just for their families, but also for society as a whole. As a man of color who has encountered some of the effects of these policies, I hold a personal stake in seeing the goals of the Joint Center come to fruition. Based on my own life experiences, two areas that I feel warrant particular attention are the child welfare system and educational policies.

Moving through the child welfare system in New York State, I crossed paths with many youth, young men of color in particular, who fell through the cracks of the system. Two things that “system kids” (children within the child welfare system) all had in common were not being able to go home—or not having a stable home—and a disrupted educational pathway. We all had unusually long tenures in the system and we all dreaded the day when we would age out of the system and lose the support on which we had become dependent. In *On Their Own* (2004), Shirk and Stangler put it best when they describe the condition of youth who aged out of foster care: “Without the benefits of normal growing-up experiences, such as holding down a part-time job, watching a parent balance a check book, or learning the meaning of household responsibility by performing daily chores, youth who leave foster care often have difficulty negotiating more complex tasks like finding safe housing, finding and keeping steady employment, staying healthy, and avoiding financial or legal trouble.” The authors explain that four years after leaving care, only

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Addressing a Need: Reproductive Health among Young Men of Color

By Jessica Gonzalez

Over the past two and a half years, I have devoted a considerable amount of time to studying and working in the field of public health, with an emphasis on young men's health and adolescent health. While my interactions with young men of color have varied to a great degree, in all instances, I obtained a first-hand glimpse into the life experiences of young men of color who reside in New York City's low-income neighborhoods.

As a graduate researcher at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, I undertook the implementation of a young men's reproductive health education project through the Young Men's Clinic (YMC). During the implementation process, I worked in the Bronx and Washington Heights and interacted with approximately 500 young men of color between the ages of 18 and 30 in a variety of venues, including clinics, community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations, high schools, and community colleges.

I now work for F.E.G.S. Health and Human Services System as the director of programming for the Bronx Lab School, a small new school in the Bronx that opened its doors in 2004 with a mission to provide a college preparatory experience for underserved youth. I design, implement, and evaluate health and wellness, academic enrichment, and cultural arts programs, while also working to develop external partnerships and refine the delivery of support between Bronx Lab and F.E.G.S. more broadly.

These first-hand glimpses into the life experiences of young men of color have allowed me to make two saddening observations: (1) the vast majority of young men of color who reside in low-income neighborhoods are likely to experience unemployment, under-education, poverty, incarceration, and limited access to health care; and (2) investments in health-related institutional and human resources for young men of color are lacking in public health literature, interventions, and policies.

In the United States, young men of color represent a significant population of consumers, workers, taxpayers, and voters. Yet, without a doubt, they are facing poor health outcomes that are compounded by significant health disparities and barriers to health care. Focusing on their health and well-being and understanding the complexity of the factors that affect their health are ultimately in the nation's best interest, as these men have the potential to form a collective voice and become a powerful social, political, and economic constituency with major influence on the trajectory of this country.

I was delighted when the Joint Center Health Policy Institute and the Academy for Educational Development created the Dellums Commission and the Youth Task Force, both of which are responsible for analyzing the impact of social, structural, and individual factors on the physical, emotional, and social health of young men of color.

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St. Vil - continued from page 7

one in five former foster youth is fully self-supporting—i.e., capable of engaging in and accomplishing daily tasks and responsibilities associated with independent adulthood and civic participation.

Another one of the main factors contributing to the lack of self-sufficiency among youth aging out of the child welfare system is the lack of educational attainment. Too few undertake the education and training necessary to compete in today's economy. Going back and forth between homes and placements takes its toll on the educational attainment and aspirations of youth by constantly disrupting educational pathways. In addition to transient placement, the educational services provided by some placements (i.e., shelters, group homes, holding centers for youth awaiting family court appearance dates), which keep the youth up-to-date with their educational curriculum, are hardly adequate and in some cases not age or grade appropriate. Among those aging out of the system, only slightly more than half have graduated from high school, compared with 85 percent of all youth ages 18-24. The result is a sense of hopelessness and dependency on the system as an adult.

Although I was able to avoid the pitfalls of the child welfare system and get back on track with my education in spite of challenges, my situation was unique. I was admitted into a group home that stressed the value of education, social skills, and time and money management. It was mandatory that we opened bank accounts, maintained employment or attended school, cleaned and cooked (with supervision), and introduced the peers with whom we engaged to the group home staff. The managers of the group home regularly visited our school to get updates on our educational and behavioral progress and then discussed it with us. Also, the group home staff showed genuine interest in our well-being—a sense of interest that the managers ensured resonated with staff. In sum, the environment created in my placement was one of warmth, understanding, tolerance, and discipline.

I left the group home equipped with a high school diploma, a driver's license, a bank account, a bag full of motivation, and a college acceptance letter, along with hope for my future. It should be said, however, that many of my peers—in the same group home and from other placements—did not follow the same path. I am often asked, "What was so different about your situation, why did you decide to change your mindset?" My answer is, I don't know—resilience, a sense of agency, wanting more out of life than many of my peers from my hometown achieved, or maybe just wanting to prove wrong all of the people who looked at a young man of color named Christopher St. Vil and said, "You are just like the rest of them and will amount to nothing."

What I can say, however, is that I was given the opportunities and expanded on them. Policies must be geared toward addressing the large population of young men of color entering the child welfare system, their tenure within the system upon entry, and the quality of education and home environment that is provided to the youth once inside the system. With the establishment of more quality child welfare programs that focus on the acquisition of concrete skills for navigating and functioning in today's society (with an emphasis on educational attainment), many of the young men of color aging within the system will have far more favorable outcomes. □

Christopher St. Vil (stvil2002@yahoo.com), MSW, is a third-year doctoral candidate at Howard University School of Social Work and a member of the Joint Center's Youth Task Force on the Reproductive Health and Behavior of Young Men of Color.

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The Dellums Commission places more of an emphasis on examining key policies and recommending corrective actions to be taken by local, state, and national policymakers, while the Youth Task Force focuses more on gathering information from youth across the states and recommending policies and interventions based on that information.

As an active member of the youth task force, I have had the opportunity to participate in community forums in Atlanta and New York City in addition to meeting with the Dellums Commission and reading background reports prepared for the Dellums Commission by experts in various fields. During the community forums, I interacted directly with about twenty young men of color. In both forums, the young men heard from a panel of experts on issues concerning young men's reproductive health and were then able to give their opinions on a variety of related issues, such as healthcare services, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, and teen pregnancy.

The community forums served their task; they engaged participants in a passionate dialogue on the topic of reproductive health and young men of color and generated ideas for health reform. General group conversations depicted a clear need for health policies that promote access to care, an understanding of cultural differences in the medical field, and positive and informative media messages around the topic of reproductive health and young men of color.

The Commission's background reports identified a similar need for programs and policies that lead to improvements in structural and material factors (e.g. access to quality care, cultural competency, and responsibility in the media). However, these also indicate a need for programs and policies that address social factors, such as social networks. As stated in James Hyman's report, *Men and Communities: African American Males and the Well-Being of Children, Families and Neighborhoods*, "community strengthening is key to improving the mental and physical health of young men of color. Such efforts should be made at the level of neighborhoods and should be aimed at increasing the amount of neighborhood supports for the healthy development of African American men and boys."

The Dellums Commission and the Youth Task Force are critical efforts to tackle important questions surrounding the status of young men's health in communities of color. They are working jointly to prepare a comprehensive analysis of the status of health among young men of color and how policy reform can best produce positive health outcomes for this population. In my opinion, promoting access to school-based health education and school-based clinics may serve as an effective way to reach out to young men of color. Clearly, schools provide a captive audience.

In sum, I encourage both groups to continue to think outside of the box and create programmatic and policy-based initiatives that target social, materialist, and structural factors, such as poverty, low socioeconomic status, unemployment, racial characteristics, social networks, and urban context. □

Jessica Gonzalez (jegonzalez@fegs.org) works with F.E.G.S. Health and Human Services System as the director of programming for the Bronx Lab School. She is a member of the Joint Center's Youth Task Force on the Reproductive Health and Behavior of Young Men of Color.

DELLUMS COMMISSION BACKGROUND PAPERS

BETTER HEALTH THROUGH STRONGER COMMUNITIES: PUBLIC POLICY REFORM TO EXPAND LIFE PATHS OF YOUNG MEN OF COLOR

Men and Communities: African American Males and the Well-Being of Children, Families, and Neighborhoods

by James B. Hyman

This report analyzes the extent to which, in what ways, and through what mechanisms the condition, behavior, and/or circumstances of men affect the well-being of poor communities.

Young Men of Color in the Media: Images and Impacts

by Robert M. Entman

This report assesses the media's impacts on the life chances of young men of color and offers potential paths to reform and improvement.

A New Generation of Native Sons: Men of Color and the Prison-Industrial Complex

by Adolphus G. Belk, Jr.

This report evaluates the impact of the prison-industrial complex on males of color, including the extent to which the private corrections industry and intellectual and political discourse have influenced criminal justice policy and programs.

Public Policies and Practices in Child Welfare Systems that Affect Life Options for Children of Color

by Ernestine F. Jones

This report examines the impact of the child welfare system on the ability of minority children to pursue positive life options and presents promising practices to bring about improvements.

Black Male Students at Public Flagship Universities in the U.S. – Status, Trends, and Implications for Policy and Practice

by Shaun R. Harper

This report examines racial disparities in college access, graduation rates, degree attainment, and Division I athletics at 50 public flagship institutions across the nation.

How the Juvenile Justice System Reduces Life Options of Minority Youth

by Edgar S. Cahn

This report reviews access to counsel and practices that produce disparities in the juvenile justice system and provides examples of how to prevent the system from reducing the life options of minority youth.

The Impact of Waivers to Adult Court, Alternative Sentencing, and Alternatives to Incarceration on Young Men of Color

by Michael L. Lindsey

This report examines the impact of transferring young men of color from the juvenile justice system to adult criminal courts and the impact of alternative sentences and alternatives to incarceration on these youth

Correctional Policy — Reentry and Recidivism

by Sandra Edmonds Crewe

This report discusses the causes of correctional reentry and recidivism of young men of color and evaluates current practices versus alternative approaches to reduce recidivism.

Community Health Strategies to Better the Life Options of Boys and Young Men of Color: Policy Issues and Solutions

by Kay Randolph-Back

This report addresses how the application of community health strategies improves the life options of young men of color and strengthens communities.

Indigenous Men in Higher Education

by Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy

This report explores the issues that influence college enrollment and completion rates among American Indian and Alaska Native men.

State Public Education Policy and Life Pathways for Boys and Young Men of Color

by Kay Randolph-Back

This report focuses on the barriers that are limiting the educational and life paths of boys and young men of color, such as zero tolerance policies, and creates an action agenda to remove these barriers.

Conditions that Affect the Participation and Success of Latino Males in College

by Octavio Villalpando

This report analyzes the enrollment status and changes in attainment rates among Latinos in postsecondary education.

The Dellums Commission's Final Report, containing the Commission's recommendations, is to be released on November 15th at the National Press Club in Washington, DC. Check the Joint Center's website, at www.jointcenter.org, for the Final Report and these background papers.

HEALTH REPORT

TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE BEHAVIORS AND OUTCOMES AMONG YOUNG MEN OF COLOR

By Wilhelmina A. Leigh

Behavioral nuances and data limitations make it difficult to accurately assess and understand the sexual and reproductive health outcomes and behaviors of young men of color. Although notable exceptions exist, young men of color are more likely than their white counterparts to report sexual-risk behaviors and related health outcomes, such as sexually transmitted infections (STIs). These reported trends, however, are based on data that are limited and biased in several ways. For example, many behavioral surveys yield information for young men who are either African American or Latino, but not for the smaller racial/ethnic groups. This results in part because black or African American (4.6 million) and Hispanic or Latino (6.5 million) males ages 13-29 constitute the majority of the 12.8 million young men of color in the United States in 2005. In other data sources, errors are made in the assignment of men of color to a racial/ethnic group. Thus, these sources either overstate or underreport data for all the racial/ethnic groups. Yet other sources underreport outcome data for whites and thereby skew the relative weighting of outcome data for males of color. To illuminate trends as well as the challenges inherent in their analysis and interpretation, the Joint Center examined recent data on sexual and reproductive health outcomes and behaviors among young men of color.

Outcomes

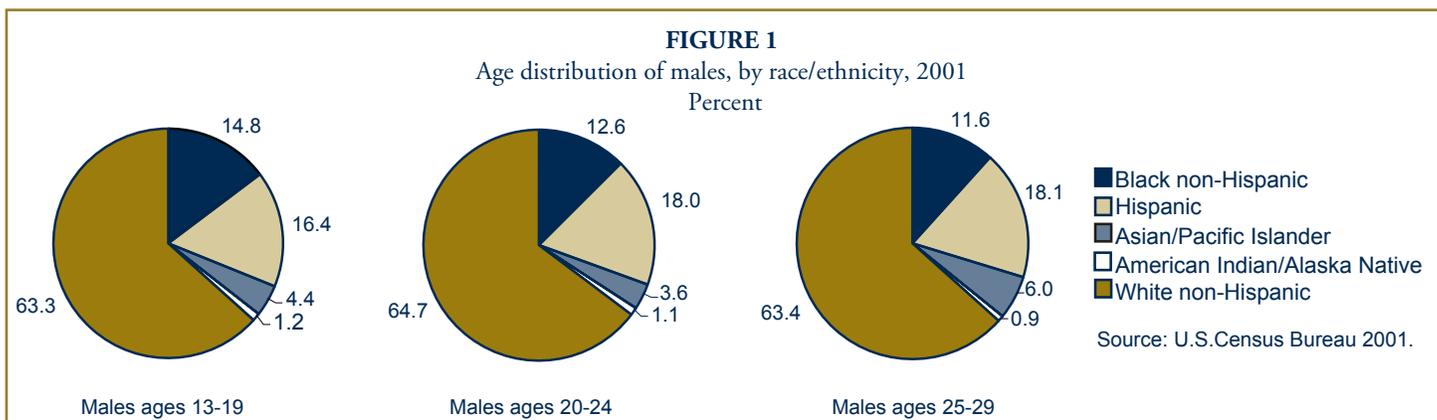
Outcomes commonly used to assess the sexual and reproductive health of young men include impregnation rates and the rates of STIs, HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) infection, and AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome). Within the recent past, selected outcome measures have improved for some young men of color (e.g., the decline in impregnation rates among high school males), while others have worsened (e.g., increased chlamydia rates among males ages 15-29).

Young black non-Hispanic males report the highest rates of infection for chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis (three of the most common STIs), often double and sometimes as much as six times the rates reported by other groups. Although their rates are highest by far, between 1999 and 2004, the rates for most STIs among young black non-Hispanic men declined while the corresponding rates for other racial/ethnic groups did not. In particular, gonorrhea rates declined significantly for young black non-Hispanic men between 1999 and 2004 (by 29 percent for 15- to 19-year-olds, by 32 percent for 20- to 24-year-olds, and by 17 percent for 25- to 29-year-olds), while remaining steady or increasing slightly for most other young males. Syphilis rates among 15- to 29-year-old black non-Hispanic men also declined significantly (by

37 percent for 15- to 19-year-olds and by 30 percent for 20- to 24-year-olds and 25- to 29-year-olds) between 1999 and 2003, before increasing between 2003 and 2004. Young black non-Hispanic men were overrepresented—and men of other racial/ethnic groups were underrepresented—among newly diagnosed cases of HIV infection and AIDS in 2001 (the most recent year for which data for race by age and by gender are available). This overrepresentation is most striking among those ages 13-19. Although black non-Hispanic males were less than 15 percent of this age group, they accounted for 59 percent of the cases of HIV infection and 40 percent of AIDS cases diagnosed in 2001 among this cohort (see Figures 1 and 2).

Behaviors

Undesired reproductive health outcomes often result from risky behaviors such as having multiple sexual partners or engaging in unprotected sexual intercourse. The reported frequency of several risky behaviors, however, has declined in the recent past. In particular, between 1993 and 2003, the proportion of high school young men of color who ever had sexual intercourse (i.e., vaginal intercourse) declined notably—by more than 17 percent among black non-Hispanic male students (from 89 percent to 74 percent), and by



nearly 11 percent among Hispanic male students (from 64 percent to 57 percent). Between 1997 and 2001, these rates also declined nearly 8 percent (from 71 percent to 66 percent) among American Indian male students. The proportions of high school males who reported having four or more sexual partners also declined, from a high of 59 percent (black non-Hispanic) and a low of 15 percent (white non-Hispanic) in 1993 to a high of 42 percent (black non-Hispanic) and a low of 12 percent (white non-Hispanic) in 2003.

In addition, a 2002 survey found that using condoms has become more normative among young men of color, especially among young black non-Hispanic men. Nearly 95 percent of young black non-Hispanic men reported using condoms at least some of the time, compared to 84 percent of both Hispanic and white non-Hispanic young men.

Data Challenges

The quality and accuracy of information about the sexual and reproductive health of young men of color are determined primarily by survey design decisions and by the reach of the nation’s public health surveillance system. The size and diversity of the populations surveyed to gather this information shape what we know about the sexual and reproductive health of young men of color. Although females and teen pregnancy historically have been the foci of data collection about adolescent sexual and reproductive health, since the 1990s a number of behavioral surveys have either targeted men exclusively (e.g., National Survey of Men and National Survey of

Adolescent Males) or have expanded their samples to include males (National Survey of Family Growth, in 2002). Young males who are Asian, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and American Indian or Alaska Native, however, often are not included in these surveys. If these smaller populations are surveyed, findings about them may not be generalizable because they are based on small samples or on non-random samples (e.g., American Indians attending schools funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs).

Another challenge with the use of the sample surveys (i.e., surveys of population samples) to learn about sexual behaviors is their reliance upon self-reports. Although quite likely unavoidable, this reliance comes with known biases due to males exaggerating—and females understating—their sexual acumen and experiences. Surveys about reproductive and sexual health also are frequently conducted at a single point in time (i.e., cross-sectional) and, thus, do not provide insights into the causes of behaviors that might be revealed if these behaviors were studied over time.

Outcome data (primarily about STIs) for young men of color are likely to be biased because disease case reports are captured within the nation’s public health system more often for people of color than for whites. This occurs because lower-income populations are more likely than higher-income populations to use the local public health clinics that report STI data for federal tabulation, and because people of color are more likely than whites to be poor. In addition, sexual and reproductive health outcome data are not reported over time for all conditions and for all categories of race

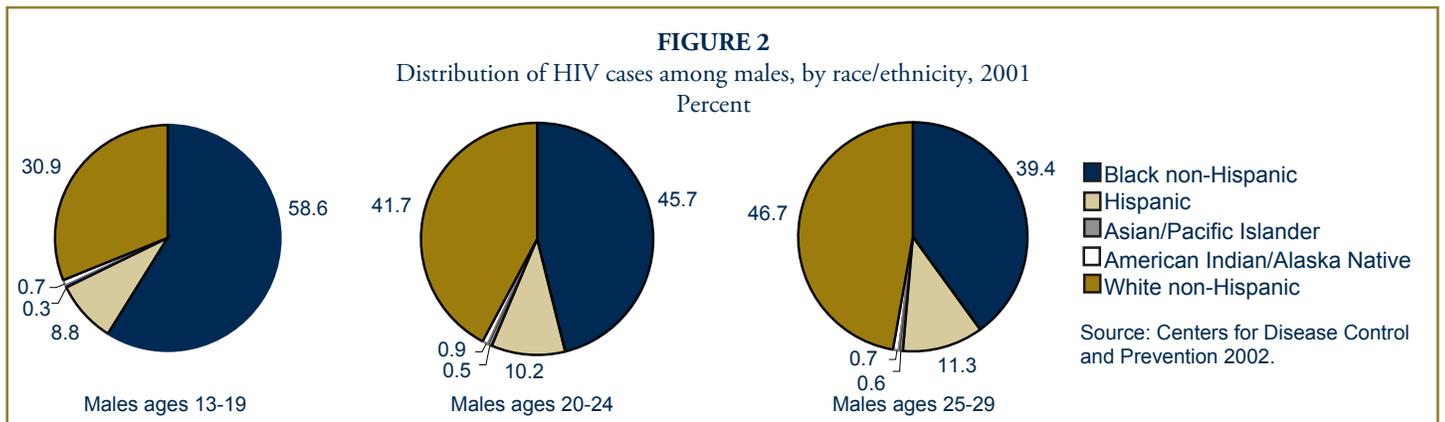
by age and by gender. For example, 2001 is the most recent year for which data about HIV infection and AIDS are provided for these subcategories, although 2004 data are available for these subgroups for the major STIs.

Conclusion

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the sexual and reproductive health of young men of color, we need to know more about both the behavior underlying the outcomes and the influence of data collection decisions on these perceived outcomes. For example, knowing how to capture the experiences of adolescents more completely in sample surveys and how to measure the influence of macro factors (such as poverty, racism, and the media) could enhance our knowledge and thereby lessen the burden of these health behaviors and outcomes on young men of color and on society in general. □

Wilhelmina A. Leigh (wleigh@jointcenter.org) is a senior research associate at the Joint Center.

For more information about the sexual and reproductive health of young men of color, see *The Sexual and Reproductive Health of Young Men of Color: Analyzing and Interpreting the Data*, by Joint Center researchers Wilhelmina A. Leigh and Danielle Huff, at <http://www.jointcenter.org/publications1/publication-PDFs/YMOC/YoungMenColor.pdf>.



ECONOMIC REPORT

IMPROVING SCHOOLING AND JOBS FOR YOUNG BLACK MEN

By Harry J. Holzer

During the economic boom years of the late 1990s, young black women poured into the labor market. Pushed by welfare reform, pulled by a very strong labor market, and assisted by expanded supports for the working poor (such as the Earned Income Tax Credit and child care), low-income single mothers found work at impressive rates, and sometimes (though not often enough) even managed to pull their families out of poverty.

But, despite the booming economy and other social policy changes, the employment rate of young black men (ages 16-24) did not improve—in fact, it worsened. By the end of the 1990s, less than half of less-educated and out-of-school black men between the ages of 16 and 24 were working. Their employment rates were even lower than those of single mothers, who were often caring for small children. Currently, they also finish high school and attend college at much lower rates than young women. A third of all young black men—and the vast majority of high school dropouts—become incarcerated by age 35. And as many as half also become unmarried and non-custodial fathers by this age.

What accounts for the education and employment difficulties of young black men, even relative to young women in the same families and communities? And what can be done to turn this situation around?

The Problem

The “achievement” gap that limits the schooling and basic skills of blacks relative to whites opens up quite early and then becomes compounded over time by the effects of growing up in poor families and segregated schools and neighborhoods. Other labor market

factors—such as persistent discrimination, the continuing loss of jobs in minority urban neighborhoods, and weakening job networks—compound the employment problems of young black men.

Over the past few decades, young black men have been hit very hard by labor market changes. The disappearance of high-paying blue-collar jobs for less-educated men—in manufacturing and other sectors—reduced their earnings and incentives to work. While many high-paying jobs remain in the U.S. labor market, they require more education and skill levels than they did a generation ago.

Also, the “crack” boom of the 1980s diminished the incentives of many young black men to finish school and enter the legal labor market, as short-term rewards improved in the illegal sector. Their willingness to marry before having children declined as well, as the legitimate means of supporting a family dwindled.

The crack market and the crime wave of the 1980s came and went, but they left huge rates of incarceration among young black men in their wake. Employers are extremely wary of hiring young men with criminal records, and in many sectors are forbidden to do so by state or federal law. The young men themselves often suffer from very poor skills and work histories, as well as substance abuse and mental health problems. Even when hired, their abilities and incentives to retain their low-wage, low-benefit jobs are low.

The incentive problems are compounded by the child support system. Since the child support clock keeps ticking, even when these men are behind bars, they inevitably come out of prison with large “arrearages,” or debts to the child support system. While the men are in arrears, states can tax away up to 65 percent of their meager earnings. And, in many cases, the money paid does

not get “passed through” to their families and children if these families have received public assistance in the recent past. These factors induce many young men to simply disappear into the informal labor market, whenever possible.

While these factors are most likely to directly affect young men in their twenties and thirties who have dropped out of school, fathered children out of marriage, and committed crimes, they also seem to negatively affect the hopes and aspirations of much younger boys and men. Some commentators have talked about an oppositional culture developing among young black men, with attitudes and behavioral norms that impede academic success and employment at early ages. But, if accurate, it seems likely that this culture most often blooms in an environment where these young men perceive little chance of success in the mainstream world.

What to Do

So how can we begin to turn this situation around? In my recent book with Peter Edelman and the late Paul Offner, *Reconnecting Disadvantaged Young Men* (Urban Institute Press, 2006), we laid out a three-pronged strategy for improving schooling and employment outcomes for disadvantaged young men: (1) improving schooling and early work experience; (2) improving financial incentives to accept lower-wage jobs; and (3) reducing barriers and disincentives to work for ex-offenders and non-custodial fathers.

Improving Schooling and Early Work Experience

Since the “achievement gap” opens up very early in life, efforts to combat it should begin very early as well. High-

See the January/February 2007 issue of *Focus* for the third article in the three-part series reporting on the Joint Center’s National Opinion Poll of African American Adults About Social Security and Wealth.

quality pre-kindergarten programs should be universally available for children ages three and four, with intensive interventions available even earlier for low-income children. School reforms in the K-8 years should continue to advance, with improved funding for teacher recruitment, retention, and development in poor urban school districts going hand in hand with mobility options for those in failing schools.

The middle and high school years are critical points at which many young men either “connect” or “disconnect” with school and the workplace. We support a range of “positive youth development” efforts, such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters and Quantum Opportunities, to help young men during these years. The high school years should also provide young people with a range of “pathways to success”—either directly through postsecondary education or through the labor market, or some combination of the two.

In particular, we support the expansion of high-quality Career and Technical Education (CTE) options for secondary school students, including Career Academies and apprenticeships for young people. The Career Academies have been rigorously evaluated and appear to raise the earnings of high-risk young men by nearly 20 percent per year without having any negative effects on their schooling. Indeed, high-quality CTE (as opposed to old-fashioned “Voc-Ed”) can enhance postsecondary schooling by raising student motivation for skill development. Apprenticeships can also help link young men with a job market that will provide many jobs for semiskilled workers, as Baby Boomers begin retiring in the near future.

Of course, postsecondary education requires more financial support for lower-income students—through expanded Pell grants and through “merit scholarship” programs in colleges and universities that reward young people with low tuition if they maintain good academic standing. Remedial academic and other supports also are needed to reduce the high dropout rates that young blacks experience in college.

For those who are failing in secondary schools and dropping out, alternative routes

to education and the labor market must be developed. These can include a range of public charter schools, like the “early college high school” models that blend high school and community college for older dropouts, as well as “second chance” training programs for youth, such as the Job Corps, the Service and Conservation Corps, and the “ChalleNGe” program recently pioneered by the National Guard. And, to keep these options from being further fragmented and inaccessible at the local level, local “youth systems” need to be developed that keep track of young people when they finish school and help them reconnect with available opportunities.

For those who are failing in secondary schools and dropping out, alternative routes to education and the labor market must be developed.

Improving Financial Incentives to Accept Lower-Wage Jobs

The low-wage jobs available to so many less-educated young men must be made more appealing so that more will be willing to take them. The easiest and most direct way to do this is to modestly raise the federal or state minimum wage (though not by so much that it could impede employer hiring). Currently, the federal minimum has fallen to its lowest level (relative to other private sector wages) in half a century.

Expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is another way of improving work incentives. Currently, the EITC provides a \$2 per hour subsidy to low-income parents with children, but it provides very little to non-custodial fathers—even if they are paying child support. At a minimum, we should expand the EITC for such fathers, as Governor

Pataki and the state legislature have recently done in New York. More broadly, an expanded EITC for childless adults between the ages of 21 and 40 should be considered as well.

Reducing Barriers and Disincentives to Work for Ex-Offenders and Non-Custodial Fathers

A range of programs that help ex-offenders “reenter” society and the labor market, including those that are “faith-based,” deserve greater public support (as well as continued evaluation efforts). These include “transitional jobs” programs to help prepare them for the private sector job market and “fatherhood” programs that tie child support obligations to a range of supports for those who meet their obligations.

But public policy can be more broadly supportive of efforts to improve employment among these men. States should reconsider the barriers that they have erected through prohibitions against the hiring of offenders in key sectors (like health care and elder care) or through the suspension of drivers’ licenses (which are needed to obtain employment) for those in arrears. Indeed, arrearage adjustment in return for current support payments should be considered, as well as greater “pass-through” of child support collections to the families of those who are paying.

Some of the options described above will require new resources, and all will require more political will than we have seen to date to address a severe set of problems. But the costs of not making these changes will be massive—not only to the young men in question, but also to their families and communities, and to the nation as a whole. It is time for a major national commitment to restore education and employment—and hope and opportunity—to all young men in America. □

Harry J. Holzer is a professor and acting dean of public policy at Georgetown University and a visiting fellow at the Urban Institute. For more information on Reconnecting Disadvantaged Young Men, go to <http://www.uipress.org>.

RECONCEPTUALIZING REACTIVE POLICY RESPONSES TO BLACK MALE COLLEGE ACHIEVEMENT: IMPLICATIONS FROM A NATIONAL STUDY

By Shaun R. Harper

Tariq Dixon and Bryan Barnhill II, both juniors at Harvard University, share a variety of common characteristics, including race and gender. The two black male undergraduates maintain 3.6 cumulative grade point averages, are extremely active on campus and hold leadership positions in multiple student organizations, and aspire to attend law schools upon completion of their bachelor's degrees. Perhaps more interesting are the circumstances from which they emerged. Some may erroneously assume that all Harvard students come from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds and high-resource preparatory schools, which is far from true. Both Tariq and Bryan attended predominantly black public schools, one in Baltimore and the other in Detroit. Although one was raised by two parents and the other in a single-parent home, poverty was a shared reality of their upbringing. Despite these odds, both students were afforded access to one of the most highly regarded universities in the world and are currently demonstrating excellence, both inside and outside of the classroom.

Much can be learned from Tariq and Bryan—insights into their triumphant educational journeys could be instructive to policymakers who endeavor to improve black male participation and achievement in higher education. In 2004, black men comprised only 4.3 percent of all students enrolled at American institutions of higher education, the exact same percentage as in 1976. Literally, no progress has been made in increasing participation rates among this population in over a quarter of a century. Moreover, 67.6 percent of black male undergraduates who start college never finish, which is the worst college completion rate among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in higher education. Political responses to these trends have been few and marginally effective. Clearly, college administrators, faculty, and policymakers need new insights into interventions that increase access and facilitate successful transitions among those who not only enroll, but also excel, persist through baccalaureate degree attainment, and graduate with a host of productive outcomes.

Right or wrong, the reality is that most policy efforts, especially those aimed at

socially disadvantaged groups, are reactive in nature. More problematic is that political stakeholders concerned with black male student achievement at all educational levels typically react to deficiencies and, in some instances, to evidence of educational malpractice among those responsible for the schools in which these students are enrolled. Consequently, policy and resource allocation decisions are made to fix what researchers, parents, educational lobbyists, and sometimes the students themselves identify as contributing factors to racialized and gendered achievement gaps.

A paradigmatic shift in policy formation is advocated in this article. Concerning black male achievement, the question here is: To what should policymakers react? While it is necessary to continually illuminate factors contributing to black male underachievement and the unequal assurance of social justice via education, it is equally important and arguably more instructive to look for insights into “what works”—the programs, people, and enriching educational experiences that helped prepare Tariq and Bryan, for example, for admission to and success at a premier university. In this regard, policy initiatives are still reactive, but typical responses to the dearth of effective educational interventions are balanced with efforts guided by lessons learned from those who transcend socioeconomic disadvantage,

overcome previous educational odds, and successfully navigate their way to and through postsecondary education.

An Anti-Deficit Investigation of Black Male Student Success

Emphasis here is placed on balanced political decision making based on black male students' self-reports of success. In 2006, I constructed an anti-deficit framework for use in a national research study to explore the undercurrents of black male educational achievement, to furnish evidence of good practices in black male access and educational engagement initiatives, and to enable black male college achievers to reflect on critical moments and key experiences that facilitated their success. Interviews were conducted with more than 200 high-achieving black male undergraduates at 42 different colleges and universities across the country. Administrators at each institution, including provosts, deans of students, multicultural affairs professionals, and directors of various student services and academic affairs units, identified black men who met the following criteria: those who had earned cumulative GPAs above 3.0, established lengthy records of leadership and engagement in multiple student organizations, developed meaningful relationships with campus

The National Black Male College Achievement Study Participating Institutions

Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Albany State University, Cheyney University, Clark Atlanta University, Fisk University, Florida A&M University, Hampton University, Howard University, Morehouse College, Norfolk State University, North Carolina Central University, Tennessee State University, and Tuskegee University.

Highly Selective Private Research Universities

Brown University, Columbia University, Harvard University, Princeton University, Stanford University, and University of Pennsylvania.

Public Research Universities

Indiana University, Michigan State University, The Ohio State University, Purdue University, University of Illinois, and University of Michigan.

Private Liberal Arts Colleges

Amherst College, Claremont McKenna College, DePauw University, Haverford College, Lafayette College, Occidental College, Pomona College, Saint John's University (MN), Swarthmore College, Vassar College, Wabash College, and Williams College.

Comprehensive State Universities

California State University Long Beach, California State Polytechnic University, City University of New York, Lock Haven University, Towson University, and Valdosta State University.

administrators and faculty outside of the classroom, participated in enriching educational experiences (e.g., study abroad programs, internships, and summer research programs), and earned numerous merit-based scholarships and honors in recognition of their undergraduate achievements. Each student participated in a two- to three-hour individual interview on his campus and follow-up interviews via telephone.

The national study magnifies lessons learned from those who maximized their college experiences and moves beyond the deficit perspective by highlighting institutional agents, policies, programs, and resources that help black men achieve desired educational outcomes across a range of institutional contexts. From this study emerged a powerful set of policy implications, some of which are presented below.

Improving Access and Outcomes for Black Males in Higher Education

High-achievers on each campus cited numerous programs and initiatives that led to their achievement, which are too numerous to list in this article. The point here is not to present an exhaustive list of implications, but to offer only a few examples of how policy and resource allocation decisions can be informed by the perspectives of successful students. If asked, Bryan might recommend that public resources be allocated to initiatives like the Detroit Area Pre-College Engineering Program, or that participation in the Summer Engineering Academy sponsored by the Minority Engineering Program Office at the University of Michigan be extended to more black male high school students. Bryan attributed his college readiness to engagement in these programs. Others in the study named several other publicly and privately funded programs in their states that were designed to offer racial/ethnic minority students early exposure to college. Reportedly, these types of programs are extremely effective, especially in rural areas and urban centers. Without them, some high-achievers insisted that they would not have been prepared to compete for admission to college or excel once enrolled.

Like Tariq, many participants were from single-parent homes, while others were raised by two parents. Regardless of his

familial structure, each high-achiever noted that his parent(s) held non-negotiable expectations for college attendance. The question was never “if,” but “where.” This was true of participants whose parents were college graduates, as well as those who were first in their families to experience higher education. The salience of this finding makes clear that the expenditure of public resources on programs for parents of black boys and teens that focus on college

Much can be learned from Tariq and Bryan—insights into their triumphant educational journeys could be instructive to policymakers who endeavor to improve black male participation and achievement in higher education.

knowledge and the consistent articulation of college-going expectations would be extremely valuable.

Support for pre-freshmen transition programs for admitted students (often referred to as summer bridge programs) is also essential, as participation proved beneficial for many high-achievers in the study. On many campuses, these programs take place six to eight weeks prior to the start of a student’s first semester; some are part of federally funded TRIO Programs. Several participants indicated that they would not have gained access to their respective institutions were it not for the existence of these programs. Furthermore, participation also enhanced their transitions to college by exposing these students to campus resources, enabling them to foster early relationships with faculty and staff, and providing space for the cultivation of same-race peer support, all of which they relied on once the academic school year officially began. For those who participated, these programs left a memorable imprint on their success. Tariq was not involved in a bridge program, but did arrive at Harvard having participated in a pre-freshmen initiative that afforded him opportunities for meaningful interaction

with other racial/ethnic minority students. As a result, he had a group of peers upon whom he could rely for support during his first semester. Institutions should invest resources into programs of similar design.

The high-achievers remained enrolled at their institutions in part because financing their college education was not a burden. Few held off-campus jobs, not because they came from affluent families, but because their institutional aid packages were such that employment beyond the borders of their campuses was unnecessary. Efforts to dismantle public support for scholarship programs geared toward racial/ethnic minority students contradict findings from this national study. If black male student enrollments are to increase, public resources must be targeted to need- and merit-based financial aid awards for this population. Scholarship programs should be grown instead of eliminated, and more funds must be earmarked at the federal, state, and institutional levels specifically for black male undergraduates.

Conclusion: A Paradigmatic Shift in Policymaking

Although the range of policy implications from more than 200 student interviews could not be presented more fully in this article, the case has been made for a conceptual shift in policymaking related to black male achievement. Examples cited above only provide a glimpse into the instructive insights that can be garnered from those who manage to do well. The important role of black faculty in black student success and the allocation of funds for black male student engagement efforts are just two other examples of findings for which there are policy implications. The paradigm emphasized throughout this article does not seek to dismiss the sociopolitical wrongdoings that continually yield educational disparities for black men. Instead, the rightful juxtaposition of these issues with instructive lessons learned from transcendents like Tariq, Bryan, and other high-achievers would likely move states and institutions beyond stagnation and ill-structured political responses to the troubling status of black male students in higher education. □

Shaun R. Harper (sharper@psu.edu) is an assistant professor and research associate in the Center for the Study of Higher Education at The Pennsylvania State University.

THE CRADLE TO PRISON PIPELINE CRISIS

— Continued from cover page

being locked up involve nonviolent offenses.

Today, a complex web of social, economic, and political elements converge to reduce the odds that poor children of color will grow up to become productive adults and increase the odds that they will face a *Cradle to Prison Pipeline* crisis (a trademarked concept of the Children's Defense Fund). CDF is preparing to release a report on this crisis that we all must name and address to prevent the clock of racial and social progress from turning backwards.

Why There Is A Crisis

The *Cradle to Prison Pipeline* crisis stems from the overarching reality that the United States of America is not a level playing field for all children. At crucial points in their development from birth through adulthood, poor children—and disproportionately large numbers of poor children of color—face many risks that converge, cumulate, and overwhelm fragile young lives and significantly increase their involvement in the criminal justice system.

At crucial points in their development from birth through adulthood, poor children—and disproportionately large numbers of poor children of color—face many risks that converge, cumulate, and overwhelm fragile young lives.

Poverty, exacerbated by race, drives the pipeline as poverty frays the bonds of family and community. A child in a low-income family is 22 times as likely to be neglected or abused. Black children are

more than three times as likely as white children to be poor and about four times as likely to be in foster care. Children in the child welfare system are less likely to do well in school and more likely to enter the juvenile justice system. The lack of health and mental health care, beginning with late or no prenatal care and low birthweight births; poor, single, and teen parents; the lack of quality early childhood experiences and enrichment; unprepared and unstable parents who lack supports; zero tolerance discipline policies; a culture that glorifies materialism and violence; unaddressed mental health problems of mothers, fathers, and children; racial and economic disparities in child and youth serving systems; tougher sentencing guidelines; and too few positive alternatives to the streets and positive role models and mentors all add up to a burden on fragile children that none should have to bear and many are unable to bear. Without significant interventions to prevent and remove these multiple, accumulated obstacles, poor and minority youth are often trapped in a trajectory that leads to marginalized lives and premature death.

A Comprehensive Approach Is Needed

All of these factors need to be addressed in a comprehensive way as children do not come in pieces. But right now CDF is especially focused on addressing unmet child health and mental health needs laid bare by Hurricane Katrina. We are calling for health and mental health coverage for all children in America as the Child Health Insurance Program (CHIP) comes up for renewal in 2007. It is a moral disgrace and practical disaster that more than nine million children—one in nine—are uninsured and that millions more are underinsured. Eighty-seven percent of uninsured children have a working parent and a majority live in two parent families.

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Black children are nearly twice as likely and Latino children are almost three times as likely as white children to be uninsured. Black and Latino women are almost three times as likely as white women to have late or no prenatal care. A healthy start is the foundation of a child's sound development and every child in this rich nation should have it.

A low birthweight baby, one potential risk from late or no prenatal care, is 50 percent more likely to score below average on reading and mathematics measures, and is more likely to experience educational disadvantages that can persist into early adulthood. Adolescents with elevated blood lead levels in childhood report higher levels of delinquency and anti-social behavior. Black children and children from poor families are not only more likely to have had asthma than white or Latino children and children from higher income families, they are more likely to suffer from disabling asthma. Children with *disabling* asthma have almost twice as many restricted activity days and lost school days as children with impairments from other types of chronic conditions. These kinds of childhood health disparities can have a long-lasting impact on future success in school and in life.

The acute dearth of mental health treatment for children in the United

States results in thousands of poor children being unnecessarily sucked into the *Cradle to Prison Pipeline* every year. Health coverage denied to millions of children affects academic performance. Reading scores and school attendance of uninsured children improve dramatically after they become insured. Some studies link health insurance and good health in childhood to increased future earning potential. The U.S. General Accounting Office reported that thousands of families have been forced to relinquish custody of their children to the child welfare or juvenile justice systems in hopes of getting them treatment for unmet mental health needs. A recent Congressional study

Every dollar spent vaccinating children against measles, mumps, and rubella saves \$16 in medical costs to treat those illnesses. The United States stands virtually alone in the industrialized world in not guaranteeing access to health care to all its children.

commissioned by Representative Henry Waxman (D-CA) and Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) reports that two-thirds of juvenile detention facilities in 47 states are holding children solely because they need mental health services unavailable in their communities. This is unconscionable. Over a six-month period in 2003, nearly 15,000 incarcerated children waited for community mental health services in their states, some as young as seven. Other studies report that as many as three-fourths of incarcerated youths have mental health disorders and about one in five has a severe disorder. Studies also show that given the

same behavioral symptoms, more black than white youths are incarcerated and more white than black youths are placed in mental health institutions.

Timely access to preventive health care for all children is not only the right thing, but the smart and sensible thing to do. It costs less to provide health coverage to children than to any other group. Every dollar spent vaccinating children against measles, mumps, and rubella saves \$16 in medical costs to treat those illnesses. The United States stands virtually alone in the industrialized world in not guaranteeing access to health care to all its children. It is time to do better. It is also time to change our perverse investment priorities. States spend three times as much on average per prisoner as per public school pupil. The only universal child policy is a detention or jail cell after a child gets into trouble.

Solving the Problem

The *Cradle to Prison Pipeline* is neither inevitable nor necessary. This is unjust and robs America's children and future. We can reroute children to healthy, productive adulthood. Every *entrance into* the pipeline is also a potential *exit from* it if we build the political will to make it so. And we need to start early before children get sick or drop out of school to prevent them from entering the pipeline in the first place. We need to resist its pull by reweaving the fabric of family and community; closing the adult hypocrisy gap; ensuring high quality community-based parent supports and systems of care including health and mental health; ensuring early Head Start and preschool, and quality schools and after-school and summer programs; and providing caring adult mentors who counter the violent, disrespectful, and destructive messages of our culture and of the streets. Our country's moral compass needs resetting.

Doing right for children is also doing right for taxpayers. We will save over \$1.5 million for every child we divert from the criminal justice system. It's time to choose cost-effective prevention over costly

punishment and prepare self-sufficient citizens and productive workers in our competitive globalizing world. It's time to end the national shame of letting children be the poorest age group of citizens in the richest nation on earth. No other wealthy industrialized nation treats its children so poorly.

We will save over \$1.5 million for every child we divert from the criminal justice system.

But our nation will not change its priorities unless black and Latino leaders and a critical mass of citizens demand it. It's time for a new civil rights movement to put the social and economic underpinnings beneath the hard-earned civil and political rights of the 1950s and 1960s and to restore hope, stability, and a sense of future to our lost children in our lost nation.

If we could afford trillions in tax breaks for the wealthy we can afford the far fewer billions needed to build healthy and educated children. After we ensure children health care in 2007, let's work together in 2008 to expand access to quality early childhood and poverty supports that prevent the abuse and neglect of children. And let's commit to decreasing child poverty by half by 2010 and to ensuring every child a quality education. To do otherwise is to sentence children to social and economic death. We already know what our children need to survive and thrive. Now it's up to responsible adults to provide children what they need. □

Marian Wright Edelman is president and founder of the Children's Defense Fund and its Action Council, whose Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start, and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.

IT'S IN OUR HANDS:

The Essence Call to Action to Secure our Children

— Continued from cover page

- Every day more than a thousand black teens are arrested.
- For comparable drug offenses, African American youth are 48 times more likely than white youth to be sentenced to juvenile prisons.
- One in every eight black men between the ages of 25 and 29 is incarcerated.
- For young black women between the ages of 25 and 34, HIV/AIDS is the leading cause of death.
- The leading cause of death for black boys is homicide.

What should be viewed as a national scandal and greeted with outrage and action is too often accepted with a philosophical shrug and a sigh of exasperation.

Failing schools, crumbling neighborhoods, the carnage in our communities, celebration of thug life, and demeaning, misogynist misrepresentations of black women in rap lyrics and videos—these are the unforgiving facts that have pushed me beyond just writing about the state of emergency that exists in Black America today. These, along with the continuing—and largely ignored—crisis wreaking havoc on the lives of survivors of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, are symptomatic of the moral impoverishment at the heart of America. What should be viewed as a national scandal and greeted with outrage and action is too often accepted with a philosophical shrug and a sigh of exasperation. Our neglected youngsters are being blamed for their suffering, and remedies to address the conditions in which they live are off the

radar screen of most national policymakers. It is this national apathy that forced me to rethink the 2006 Essence Music Festival in Houston.

The Essence Festival

Each year since 1995, some 250,000 middle-class black people have traveled from everywhere to New Orleans to attend our festival. The first Essence festival, in 1995, presented 40 top-tier musical acts on five stages each night in the Superdome and, during the day, a marketplace for black designers, craftspeople, and artists to sell their creations. Additionally, we produced seminars on health, finance, relationships, spirituality, and the popular “Sisters Only” and “Brothers Only” sessions—all daytime events open and free to the public. Since then, the Essence Music Festival has become our “Party with a Purpose,” the largest black entertainment event in the nation.

But this year, after the flood from Katrina, with people still suffering so and many having evacuated to our temporary host city of Houston, we knew it would have to be a different festival. Our purpose had deepened. In my travels throughout the country, I saw again and again that many more African Americans were galvanized and feeling that we must create our own reality. The storm that washed the festival out of New Orleans also washed the scales from black people’s eyes. Everywhere we were seeing and hearing the same things: “That could have been me left on a rooftop for days to die.” “No one will save us but us.” “We’ve got to end poverty and violence in the community and fix the schools.” “We’ve got to do something about the large and disproportionate number of young African Americans being locked up.” “Enough is enough!”

The activist spirit dormant in most quarters of Black America had been aroused. It was evident that people were ready for an assignment. We have long been aware of the escalating crisis among under-served black youth. We have pored over studies and statistics and attended conferences and myriad panel discussions de-constructing the complex challenges that poor black chil-

dren—particularly boys, but also girls—face. Sound solutions have been offered. But what is the plan? Over the July 4th weekend, we would have the rapt attention of tens of thousands of privileged African Americans for three days. What could we all commit to do to heed our children’s desperate cry for help?

In my travels throughout the country, I saw again and again that many more African Americans were galvanized and feeling that we must create our own reality.

There is powerful leadership at the helm of our major civil rights organizations: Bruce Gordon, president of the NAACP; Marc Morial, president of the National Urban League; Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children’s Defense Fund; Ted Shaw, head of the Legal Defense Fund. But there is painfully little connection between the masses of black people and these leading organizations working on our behalf. We live in an age of opportunity and choice, hard won by our veteran civil rights organizations. Too many black folks have forgotten this. At Essence, we are solidly connected to both constituencies—the leadership and the community. The Essence Music Festival in Houston could help to bridge the gap. It would be the perfect place and time to launch a new and needed movement that would engage many more African Americans in the civic and social life of the black community. That initiative is Essence Cares: A Call to Action to Secure our Children.

The Team-Building Begins

And so the outreach—the emailing, telephoning, letter writing, meetings—and team

building began. Mentoring our under-served youth is at the heart of the Essence Cares initiative. So, in addition to reaching out to our most prominent national leaders, all of whom agreed to travel to Houston for the festival, and to grassroots leaders, I contacted Thomas W. Dortch Jr., chairman emeritus of 100 Black Men, and asked if he would recruit two million black men to mentor vulnerable boys. Without pausing for even a second, he agreed and began immediately to enlist them.

The Essence call to action program, which will be managed by the highly regarded Twenty-First Century Foundation, the oldest African American foundation in the nation, asks that every able adult in the community place his or her hand on a vulnerable young person's shoulder, which costs nothing. The call to action asks that the leadership—the mayor, elected and appointed officials, educators, business, religious and secular leaders, and college students, too—in every city and hamlet rally the community to get involved in a massive mentoring program created to secure and guide our struggling children. The community-based initiative asks that African Americans join our trusted civil rights organizations working to open wider pathways to academic and social success for our young and that communities form partnerships that work to turn every failing school into a safe, supportive, top-tier learning environment with a culturally relevant curriculum.

One of the most encouraging experiences in the call to action was the positive response from the presidents of the four national Baptist conventions. These leaders have agreed to encourage their adult members, among their more than 15 million congregants, to sign up for mentor training and certification and open the sanctuary doors after school for homework help and on Saturdays for the accurate teaching of black history.

Another important part of the Essence Cares program is the online component. We are building a website, essencecares.com, to help cultivate African Americans' civic involvement, and give black people a strong voice in the shaping of public policy. Essencecares.com has links to the websites of our four major civil rights organizations—the NAACP, the National Urban League, the Legal Defense Fund, and the Children's Defense Fund—as well as our other partners—Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, the nation's largest mentoring organization, and our sororities and fraternities, who will

work with police departments to help sign up, train, and certify mentors; Operation Hope, which is teaching financial literacy to teens and adults throughout the nation; and MAD DADS, an organization of courageous, committed men who go into prisons and our most crime-ridden communities to encourage and guide struggling young males. An online tool will track the number of mentors signing up so that both the needs and the successes may be monitored. Michael L. Lomax, president the United Negro College Fund, an Essence Cares partner, has agreed to identify business sectors in which African Americans should have an entrepreneurial stake and to help create institutes at selected historically black colleges that prepare young people to become owners, not just employees.

The overarching goal of increasing the high school graduation rates among black students by 10 percent each year will require cities, corporations, small businesses, and religious institutions to embrace, own, and perhaps brand the effort; Atlanta Cares, New York City Cares, Oakland, Ebony, Black Enterprise, Coca-Cola, Starbucks, Verizon, AT&T, Macy's, Proctor & Gamble, Mt. Moriah's, St. Sabin's Cares—all of us with our oars in the water pulling smartly in the same direction.

Activists, politicians, preachers, scholars, and entrepreneurs joined Lomax, Morial, Edelman, Gordon, and Shaw at the launch of the Essence Cares initiative in Houston. Theologian Renita Weems challenged women to take a stand in their churches and engage them in securing vulnerable children. Sylvia Brooks, president of the Houston Area Urban League, helped to create a job fair for evacuees. Former social worker and author Terrie Williams created an interactive workshop on de-stigmatizing and healing depression and led a provocative discussion with former gang members on quelling the violence. Joining them was Deborah Prothrow-Stith, one of the nation's foremost authorities on urban violence. Economist Julianne Malveaux led a workshop on getting out of debt and building wealth. Magic Johnson spoke passionately and instructively about how he has built his business empire. Other speakers offered strategies that address the black community's critical need for wellness and healthy love relationships and that help put an end to the celebration of misogyny and violence in the lyrics and images of music videos.

Caring and committed celebrities joined us

during the holiday weekend that the festival's major sponsor, Coca-Cola, has made possible over the years. Speaking to the hearts of the people were Jamie Foxx, Jill Scott, Mary J. Blige, Shemar Moore, Danny Glover, Jennifer Holiday, Terrence Howard, Common, Mo'Nique, Elise Neal, and Yolanda Adams, along with female emcees Yoyo, MC Lyte, and others well known.

Who feels good about what we have allowed—this state of emergency among our under-served children? While we cannot rewrite the past, we can create a brighter future.

A Pledge to Rescue Our Youth

Who feels good about what we have allowed—this state of emergency among our under-served children? While we cannot rewrite the past, we can create a brighter future. It is in our hands. The question is this: Do we have the will? Will black leaders and our people do what has been most difficult for us in recent times; will we stand together, stick together, and work together in peace and without ego to open wide the pathways to wholeness and self-sufficiency for our children?

Offering her time and poetic voice, Maya Angelou wrote "A Pledge to Rescue Our Youth," a moving affirmation of our children and promise of support that we hope will become a spoken national anthem wherever and whenever we gather—at meetings, conventions, entertainment events, and especially at worship services. "We pledge you our whole hearts from this day forward," it states. Our purpose must be firm, our commitment unwavering.

And now the work begins. □

Susan L. Taylor is editorial director of Essence magazine and a member of the Board of Governors at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. Leaders interested in helping to build the community-care movement can reach Taylor at taylor@essence.com.

JOINT CENTER UPDATES

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Joint Center Health Policy Institute, Release of Dellums Commission Final Report, Panel Discussion and Press Conference, National Press Club, November 15, 2006.

National Black Caucus of State Legislators, 30th Annual Legislative Conference, Jackson, MS, November 29-December 3, 2006.

National Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials, National League of Cities, Congress of Cities and Exposition, Reno, NV, December 5-9, 2006.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

- ***Solutions to the Crises Facing Young Men of Color: The Findings and Recommendations of the Dellums Commission***, by George White
- ***Strategic Options for Managing Diversity in the U.S. Army***, by Lieutenant Colonel Anthony D. Reyes
- ***"Never Again" — Themes from a Forum on Disaster Preparedness and Post-Katrina Reconstruction***, by Tiffany Graddick

* For a complete list of the Dellums Commission background papers, see page 9 of this issue.

GIVE US YOUR PERSPECTIVE

From the standpoint of communities of color in the U.S., what is the most important issue that President Bush needs to address in his State of the Union address this January? What are the specific proposals you think he should make? Please email your response to sdilliplane@jointcenter.org with "SOTU Reader Response" in the subject heading, and we will publish a selection of the responses in the January/February 2007 issue of *Focus*.

For an updated list of Joint Center events and publications, as well as ordering information for Joint Center products, please go to www.jointcenter.org or call 202-789-3500.

READER PERSPECTIVES

In the last issue of Focus, we asked readers to respond to the following questions on immigration: From both an economic and political perspective, do you believe that people of color should welcome or oppose the large inflow of immigrants entering the United States? Why? What policies do you think lawmakers should implement in order to address immigration?

Two of the responses are as follows:

While some people of color are legitimately concerned that the large inflow of immigrants into the United States will result in increased competition for limited resources, we should nonetheless recognize and be prepared to respond to the enormous potential for consolidating our respective economic and political power bases. We have an unprecedented opportunity to make common cause strong enough to place our common issues at the center of the national stage and compel meaningful action.

Our national resources are limited and we live in a dangerous world. To avoid exhausting our resources, to enrich the public fisc, and to help guard against terrorist threats, lawmakers should implement criminal background checks and tight international border controls. Lawmakers should also implement policies to give newly screened and admitted immigrants the means by which to become legitimate economic actors by allowing them to work legally, pay taxes, and learn English. In exchange for this, immigrants would then be able to seek U.S. citizenship and the power of the vote.

- Pamala A. Micbeaux

Ideally, people of color should welcome the inflow of immigrants into American society. From a political perspective, the large numbers of immigrants entering the U.S. will allow minority groups to no longer be disjointed in their quest for civil rights. Historically in this country, those groups with no inherent political power (i.e., wealth, assets, legacies, etc.) must employ other methods to have their voices heard. Usually, this comes in the form of numerical power. If people of color were to galvanize resources, this would most assuredly give them a political voice given the sheer buying power that they possess to affect the economy.

This will make the political landscape fertile for a merger of resources from minority groups in order to push for policy changes such as an increase in minimum wage, better access to health care, aiding minority entrepreneurship, and stronger education initiatives. The only policies that lawmakers should implement concerning immigration should address the influx of undocumented immigrants and issues dealing with acculturating to U.S. culture. Those immigrating to the U.S. should be held responsible for actively learning the culture of the society in which they have chosen to now live. They should learn English and the economic and political landscape of the U.S. so they will have every opportunity to obtain the liberties as outlined in the Constitution.

- Shaun J. Fletcher



Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies
1090 Vermont Ave., NW, Suite 1100
Washington, DC 20005-4928
202-789-3500



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