



Education Policy Analysis Archives/Archivos  
Analíticos de Políticas Educativas

ISSN: 1068-2341

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Current and Future Implications

Education Policy Analysis Archives/Archivos Analíticos de Políticas Educativas, vol. 13, 2005, pp. 1-32

Arizona State University  
Arizona, Estados Unidos

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# EDUCATION POLICY ANALYSIS ARCHIVES

A peer-reviewed scholarly journal

Editor: Sherman Dorn

College of Education

University of South Florida

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Volume 13 Number 25

April 6, 2005

ISSN 1068-2341

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## **Progress of African Americans in Higher Education Attainment: The Widening Gender Gap and Its Current and Future Implications**

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Citation: Kaba, A. J. (2005, April 6). Progress of African Americans in higher education attainment: The widening gender gap and its current and future implications. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 13(25). Retrieved [date] from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v13n25/>.

### **Abstract**

This research argues that despite all of the obstacles that African Americans have confronted in the history of the United States, they have made substantial progress in higher education attainment from the 1970s to the beginning of the 21st century. It reveals that the rise in attainment of college and university degrees has resulted in a substantial increase in living standards and that African Americans are making important economic, social and political contributions to the United States. I present several reasons why black males are not performing as well as black females in higher education attainment. Analyses are also presented regarding the current and future implications of the growing gap between black males and black females.

### **Introduction**

In the beginning of the 21st century, the United States is among the world's leaders in the proportion of people who have attained higher education. Among the over 1 billion African or people of African descent in the world, African Americans have the highest proportion of those with a college education. In the year 2000, there were 2.29 million employed blacks in the United States with bachelor's degrees or higher (National Science Foundation [NSF], 2004, p.176). This

achievement in higher education by African Americans has placed them in a situation in which they are already playing, and will continue to play, a substantial role in investing (economically) in many black nations; just as white people of the United States have used their high level of higher education achievement to invest in many countries in Europe, especially in the post-World War II period (Adebajo, 2004; Kaba, 2004). The achievement in higher education of African Americans, however, appears to have moved in a direction where more females disproportionately enroll in college and attain degrees than males. Although this trend is also occurring in the American college-age population, the gap between black females and black males is substantially wider.

This paper is divided into two parts. The first part examines the gains made by African Americans in the attainment of higher education since the 1970's to the beginning of the 21st century. It provides in-depth data of the levels, types of academic programs, and institutions that black students enroll in. It provides data on the number of blacks that graduate from college and the total number of blacks in the United States who have college degrees. It also provides data on the levels of higher education degrees that black students attained in the 1999-2000 Academic year. The paper will attempt to measure the actual gap between black females and black males in all of the data and the speed at which it is occurring. Part two goes on to examine the reasons or factors responsible for this higher education gap between black females and black males. It presents many examples for this widening gap between black females and males and its current and future implications.

### **College Enrollments of Black Males and Females: 1970s to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Parents of all various backgrounds and racial groups always seek better educational opportunities for their children. In the United States, African American parents have always stressed education for their children because they believe it is their best way out of poverty ("Black Parents are," 2000). The numbers and percentages of minorities in general who enroll in college have increased substantially in the past three decades. From 1990 to 1999, enrollment in higher education by students of color increased by 48.3 percent ("Students of Color Make Enrollment," 2002).

In 1970, an estimated 378,000 African Americans were enrolled in higher education institutions (Franklin and Moss, 1994, p.9). By the mid-1970s, more black females had enrolled in colleges and universities in almost all levels than black males. In 1976, of the 1,033,000 black students enrolled in higher education institutions, 563,100 (54.5%) were women and 469,900 (45.9%) were men. In 1995, out of the 1,473,700 black students enrolled in higher education institutions, the enrollment figure for women increased to 917,800 (62.3%) and black male students' enrollment was 555,900 (37.7%). In 1999, there were 1,640,000 black students enrolled in degree-granting institutions, with black women accounting for 1,037,700 (63.2%) and black men accounting for 603,000 (36.8%) (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2002, April).

The majority of black college enrollments have been in undergraduate programs. In 1976, of the 943,400 black students enrolled in undergraduate institutions, 512,700 (54.3%) were women and 430,700 (45.6%) were men. In 1995, of the 1,333,600 black undergraduate enrollments, 826,900 (62%) were women and 506,800 (38%) were men. Of the 1,470,500 black undergraduate enrollments in degree-granting institutions in 1999, 922,700 (62.7%) were women and 547,800 (37.3%) were men (NCES, 2002, April).

In terms of graduate enrollments, out of the 78,500 black students enrolled in graduate programs in higher education institutions in 1976 (excluding non-resident aliens), 46,500 (59.3%) were females and 32,000 (40.7%) were males. In 1995, of the 118,600 blacks enrolled in graduate

programs, women accounted for 78,800 (66.4%) and men accounted for 39,800 (33.6%). In 1999, out of the 147,800 blacks enrolled in graduate programs in degree-granting institutions, women accounted for 101,600 (68.7%) and men accounted for 46,100 (31.3%). In 1976, there were more black males enrolled in first-professional degree programs in higher education institutions than black women. During that year, of the 11,200 black students enrolled in first-professional degree programs in higher education institutions, black men comprised 7,200 (64.2%) and black women comprised 3,900 (34.8%). However, by 1995, black women had taken the lead in enrollment in first-professional degree programs, accounting for 12,100 (56.3%) and black men accounting for 9,400 (43.7%), of the 21,500 total enrollments in that year. Finally, in 1999, of the 22,500 black students enrolled in first-professional degree programs in degree-granting institutions, black women accounted for 13,400 (59.6%) and black men accounted for 9,100 (40.4%) (NCES, 2002, April).

By October 2000, 15 million students were enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities, with black students accounting for 14.1% of that total ("Scholars of All Ages," 2002). The enrollment rates of black students have continued to rise since the 1970s due to the significant increase of their high school completion rates. For example, in 1972, the percentage of black high school completers aged 18-24 enrolled in college was 27.2%, and by 1997, it had climbed to 39.3 percent (NCES, 1999). The percentage of blacks aged 18 to 24 enrolled in college in October 2000 was 30.3 percent. ("Scholars of All Ages," 2002). Cose (2003, March 3) notes that 23% of young black males go to college, while 35% of young black females do so.

### **Breakdown and the Types of Programs of Black Students Enrolled in Graduate and Professional Schools**

The enrollment of blacks in graduate and professional schools has increased significantly in the past quarter century. For example, according to a 2003 NCES report, in 1976, a total of 78,000 blacks (or 5.85% of all enrollments) were enrolled in graduate schools across the United States. By 2000, that number had climbed to 158,000 (8.5%). In 1976, there were 11,000 (4.5%) blacks enrolled in first-professional degree programs in the United States. By 2000, that figure increased to 24,000 or 7.8% (NCES, 2003, p.060). As of 2002, 1,189 black students were enrolled in America's 26 highest-ranking medical schools, comprising 8% of all enrollments in these institutions. This number is said to be more than ten times the number of black students enrolled in these medical schools three decades ago ("Checking Vital Signs: Blacks Student Enrollment in," 2002). In 2000, over 9,300 African Americans were enrolled in law schools, 50 percent more than the number of blacks enrolled in 1990 (Manning, 2002, July 25).

### **Degree Attainment Rates by Black Students in the United States**

The types of academic degrees awarded to any group of students most often determine their role in the economic, political and social structures within their society and the world. Colleges and Universities in the United States are known to provide high proportions of degrees in diverse academic fields to their students. However, like enrollment rates, overall, black women in the United States have attained and continue to receive more higher education degrees than black men. This section looks at the total number and types of degrees awarded to black students at the end of the 1999-2000 academic year.

**College Degrees Awarded to Black Students in the 1999-2000 Academic Year**

During the 1999-2000 academic year, a total of 244,324 degrees and certificates were awarded to blacks by Title IV degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the United States (50 states and Washington, D.C.). Of that total, black women received 159,480 (65.3%) and black men received 84,844 (34.7%). Of the 58,347 associate's degrees awarded, black women accounted for 38,096 (65.3%) and black men received 20,251 (34.7%). Black women received 68,520 (65.8%) and black men received 35,638 (34.2%) of the total 104,158 bachelor's degrees awarded. Of the 33,566 master's degrees awarded, black women received 23,158 (69%) and black men received 10,408 (31%). Of the 2,147 doctorate degrees awarded, black women received 1,314 (61.2%), and black men received 833 (38.8%). Finally, of the 5,342 first-professional degrees awarded, black women received 3,114 (61.2%) and black men received 2,228 (41.7%). (NCES, 2002, April).

According to Hoffer et al., (2003) in 2002, 2,009 blacks received doctoral degrees in the United States, 5% of the total 39,955 doctoral degrees awarded. Of the total 2,009 doctoral degrees awarded to blacks in 2002, black women comprised 1,160 (57.7%) and 849 (42.3%) black men (pp. 113-115). While the number of black men receiving doctorates has declined, black women continue to increase their share of earned doctorates. Porter and Bronzaft (1995) pointed out that from 1982 to 1992, the number of black men earning doctorates declined by 20% and that by 1992, black women outnumbered black men 565 to 386 (p.162). Solorzano (1995) points out that from 1980 to 1990, 11,217 blacks or African Americans had doctorates, with black females comprising 5,823 (52%) and black males comprising 5,394 (48%) (p.19).

**Total Numbers and Percentages of All Non-Hispanic Black Males and Females 18 Years and Over, Degree Holders: March 2002**

Educational attainment data for the year 2002 showed a substantial rise in the overall number of degrees held by blacks 18 years and over in the United States. The data showed that because higher education attainment is such an important component of upward mobility in the U.S., the current levels of educational achievement of African Americans have led to many of them becoming prosperous. Let us examine the breakdown of the total number of degrees held by blacks 18 years and over in the United States in March 2002.

According to the United States Census Bureau, of the 879,000 non-Hispanic blacks 18 years and over with associate's degrees (occupational), in March 2002, black women comprised 548,000 (62.3%) and black men comprised 331,000 (37.7%). Of the 829,000 associate's degrees (academic) held by blacks 18 years or older in March 2002, women accounted for 526,000 (63.4%), and men accounted for 303,000 (36.6%). In March 2002, there were 2,488,000 non-Hispanic blacks 18 years and over with bachelor's degrees, with black women comprising 1,440,000 (58%), and black men comprising 1,048,000 (42%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003, March 21). In 1970, 4.4% of blacks in the United States had at least a bachelor's degree. By 2002, it had increased to 17 percent ("The Remarkable and Steady Progress," 2004).

The gap is wider between black men and women in master's degree attainment. In March 2002, the number of non-Hispanic black women with master's degrees was 502,000 (63%), while the number of men with master's degrees was 294,000 (37%), of the total 797,000 master's degrees holders. In March 2002, the total number of non-Hispanic blacks with professional degrees was 142,000, with black women accounting for 76,000 (53.5%) and 66,000 (46.5%) for black men (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003, March 21).

Finally, in March 2002, the total number of non-Hispanic blacks 18 years and over with doctorate degrees was 105,000, with men accounting for 63,000 (60%), and women accounting for 42,000 (40%) (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Educational Attainment of the non-Hispanic**  
**Black Population 18 Years and Over: March 2002**

		High school	Asso.degrees	Asso.degrees	Bachelor's	Master's	Professional	Doctoral
	Population	graduates	occupational	academic	degrees	degrees	degrees	degrees
	23,449,000	7,976,000	879,000	829,000	2,488,000	797,000	142,000	105,000
Males	10,369,000	3,592,000	331,000	303,000	1,048,000	294,000	66,000	63,000
%	44.2	45	37.7	36.6	42	37	46.5	60
Females	13,080,000	4,373,000	548,000	526,000	1,440,000	502,000	76,000	42,000
%	55.8	55	62.3	63.4	58	63	53.5	40

Source: "Educational Attainment of the population 15 Years and Over, by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: March 2002. U. S. Census Bureau. Internet Release date: March 21, 2003.

It is important to note that based on current black degree attainment trends, black women are set to surpass black men in the total number of doctoral degree holders within the black population in the United States in the next decade. For example, of the 2,147 doctoral degrees awarded to blacks in the 1999-2000 academic year, black women received 1,314 (61.2%) and black men received 833 (38.8%) (NCES, 2002, April). Why do African American females continue to be disproportionately enrolled in higher education and receive more degrees than their male counterpart? What are the factors causing the widening educational gap between black females and black males? Let us examine some of the answers to these questions.

### **Some Factors Cited for the Widening Higher Education Gap Between Females and Males**

As already noted in this paper, black women have not only made substantial gains in higher education attainment since the 1970s, but they have also created a very wide gap between themselves and black men. This substantial higher educational attainment gap, if not addressed immediately, will only continue to grow and may have serious implications for future generations of blacks in the United States. Several factors have been cited for the widening gap in higher education attainment between black women and black men in the United States. For this paper, the following six factors will be examined: (1) significant high school dropout and low college graduation rates for black males, (2) high proportion of black males in the United States military, (3) more black females within the total black population than black males, (4) black males entering the workforce at an early age instead of college, (5) the high death rate of college aged black males, and (6) the disproportionately high number of black males in local jails and federal and state prisons.

### **School and College Dropout Rates of Black Students**

The high dropout rate of blacks, especially males, in primary and secondary schools and the low rates of degree completion in college have also been significant factors in the increasing gap in higher educational attainment rates between black males and females. Tatum (2003)

presents this observation of young black males as "...disproportionately represented in the categories of special-needs students and low achievers. Their high school dropout rates have increased since 1990. They are underrepresented on college campuses and in most professions. Black males are the only group to hold the distinction of having more of their number in prison than in college. They are the only group of males to be outnumbered by women in college enrollment in the United States" (p.623).

Although blacks have lowered their high school dropout rate in the past 30 years, it is still fairly high and significant. For example, in 1972, the status dropout rate for black 16-to-24 year olds was 21.3%. By October 2000, it had declined to 13.1% or 663,000 out of a total population of 5,058,000 (NCES, 2002, p.025). Black male students tend to drop out of school at higher rates than black female students do. Cose (2003, March 3) notes that 13.5% of young black females in the United States are high-school dropouts, while more than 17% of young black males are. Several factors have been cited for the significant dropout rates of black male students.

Research shows that black male students are the most likely to be suspended while in high school. Black male adolescents are reported to outnumber their white counterparts on suspension and expulsion lists, and that although they comprise "... 17% of the total school population, they account for 32% of suspensions and 30% of all expulsions.... the African American male student has ... a 1 in 4 chance of becoming a dropout statistic from high school..." (Bailey and Paisley, p.11).

The poor performances of minority students especially black males is another factor that contributes to their high dropout rates: "Today, African-American, Hispanic, and American Indian students still perform well below other students in all subjects at all grade levels tested. In some cases, the gap has widened because the scores of minority students have declined; in other cases, the performance of white students has improved, while the performance of minority students has remained relatively stable" (Olson, 1997). Olson added that poor and minority students tend to be in classes in which their teachers did not even minor in the field:

In the 1990-91 school year, for example, only 42% of math classes in high schools with majority-minority enrollments were taught by teachers who were math majors. By comparison, in high schools with few minority students--less than 15% of enrollment--69% of math classes were taught by math majors. More than two-thirds of African-American and Hispanic students attend predominantly minority schools.<sup>1</sup>

Poverty plays a significant role in the poor performance of black males and the eventual dropout of many from schools (Margo, 1991). Wilson (1991) points out that: "Poverty in the United States has become more urban, more concentrated, and more firmly implanted in large metropolises, particularly in the older industrial cities with immense and highly segregated black and Hispanic residents" (Wilson, 1991, p.1). In 2002, the national poverty rate in the United States was 12.1% or 34.6 million people. However, for blacks the poverty rate in 2002 was 24.1% or 8.6 million (Proctor and Dalaker, 2003). The median net worth for all black families in the United States in 2001 was \$19,000 and \$120,900 for non-Hispanic whites ("Vital Signs: Statistics that Measure," 2003). As Kaplan (2003) notes: "...if one visits Southeast Washington, D.C., or the Englewood district of Chicago, one enters the Third World. Uneducated, out-of-work, hopeless masses endure a life cluttered by dope and drive-by shootings" (p. 12). Olson (1997) writes that:

In schools where more than 30% of the students are poor, 59% of teachers report that they lack sufficient books and other reading resources. By contrast, only 16% of teachers in more affluent schools report such shortages. ...Poor and minority

students are more likely to be taught a low-level curriculum with low standards for performance. Only one in four students from low-income families is placed in a college-preparatory sequence of courses. In contrast, poor and minority students are overrepresented in less challenging general and vocational education programs.<sup>2</sup>

Garibaldi (1997) points to a 1996 U.S. Department of Education study that found that: "...among urban students, 40% attended high-poverty schools-- that is, schools with high concentrations of poor students (40% or more)-- compared to 12% who attended low-poverty schools (those that enrolled 5% or fewer poor students). Only 10% of suburban students and 25% of rural students attended high-poverty schools, and 36% of suburban students attended low-poverty schools" (p.111). Orr (2003) argued "...that wealth is not only a determinant of [academic] achievement, in general, but can help to explain the gap in black-white test scores" (p.282). Mare and Tzeng (1989) pointed out that: "Because parents' education, employment, and economic wealth improve with age, and because younger parents experience stronger competing role demands than older parents, parental age influences children's environment" (p.108).

Culture is also cited as an important factor in determining the success of black males in school. Smith-Maddox (1998) pointed out that "Culture" plays a significant role in the effective teaching of minority students, especially African American students. Cleveland (2003) asserted that black male students are oftentimes misdiagnosed by teachers who do not understand the culture of African-Americans and "As a result, many of these African-American males are labeled and placed in special education classes, suspended at higher rates than their white counterparts because of zero tolerance policies, and end up in the prison-industrial complex where there are more African-American males in prison than in college" (p 85). Bailey and Paisley (2004) also pointed out that black male adolescents are placed in special education classes at a rate 3 times higher than their white counterparts (p.11).

Gamoran and Mare (1989) asserted that: "Educational policies, practices, and organizational forms that are intended to raise levels of school performance are often accused of promoting educational stratification. Such is the case with academic tracking, the system of assigning high school students to different curricula according to their purported interests and abilities" (p.1147).

Research have also shown that negative experiences of minority students in schools and the societies in which they live tend to lead to their psychological disengagement from academic activities (Verkuyten and Brug, 2003; Ogbu, 1990, 2003). Ogbu (1990) points out that: "Warm Springs Indian children in Oregon fail to learn under white teachers because they require the use of rules of speech in the classroom different from those with which the children are familiar in their community. Similar situations exist among black children" (p.144).

According to Somers and Piliawsky (2004), researchers have also pointed out that youth exposed to many "...risk factors simultaneously tend to experience learning or behavioral problems." Those risk factors include living in poverty, larger family size, low levels of maternal intelligence, self esteem, and education" (p.17). The following variables have been identified as strongly associated with underachievement of students in urban areas: "teachers' demonstrations of caring, respect, and interest in children's growth, teacher expectations for children's achievement, curriculum relevance, class size, disengagement from school-related activities, students' own confidence in their abilities to achieve, high mobility in school attendance, parental expectations and involvement, level of parents' education, and poverty or low income" (pp.17-18).

Some scholars or reports have pointed out that that many young black students fear that



success in their studies caused them to be labeled as “Acting White” (“Acting White” Is it a Silent Killer,” 1997; Horvath and Lewis, 2003). There also have been claims that perhaps the current setup of the United States’ education system has been to the disadvantage of not only black male students, but to male students in general: “Some question whether our primary and secondary education systems, now dominated by female educators, are designed for female success and male disengagement” (Mohraz, 2000, p. B7).

Teacher shortages caused by low salaries, especially in black urban school areas such as New York City and Newark, New Jersey, also result in problems for students and their eventual dropout. When the salary is enticing, however, qualified teachers tend to take jobs in those cities. For example, Rothstein (2002, September 25), reported in the *New York Times* on September 25, 2002 that when the starting salary for New York City public schools was increased, qualified teachers quickly applied for teaching positions: “But this year in New York City, the shortage mostly disappeared, despite the difficult conditions in many urban schools. Qualified teachers flocked to New York for starting salaries of \$39,000 a year, up from \$32,000 in 2001. Those with experience elsewhere started as high as \$61,000. Certified teachers left parochial schools, the suburbs and other professions to work for the city.

### **African American Students’ College Completion Rates**

In higher education, a significant number of black students, including those with full athletic scholarships do not graduate after six years or attain a degree at all. The national college graduation rate of blacks in 2002 was 39%, compared with 60% for whites. For black women, the college graduation rate was 44%, and 33% for black males (“The Nation’s Colleges Show a Modest,” 2003, p. 109). Preparation in high school plays a major role in the readiness of blacks for college. According to the NCES (1998), 53.1% of the 1992 black high school graduates were marginally qualified or unqualified for admission to a 4-year college or university. Only 9.9% were highly and 6.3% very highly qualified for admission to a 4-year college or university. Also, in 1995, the percentage of all black students who enrolled in colleges and universities and took at least one remedial course was 24.3 percent (“Vital Signs: Statistics that Measure,” 2003). Among some of the reasons cited for this low college graduation rate are lack of adequate academic preparation of black students coming from predominantly minority schools, insufficient funds apart from financial aid, and the intimidating atmosphere of colleges for some minority students coming from neighborhoods and schools with no significant number of whites present (Vandenabeele and Upton, 2001, July 15). Moreover, debt is also a burden for most black students. For example, black students graduate with substantial student loan debt and borrowed \$2,000 more on average than the typical borrower. As a result 55% of them graduate with unmanageable debt. (King and Bannon, 2002).

An increasing number of young blacks have had the opportunity to attend college through athletic scholarships since the 1970s. For example, according to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), there were 16,672 black student athletes (those receiving athletic aid) enrolled full-time in Division I institutions in fall 2000-2001, with black male student athletes accounting for 12,226 (73.3%) and black female student athletes accounting for 4,446 (26.7%).

However, unlike black female student athletes, black male student athletes have not been able to maximize these scholarship opportunities by graduating with a degree after six years. For instance, according to a September 26, 2002 NCAA new release, 43% of African American male students who entered colleges and universities in 1995-96 graduated within six years, and 60% of black female student athletes graduated during that same period. In basketball, the sport that is heavily concentrated with black males, only 28% graduated within six years for those who entered

colleges and universities in 1995-96. In addition, of the 64 colleges and universities that comprised the 2003 NCAA basketball tournament, the graduation rate for black female players who participated was 66% and the average for black male players was 35%. Also, of the 64 women's teams in the tournament, fourteen universities had a 100% graduation rate for black female athletes and only three universities (Stanford, Butler, and the University of North Carolina at Asheville) had a 100% graduation rate for black male athletes ("Basketball Champions Have Vastly," 2003). The statistics on black student athletes' achievement show that even in situations where black males and females have the same college opportunity, black females tend to perform better than black male students.

Many studies have shown that women in general tend to perform better than men in high school or college because "... women are more likely than their male peers to hold high educational aspirations, to enroll in college, and to persist to degree attainment" (Hollenshead and Miller, 2001, Spring). Researchers claim that the increasing educational disparity between females and males in the United States reflects not only the success of females, but also the increased educational problems of males, who comprised 51% of the college-age population. Male students in general comprise a substantial majority of students enrolled in special education classes. Female students, according to researchers, have learning styles that "are more conducive to the college classroom." (Fletcher, 2002, p. A01).

Other researchers claim that males are more likely to be drawn into popular culture and that minority male students coming from poor families tend to find jobs and work while they are in school. A survey result of college freshmen "... has found consistently that men are more likely than women to spend large amounts of time watching television, partying and exercising during their senior year of high school. Women, meanwhile, report spending more time than men studying or doing homework, talking with teachers outside of class and doing volunteer work"<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, data collected by the College Board shows that while in high school, more female students than male students enroll in college prep programs, and that female students are more likely than male students "to take high school honors courses in most subjects and that girls report having higher academic aspirations than boys"<sup>4</sup>

Stahl (2002, October 31) reports that black male students are not the only ones lagging behind their black female counterparts, but white male students are also lagging behind their white female counterparts. For example, according to Bergman (2003), in 2002, women had surpassed men in the United States in attainment of high school diplomas, with those age 25 and over comprising 84.4 % and 83.8% for men. For those age 25 and over, 28.5% of men and 25.1% of women had at least a bachelor's degree or more in March 2002. However, for those 25 to 29 years old, 31.8% of women and 26.9% of men had a bachelor's degree or more. Also, the year 2002 became the first time when among citizens of the United States who earned doctorates, women comprised 51% of the total 25,936 doctorates awarded (Hoffer, et al., 2003, pp. 113-115).

A May 2004 study by the National Science Foundation (NSF) shows that undergraduate enrollment of black male students at all colleges and universities in the U.S. increased each year from 1994 to 2000 (503,512, 507,380, 513,676, 521,120, 545,285, and 576,350). However, for white male students there was a significant decline in undergraduate enrollment during that period (3,963,400, 3,918,342, 3,890,906, 3,858,521, 3,849,404, and 3,952,332). For black, Hispanic and white female college students, they experienced positive undergraduate enrollment growth, but there was slight stagnation for white female students during that same period (p.26). Stahl reports that in schools all across the United States, female students have been performing better than their male student counterparts. She provided an example of a school in Massachusetts, named Hanova High School, where for nine straight years a female student was the school's valedictorian. According to interviews conducted with authorities with experience in American

education, Stahl reports that a big factor responsible for male students lagging behind female students is that society tends to encourage boys to become athletes rather than students. She provides examples of fathers who encourage their sons to become athletes instead of preparing for college. According to Stahl, “‘Girls don’t necessarily get teased as much if they do well,’ says Meredith, a graduating senior at Hanover High. ‘I think that boys are more--you know, expected to be the star athletes, you know, to bring home the football title,’ says Tom, another graduating senior.”<sup>5</sup>

Stahl continued by pointing out that in colleges and universities in the country the gap between female and male students is also widening: “The picture doesn’t get much brighter for young men when they get to college.... Women are streaming into business schools and medical schools, and this year, women will be the majority at the nation’s law schools.” Because of this increasing disparity, Stahl reports that some institutions are beginning to practice Affirmative Action for male students in order to have a 50:50 student body. As for the future consequence of this disparity, Stahl quotes a scholar who asserts that: “We can’t have a country of women in white-collar jobs and men in blue-collar jobs. That’s not going to be good for this society”<sup>6</sup>

As these examples illustrate, this is the current condition that young males, particularly young black males are experiencing. Studies have “...found that blacks invariably express almost a reverence for education while consistently underachieving.” (Mickelson, 1990, p.44). Young children could have the intention to excel in school, but many other factors outside their control could disrupt that intention. Most black male children come from single-parent female households and also go on to find either a very small number or no black male teachers to serve as their role models in school. For example, according to a U.S. Census report, in 1999, there were 8.4 million black families in the United States. Forty-seven percent or 3.948 million of that total were married couple families, 45% were maintained by black women with no spouse present, and 8% were maintained by black men with no spouse present (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999, March). In addition, as has been pointed out in this paper, most minority youths (especially blacks) are enrolled in schools that not only have teachers who are not trained in the fields that they teach, but also degrees in the field of Education, which are specifically awarded to trained teachers, are attained disproportionately by black females. For example, of the 7,556 bachelor’s degrees in Education awarded to black students at the end of the 1999-2000 academic year, black females accounted for 5,573 (73.8%), and black males accounted for 1,983 (26.2%) (NCES, 2001, April).

As for the absence of black fathers in black homes, it has also been pointed out that most of them are in jail or prison. For example, one report claims that 59% of American prisoners are fathers.<sup>7</sup> As Raspberry (2002, October 14) notes: “... overuse of incarceration also has the effect of taking huge numbers of black fathers away from their families and out of their communities. Well, aren’t the communities better off without those criminals? As Clear [Professor at John Jay College in New York City] notes, however, these men aren’t only criminals. They are also likely to be family male role models and disciplinarians (even when their own behavior is less than exemplary) and, as such, important in early socialization of the children, especially the boys” (p. A29). If both black and white females in the United States are now outperforming their male counterparts in schools and higher education, why then is it that on average they are still not performing as well as males in the SATs? Let us examine whether this trend is likely to reverse.

### **The Shift in Academic Performance Between Males and Females in the U.S.**

It is important to point out a contradiction in black females’ academic success over black males and in general, the increasing females’ academic success over males in the United States.

Male students, including black male students, continue to score higher on the SAT than female students in the past three decades. For example, in each of the years from 1972 to 2002, males combined verbal and math scores on the SAT were higher than females. In 1972 the combined SAT score for college-bound male seniors was 1058, and 1018 for females. In 2002, it was 1041 for males and 1002 for females. For black college-bound seniors in 2002, the combined average SAT score for black females was 851, and 865 for black males, 14 points higher than black females. In each of the years from 1972 to 2002, male students in general scored higher on the verbal and math sections than females, but in 2002 black female students scored higher on the verbal section (432) than black males (427). Black males scored higher in math (438) than females (419) ("College-Bound Seniors: A Profile," 2002, July 30).

However, this trend might be reversing. "Studies had shown that females predominated among high-IQ blacks. One study of blacks whose IQs were 140 and up found that there were more than five times as many females as males at these levels.... Meanwhile, white males and white females have the same average IQs, with slightly more males at both the highest and lowest IQs..." levels (Sowell, 2002, October 1).

More black females scored 140 or more on IQ tests than black males because the chances of scoring such high numbers are higher if one has a masters degree or higher, regardless of race, ethnicity or gender. If one carefully studies high IQ whites (those with scores of 140 or more), like black females, one might find that most of them might tend to hold at least graduate degrees. White females are also earning more master's degrees than white males. For example, in 2001, of the 293,390 master's degrees awarded to whites, white women received 179,684 (61%), and white men received 113,706 (39%). (NSF, 2004, pp. 122, 127, & 130). Therefore, if the degree attainment levels especially in graduate and professional schools continue to be substantially higher for black females than black males as they are now, that significant IQ gap between black females and black males will continue to widen. A similar gap may eventually also increase among whites if the total number of white females with at least a master's degree surpass that of white males.

The average IQ score for white females and white males is equal, with slightly more males at the top because although until the 1970s white males had far more educational opportunities than white females. The substantial achievement in higher education by white females in the past three decades has led to average rates of high IQ scoring whites. But the declining academic performance of white males when compared with white females might partly be responsible for the slightly more males at the lowest IQ levels.

We also see a similar situation with geniuses. For example, "While there are statistically more boy geniuses than girl geniuses, far more boys than girls are found at the very bottom of the academic ranks."<sup>8</sup> Here too, one might argue that there are more male geniuses because women have only gained full access to education in the United States, since the 1970s. It is possible that in the coming decades and centuries we may have more female geniuses or Nobel winners than males.

For a comparative perspective on the shift in academic performance of the sexes, Table 2 presents data of the ranking of the performances of students provided by the Office of National Statistics, the United Kingdom. The table shows the proportion of boys and girls aged 16 who achieved 5 or more GCSEs (grade A\*-C), in 1999. Of the various ethnic groups, 66% of Indian girls (India, South Asia) achieved 5 or more General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) (grade A\*-C), 55% of white girls, 54% of Indian boys, 46% of black girls, 45% of white boys, 44% of those who listed as other group girls, 40% of other group boys, 37% of Pakistani/Bangladeshi girls, 31% of black boys, and 22% Pakistani/Bangladeshi boys. These figures show that females rank high among the best performing students (Table 2).

**Table 2**  
**Proportion of boys and girls aged 16 who achieved**  
**five or more GCSEs (grade A\*-C), 1999.**

<b>England &amp; Wales</b>	<b>%</b>
Indian girls	66
White girls	55
Indian boys	54
Black girls	46
White boys	45
Other group girls	44
Other group boys	40
Pakistani/Bangladeshi girls	37
Black boys	31
Pakistani/Bangladeshi boys	22

Source: Office of National Statistics, United Kingdom, Published. 2002, December 12.

"Proportion of boys and girls aged 16 who achieved 5 or more GCSEs (grade A\*-C), 1999," Retrieved on December 17, 2003 from <http://www.government-statistics.org.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=268>.

### **Black Males in the United States Military**

The United States military is home to hundreds of thousands of mostly young African Americans. Two major factors have contributed to the substantial number of African Americans in the U.S. military. First, African Americans, like Americans of other racial groups, take the defense of their country very seriously and have always volunteered to defend it. Blacks, especially black males, have been involved in the defense of the United States from the American Revolutionary War to the Civil War, the War of 1812, and the Spanish-American War. They have fought in both World Wars in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and every war after that which has involved the United States. For example, during World War I, 200,000 African Americans fought in Europe, and during World War II more than 1.2 million also fought to free Europe (Hansen, 2000; Simmons, 2000).

Second, because African Americans represent the highest proportion of Americans who are in poverty, they like many of their counterparts from other ethnic and racial groups who are also poor, have used enlistment in the U.S. military to further their education and especially in attaining college and university degrees. Halbfinger and Holmes (2003) reported that the current U.S. Military is over represented by minorities and working-class whites, while wealthy and underclass Americans are "essentially absent" (p. A1). The United States military has a very good record of providing educational opportunities to its members. A substantial portion of the increase in educational attainment for blacks, whites, Hispanics, and other racial and ethnic groups in the United States in the post World War II era has been due to the U.S. military. For African Americans, their ties with the U.S. military starts in high school and college ROTC programs. For example, "...ROTC programs are a major source of scholarship funds for black college students. And ROTC programs provide a secure career track out of poverty" ("Black Colleges are the Primary," 1997). Also, the U.S. military "...operate highly prestigious

undergraduate military academies offering a first-class education.... Of the nation's 20 black men... who are generals or admirals with at least two stars, all are college graduates" ("Top African-American Military Brass," 1998). Furthermore, "Contrary to popular belief, blacks in the Army are not being prepared for roles as cannon fodder for the next U.S. ground war. In fact, blacks make up only 9 percent of the new recruits for the infantry.... Blacks in the Army tend to concentrate in administrative and technical fields and are more likely to consider the Army as a career" ("Black Colleges are the Primary," 1997). As a result, not only has the U.S. military helped to provide college education to a substantial number of blacks, whites, Hispanics and other racial and ethnic groups in the United States, it has also produced and continue to produce a significant number of leaders in politics, business, religion and other important sectors of the American society. In her autobiography, Dickerson (2000) notes of the U.S. military: "In the Air Force there was order, there were rules, there was a yellow brick road to advancement and any number of people not only willing to show me the way but inextricably bound to my personal and professional development" (p. XIII). African Americans have been successful in increasing their attainment of college and university degrees because close to 100% of enlisted men and women have at least a high school diploma. For instance, in 2000, 97% of enlisted members had a high school diploma, while 86% of the civilian population had a high school diploma (Military Family Resource Center, n.d.).

In the beginning of the 21st century, there are over a quarter of a million blacks in the U.S. military. According to the 2004 *New York Times Almanac*, as of 2000, there were 272,818 (20.1%) African Americans in uniform in the U.S. military, with officers comprising 18,309 (8.5%) (p.153). The proportion of black officers, though smaller than either their proportion in the overall military or the civilian population, has increased significantly since the 1970s and will continue to increase in the future. For example, in 1973, almost 3% of the service officers were black. By 1997, that figure increased to only 7.5 percent (Wright, 2002, p. 260).

As for black females in the military, although their proportion is not as substantial as those of black males, they tend to have higher proportion within the officers corps, partly because of their higher level of education when compared to black males. As Dickerson (2000) notes: "My two and a half years of college had recruiters hounding me and earned me two stripes upon enlisting—the rank, responsibilities, and pay of an E-3 airman first class rather than the E-I [1] airman mere high school graduates were awarded (p. x). In 1973, there were 6,633 (15.7% of all enlisted women in the military) African American women enlisted in all the services. The number of black female officers during that year was 442 (or 3.5% of all women officers). By 1979, the number of enlisted black females in the U.S. military rose to 31,266 (or 23.9% of all women in the military) and 1,677 officers (comprising 8.9% of all women officers)" (Moore, 1990, p.62).

Wright (2002) points out that in the late 1990s, around 30% of military women were African American, with 30% of them enlisted and 13% as officers (p. 262). According Halbfinger and Steven (2003, March 30), "Perhaps most striking is the number of enlisted women who are black: more than 35 percent, according to Pentagon figures, indicating not only that black women enlist at higher rates, but that they stay in the military longer. In the Army, in fact, half of all enlisted women are black, outnumbering whites, who account for 38 percent" (p. A1). To have an idea of the actual number of black females in the U.S. military, in 2000, there were 202,601<sup>9</sup> women in uniform. If black women comprised 30%, then during that year there were 60,780 them in uniform.

### **More Black College Age Females than Black Males in the United States**

Another factor responsible for more black females attaining higher education than black males is that they out-number black males within the college age black population in the United States and also tend to attend colleges and universities at older ages. In addition, black females on average are older than black males. For example, as of July 2001, of the 26,103,000 blacks age 16 and over in the U.S., 14,022,000 (53.7%) were females and 12,081,000 (46.3%) were males. Moreover, the median age for blacks during that period was 30.6 years. The median age for black females, however, was 32.3 years and 28.8 years for black males. The mean age for all blacks during that time was 32.5 years. The mean age for black females was 33.8 years and 31 years for black males. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, January 13). To look at this another way, in 1999, 33% of the black population was under age 18 and 8% was age 65 and over. For black females, 30% were under 18 years and 9% were 65 years and over. For black males, 36% were under 18 years and 7% were 65 years and over. (U.S. Census, 2000, January 13).

### **Black Males in the Workforce**

Researchers have pointed out that a significant number of young African American males and young American males in general, tend to enter the workforce after high school or when they drop out of school. A substantial number of young black males are also unemployed at any given time. For example, in 2003, 20.3% of African Americans aged 16-24 were neither enrolled in school nor employed.<sup>10</sup> When one examines blacks in the United States civilian labor force, one finds that not only are more black women than black men working, but also black women are also substantially represented in the top professions than black men. This is due largely to their higher levels of education or degree attainment than black men. In the United States, the more academic credentials one has, the better his or her chances of upward mobility. For example: "Over an adult's working life, high school graduates can expect, on average, to earn \$1.2 million; those with a bachelor's degree, \$2.1 million; and people with a master's degree, \$2.5 million, according to a report released today by the Commerce Department's Census Bureau. People with doctoral (\$3.4 million) and professional degrees (\$4.4 million) do even better." (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002, July 18). Let us now examine the total employment numbers of blacks and the breakdown of the various types of jobs they hold as of 2000.

### **Blacks in the United States Labor Force: March 2000**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2001, February 22), as of March 2000, the total number of blacks 16 years and over in the civilian labor force was 16,522,068 (65.8%), and 8,589,032 (34.2%) were not in the civilian labor force. As of March 2000, of the 11,272,000 black males 16 years and over in the United States, 7,675,000 (68.1%) were in the civilian labor force, and 3,597,000 (31.9%) were not in the civilian labor force. Of the 13,839,000 black females 16 years and over, 8,847,000 (63.9%) were in the civilian labor force, and 4,992,000 (36.1%) were not in the civilian labor force.

As of March 2000, of the 7,675,000 black males 16 years and over in the civilian labor force, 7,055,000 (91.9%) were employed and 619,000 (8.1%) were unemployed. Of the 8,847,000 black females 16 years and over as of March 2000, 8,193,000 (92.6%) were employed and 654,000 (7.4%) were unemployed. Overall, as of March 2000, of the total 16,522,000 blacks 16 years and over in the civilian labor force, 15,248,000 (92.6%) were employed and 1,273,000 (7.4%) were

unemployed (U.S Census Bureau, 2001, February 22). According to the *Los Angeles Times* (2004, January 8), "The unemployment rate of black males between 16 and 24 is 52%" (p. B14).

As data on blacks' participation in the labor force show, black women are moving upward to the more desirable jobs in the United States, while black men must work hard to reduce their high proportion in the low wage laborers category. As of March 2000, there were 1,249,000 (17.7%) black males 16 years and over in the civilian labor force, in managerial and professional specialty, the top occupational category in the nation. There were 2,062,000 (25.2%) black women 16 years and over in the civilian labor force, in the managerial and professional specialty in March 2000. There were 1,311,000 (18.6%) black males 16 years and over in the civilian labor force, who were in the technical, sales, and administrative support. For black women, 3,110,000 (38%) were in technical, sales, and administrative support. There were 1,337,000 (19%) black males and 2,112,000 (25.8%) black females who were in the service occupations. There were 1,025,000 (14.5%) black males and 162,000 (2%) black females in precision production, craft, and repair. There were 2,013,000 (28.5%) black males and 740,000 (9%) black females who were operators, fabricators, and laborers. Finally, there were 120,000 (1.7%) black males and 7,000 (0.1%) black females in farming, forestry, and fishing (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001, February). The U.S. Census Bureau also reported that in 2000, there were 119,000 African American engineers, 45,000 physicians, and 48,000 lawyers (U. S. Census Bureau, 2002, January 17).

Several factors have been cited for the lack of job opportunities for black males and the consequences that come with them. Moore (2003) points out that:

Diminishing employment opportunities for low-skilled, less educated, inner-city residents have resulted in high levels of unemployment, particularly among African-American men, and this joblessness among neighbourhood adults contributes to the social disorganization that produces youth problem behaviour in 'bad' versus 'good' neighborhoods through weak adult social control of children in the community, and through weak adult/child social integration. Joblessness also weakens family structure in disadvantaged neighborhoods by increasing relationship instability, decreasing rates of marriage, and increasing rates of no marital childbearing, resulting in delinquent behaviors including early sexual activity among youth (p.989).

Wilson (1996; 1996/1997) has also asserted that the lack of jobs for black males is responsible for many of the problems in the communities in which they live. He asserted that: "Many of today's problems in the inner-city ghetto neighborhoods -crime, family dislocation, welfare, low levels of social organization, and so on - are fundamentally a consequence of the disappearance of work" (1996/1997, p.567).

Mohraz (2000, January 16) also noted that the successful economy during the 1990s witnessed more men seeking full-time jobs at an early age and that: "A slice of this trend may also be attributed to a booming economy and a technology revolution that has provided unprecedented high-income opportunities for those with or without a college degree. More men than women are opting for these jobs" (p. B07) Studies have also pointed out that: "...men more frequently say that a very important reason they decided to move from full-time work was because they were 'never that interested' in college in the first place... More men than women believe they can 'get a decent job' without a college..." (AAU W Educational Fund, 1999, June 10). Kitwana (2002) also points to a Harvard University study of 322 metropolitan areas in the United States, and found that "... Black men ages 16-24 with a high school education or less were more likely to be working and earning more in the later 1990s than in the early 1990s..." (p.



45). However, Boo (2003, January/February) claims that black women are more likely to work than white or Hispanic women, while black men are less likely to work than their white or Hispanic counterparts. Boo also points to a study which shows that while young non-college-educated Hispanic males work at about the same rate as their white counterparts, the rate for black males is 30 percentage points lower than their white counterparts, with fully 50% of those young black males unemployed or entirely out of the United States labor force. According to Boo, those figures do not include black males in prison.

African American females have succeeded in the work force more than their male counterparts because even though throughout the history of the United States women have been underrepresented in the workplace and other important sectors of society, they never stopped seeking higher education degrees. Mickelson (1989) points out that:

Even though women have all but closed the overall gap in educational attainment between the sexes, the occupational world fails to reward women equitably for their accomplishments.... In view of the limited rewards that women are likely to receive from education, why do they do as well and attain as much education as they do?... One might expect that if women knew of the diminished opportunities that lay ahead, they would put less effort into school because these efforts are likely to yield smaller returns to them than to males who make similar efforts. Yet, this is not the case. (pp.47-48).

Some scholars have also posed the question as to whether jobs alone will solve the problems of black males in America's urban centers. Loury (1996) claims that: "Here is the problem: too many ghetto dwellers are unfit to work. They have not been socialized within families to delay reformation, exercise self-control, communicate effectively, accept responsibility, and feel empathy for their fellows. These deficits are not genetic; they reflect the disadvantages of being born into the backwaters of a society marked by racial and class segregation, and they should elicit a sympathetic response" (p.90). Studies have shown, however, that employers in cities with large black communities have directed their recruitment of employees away from those black communities (Neckerman and Kirscheman, 1991).

### **Death of Young Black Males**

Another important factor influencing the low higher education enrollment and degree attainment rates of black males is that a significant number of them die at a young age from unnatural causes. Compared with other black nations around the world, the life expectancy of blacks in the United States is significantly higher. For example, according to the United Nations *Human Development Report 2004*, in 2002, the average life expectancy in sub-Saharan Africa was 46.3 years (p.142). However, within the United States, blacks, especially black males, have one of the lowest life expectancies of all racial and ethnic groups. According to Minino et al. (2002), in 2000, the average life expectancy in the United States was 76.9 years. The life expectancy for black females was 74.9 years and 68.2 years for black males. For white males, the life expectancy was 74.8 years, and 80 years for white females. Professor Joseph Graves asserted in a 2004 interview that if one observes the 24 categories under which the United States Census Bureau records data regarding causes of death, blacks or African Americans lead in 22 of those 24 categories. The only categories that African Americans do not lead in are in accidental death and suicide. Graves concludes that: "So for all of the biological causes, African Americans have between 1.3 to 2.5 times the death rate in all age categories"<sup>11</sup>

According to the National Center for Health Statistics [NCHS] (2002), the total number of deaths by all causes of blacks in the U.S. in 1999 was 285,064, with black males accounting for 145,703 (51%), and black females accounting for 139,361 (49%). Of the top ten causes of death for all blacks in 1999, HIV/AIDS (7,893) and homicide (7,648) ranked seventh and eighth respectively. Among black males, homicide (6,214) and HIV/AIDS (5,493) ranked fifth and sixth respectively during that year (pp.127-129).

Homicide was the leading cause of death for black males ages 15-34. For example, in 1999, although there were 34.9 homicide deaths per every 100,000 blacks of all ages, for the 15 to 24 years age group it was 85.1, and 71.8 for the 25 to 34 years age group. These 1999 figures are actually less than those from 1990. In 1990, there were 63.1 homicide deaths per every 100,000 blacks of all ages, for the 15 to 24 years age group, it was 137.1, and 123.7 deaths for the 25 to 34 years age group (NCHS, 2002, pp.127-129). What is disturbing about these high homicide rates for young blacks is that they are committed as black-on-black crimes. For example, Simmons (2002, December 27) points out that:

Homicide is the No. 1 cause of death for young black men, those between the ages of 15 and 24. Homicide is the No. 2 cause of death for young black women, those between the ages of 15 and 24. ... Black Americans are six times more likely to be slain than whites. In sum, 94 percent of black Americans slain between 1976 and 1999 were slain by (no drum roll, please) other black Americans. Nothing on the news palette is more threatening and more urgent (p. A 21).

For black females, HIV/AIDS was the tenth leading cause of death in 1999. This shows that 70% of all HIV/AIDS deaths within the black population were black males and 81% of all homicide deaths within the black population were also black males (NCHS, 2002, pp.127-129). In addition, for all black males 13 years and over, there were 106.7 AIDS cases per 100,000 people for the 12 months ending June 30, 2001 and 46.1 AIDS cases for black females. For white males, it was 13.8 per 100,000, and 2.2 AIDS cases per every 100,000 for white females. In the year 2000 alone, of the total 40,421 HIV/AIDS cases reported, black males accounted for 13,115 (32.4%) and black females accounted for 6,493 (16.1%) (NCHS, 2002, p.182). According to Lemelle (2002), in December 2000, of the 448,060 HIV/AIDS-related deaths in the United States, blacks represented 35%, whites 46% and Hispanics 17 percent (p.139).

Desai et al. (2002) point out that HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States disproportionately affect "... the poor, substance abusers, and persons of color. There is a higher seroprevalence of HIV in incarcerated populations than in the general population" (p.45). Suicide among young black males is also higher than the rates for black females in the United States. According to Haslett (2002) in 1997, among black men aged 20 to 24, suicide rate was 21.4 per 10,000. For black women in that same age group, the suicide rate was 1.9 (p.156).

Lack of adequate health care and lifestyle choices have also been cited as contributors of the higher death rates of African American males. Of the 43.5 million people who were uninsured in 2002 in the U.S., Blacks comprised 7,429 (19.9% of the black population), whites 33,320 (14.2% of the white population), Hispanics 12,756 (32.4% of the Hispanic population) and Asian, Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders 2,447 (18.1% of their total population).<sup>12</sup>

Research have shown over time that African American males tend to have a mistrust for the health care system: "The history of African Americans with public health has led to an oppositional stance among blacks toward public health efforts that is fueled by a lack of trust and righteous indignation (Lemelle, 2002, p.134). Hatter and Wright (1993) also added: "A general

sociocultural factor often identified as contributory to African-American men being besieged with poor health and/or being high mortality risks is their differential access to and consequent underutilization of health care facilities. Various investigators studying the tendency of African-American men and women to consult health professionals found that men are less likely to seek help from mental health professionals and from physicians than are women” (p.267). Hatter and Wright also write that among the factors that lead to the high death rates of African Americans are stress, hypertension, smoking, diabetes, alcoholism, suicide and poor diet. They continued by writing that:

Meats such as pigs feet, hamhocks, chitterlings, neck bones, and hog maws are considered delicacies in the African-American community, particularly among those in the Southern region of the U.S.... a better balanced and disciplined diet among African-American men would decrease and/or control the incidence of diabetes, ulcers, heart disease, various forms of cancer, and hypertension (p.267).

Obesity has become a major health problem in the United States especially within the black population. Stevens (2000) points out that obesity might be associated with a smaller rise in the relative mortality rate of blacks compared with whites in the United States. According to the NCHS (2002), from 1971-74, 5.3% of black boys and 3.3% of black girls ages 6-11 were overweight. For blacks ages 12-19, 5.3% of males and 10.1% of females were overweight from 1971-74. From 1988-1994, 12.3% of black boys ages 6-11, and 16.7% of girls of the same age group were overweight. For the young blacks ages 12-19, 10.4% of males and 16.3% of females were overweight from 1988-94 (p.215).

### **Black Males in U.S. Jails and Prisons.**

In the United States, governments (local, state and federal) spend substantial amounts of money to fight crime. The people of the United States show a great willingness to provide the resources needed in order to maintain law and order. In 2000, total expenditures for adult correctional facilities in the United States was \$34.1 billion. The average cost per inmate in state prisons in 2000 was \$57.92 per day.<sup>13</sup> Writing on the strict enforcement of the nation’s drug laws, Boyum and Kleiman (2003) presented this explanation for the strong support from the American people:

Such vigorous enforcement of drug prohibition, while controversial, enjoys substantial support. This is partly because drug laws are seen as protecting people—especially, but not exclusively, children—from drug abuse and addiction. But it is also because drug prohibition and enforcement are widely believed to prevent burglary, robbery, assault, and other predatory crime, a view apparently borne out by the violence that surrounds much drug dealing and the high rates of drug use among active criminals (pp.19-20).

The primary reason for this massive spending on prisons is that the prison population has continued to rise substantially, with young people and young black males in particular comprising an extremely high proportion of the total prison population. The evidence shows that to some extent, there are certain similar characteristics of those who commit most of the crimes in the United States. Age, sex, marital status, family income and race are all factors in crime statistics in the United States. Data show that younger people tend to commit more crimes than older people. Or to put differently, the younger a person is, the more likely he or she might commit a crime. For example, in the U.S., in 2001, the rate of violent crime and personal theft per 1,000 committed by those aged 12-15, 16-19 and 20-24 was 55.1, 55.8 and 44.7 respectively. For those

aged 35-49, 50-64 and 65 years and over, it was 22.9, 9.5 and 3.2 respectively. Most crimes in the U.S. are committed by males. In 2000, 77.8% of all those arrested in the U.S. were males. In 2001, the rate of violent crime and personal theft per 1,000 committed by those who were never married was 44.7, while it was 11.4 for those who were married.<sup>14</sup>

Family income tends to be correlated to the level of crimes committed. The lower a family's income, the more likely individuals in that family are to commit a crime. For example, in 2001, the rate of violent crime and personal theft per 1,000 of the U.S. population was 46.6 for those whose families' income was under \$7,500; 36.9 for those with family income ranging from \$7,500-\$14,999; 21 for those with family income ranging from \$50,000-74,999; and 18.5 for those with family income of \$75,000 or more.<sup>15</sup> As Boyum and Kleiman (2003) observed: "... the poorest neighborhoods in Massachusetts, with a little more than 10 percent of the state's population, accounted for 57 percent of state prison commitments for drug offenses ... nearly a third of African-American males born in the District of Columbia in the 1960s were charged with selling drugs between the ages of 18 and 24" (pp.19-20).

This brings us to race and African American males in particular. United States crime statistics show that blacks and whites are overwhelmingly arrested for crimes, with substantially more blacks arrested than their proportion of the country's population. In 2000, 69.7% of all those arrested in the United States were white, while 27.9% were black.<sup>16</sup> Lemelle (2002) notes that: "Blacks consist of 13% of the national population, but 30% of citizens arrested, 41% of those in jail, and 49% of those in prison" (p.146).

One can therefore begin to understand why there are so many young black males in jails and prisons. Blacks have the highest proportion of those in poverty, they are among the youngest racial groups in the country and among the least likely among racial groups in the country to be married. These facts, as a result, also lead to most black children being raised in homes without both parents present. For example, according to the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2004), the percentage of all black children under the age of 18 in the United States who live in the same household as both of their parents was 34.6, while it is 76% for white children.<sup>17</sup>

Due to these various factors, one can begin to understand why there are now more black males in jails and prisons than in colleges and universities. In 1965, fewer than 200,000 people of all races were in local jails and federal and state prisons (Kitwana, 2002, p.53). Williams (2003) points out that in 1980, 463,700 black males were enrolled in college, and 143,000 black males were incarcerated in the United States. In 2000, however, 603,032 black males were enrolled in college, while 791,600 black males (almost half of those incarcerated) were incarcerated in American jails and prisons (p.19). There are 3.5% of all black males in prison.<sup>18</sup>

The U.S. prison population is comprised mostly of males aged 20-35, most of whom are high school dropouts. For example, Western and Pettit (2000) pointed out that in 1996, there were 1,545,300 males in jails and prisons. Of those aged 20-35, white males comprised 504,000 and black males comprised 496,800. Of white and black males aged 20-35 in jails and prisons in 1996, 322,600 white males were high school dropouts, while 312,200 black males were (p.7). In 1996, among white and black males aged 20-35 in jails and prisons, 7.39% white males were high school dropouts, while 36.30% of black males were high school dropouts (p.8).

The argument has been that the numbers of blacks in jails and prisons in the United States are disproportionately high because they get punished more severely for crimes than other races or ethnic groups. For example, Boyum and Kleiman (2003) noted that there are 1.5 million annual drug arrests in the United States and that the majority of the 325,000 people incarcerated on drug charges are there for selling. African Americans experience the most arrests, even though they comprise less than 14% of the total population. The country's mandatory sentencing laws are cited to be contributing to the rapid increase of black males behind bars, and has been

viewed as unfair to minorities and the poor.

Oberdorfer (2003), a United States federal judge, pointed to judges': "simultaneous obligations to honor the Chambers admonition and yet to impose sentences in federal criminal cases dictated by what many judges consider to be inflexible and seriously flawed, if not unconstitutional, laws. In fact, before the Supreme Court ruled otherwise, over 200 trial judges declared the current mandatory sentencing system to be unconstitutional" (p.13). According to Oberdorfer (2003), blacks are punished more severely for the drugs that they use, compared with other racial groups. For example, within the U.S. federal system, in 2001, 82.8% of those convicted for crack cocaine-related offences were African-American, 9.3% were Hispanic, and 7% were white. For those convicted for powder cocaine offences, 30.5% were African-American, 50.2% were Hispanic and 18.1% were white (p.16). Furthermore, according to Oberdorfer, the average sentence for a crack cocaine offender in the U.S. federal system in 2001 was 115 months, while the average sentence for a powder cocaine offender was 77 months (pp.16-17). Schlosser (1998, December) also points out that among the people arrested for violent crimes in the United States, the proportion of black males has remained the same over the past 20 years. Among those arrested for drug crimes, the proportion of black males has tripled, even though the prevalence of illegal drug use within the white male population is almost the same as that among black males.

Brown (1995) claims that the lack of sufficient numbers of black judges tends to contribute to more black males going to prisons. For example, Jackson (2003) points out that in the state of Alabama only 16 of 220 judges were black. But Butler (1995) also points out that: "...lawyers and judges increasingly perceive that some African-American jurors vote to acquit black defendants for racial reasons... a decision sometimes expressed as the juror's desire not to send yet another black man to jail" (p.677).

The concern now in the United States is that if the trend of sending large numbers of young males to jails and prisons continues, it may turn the U.S. correctional system into not only a job creation enterprise for local, state and federal governments, but also a profit-making business for private businesses and corporations (Schlosser 1998, December; Gauker 2000; Elsner 2004). As Schlosser (1998, December) observes:

The prison-industrial complex is not only a set of interest groups and institutions. It is also a state of mind. The lure of big money is corrupting the nation's criminal-justice system, replacing notions of public service with a drive for higher profits. The eagerness of elected officials to pass 'tough-on-crime' legislation -- combined with their unwillingness to disclose the true costs of these laws -- has encouraged all sorts of financial improprieties (54-55).

Gauker (2000) also notes that: "This rolling and growing monster [U.S. prison system] controls us. We cannot stop it, and aren't sure we can even slow it down. We've built a whole economy around incarceration and ruthless treatment of prisoners. Should we suddenly turn compassionate, our economy would be severely impacted" (p.1).

As the prison population increases, so also the demand for more prison employees. For example, there were 207,600 jail employees in the United States for the 605,943 people in jail at midyear 1999. There were also 47 privately operated jails with 13,814 inmates during this same period, (Stephan, 2001, August) and an estimated "100,000 inmates are housed in private prisons, with projected growth to 350,000 by 2004" (Kitwana, 2002, p.75).

Businesses that build prisons also expect to profit from their investments. Some of these companies are reported to include Corrections Corporation of America, Wardenhut Corrections Corporation, Cornell Corrections, and U.S. Corrections Corporation. The private prison industry is estimated to be worth \$1 billion a year, accounting for over 160 facilities in at least 26 states.

Telephone companies such as MCI and AT&T are also reported to make large profits from collect telephone calls made from prisons across the country. In addition, a 1979 U.S. Congressional law, the Prison Industry Enhancement certification program (CPI), is reported to have given private companies and corporations access to prison laborers for exceedingly cheap wages, with an estimated 80,000 prisoners currently hired out to private companies (Kitwana, 2002, pp.73-75). According to Malveaux (2001), "The privatization of the prison system has created employment 'opportunities' for thousands of the incarcerated, whose immobile labor is boosting the profit positions of publicly traded for-profit corporations.... "Wackenhut posted revenues of \$2.5 billion" (p.32). Kitwana (2002) also notes that: " Over the past two decades, more than half the states have passed laws allowing private corporations access to inmate laborers. With rates of pay as little as 50 cents an hour or in some cases \$ 3 a day, companies like TWA, Microsoft, Victoria's Secret, and even Toys R Us have taken advantage of the virtually slave labor (p.73). Moreover, Kilborn (2002, March 27) reported in the *New York Times* that a U.S. Justice Department survey showed that 124,000 inmates in state prisons (10.4% of the total state prison population in the country), and 45,000 local inmates (7% of those in jails nationally) in the year 2000 were working off the premises. Kilborn adds that in Louisiana, prison inmates were paid 4 cents to 20 cents an hour. According to Kilborn, "Nationwide, inmate labor sometimes arouses resentment from unions and local contractors" (p. A1).

The people of the United States could improve the situation by providing free high school and college education for all of those incarcerated to prepare them for a smooth reintegration into the general society after their release. This could contribute significantly to many of them not committing anymore crimes after their release from incarceration, because their chances of finding a job would increase substantially.

## **Conclusion**

The 21st century has witnessed the substantial gains that African Americans have made in education attainment in their American experience. There is a correlation between increase in college degree attainment and the economic success of black families in the United States. For example, in 2001, of the 13,315,000 black households in the United States, 27.8% had incomes of \$50,000 or more. In 1970, of the 6,180,000 black households in the United States, 12.8% had incomes of \$50,000 or more.<sup>19</sup>

The gains in higher education attainment, however, as the data has revealed, have disproportionately been made by black women. It is worth noting that most black males succeed both in school and the work place (Franklin and Mizell, 1995) and that the more than 600,000 black males enrolled in colleges and universities in 1999 is a very large number of people. That figure is substantially larger than the total populations of a number of major cities (such as Washington, D.C., Atlanta, Georgia and Cleveland, Ohio) in the United States. Furthermore, despite the gap in education attainment between black females and males, evidence shows that in each of the years from 1994 to 2000, black male students' undergraduate enrollment actually increased. Also, one must remember that the black male population in the United States is estimated at 17 million, meaning that most of them are contributing substantially to the success of the nation.

Due to the fact that in the United States the higher the level of one's education regardless of race or gender, the more likely they are to succeed economically and politically, black females as a whole are clearly progressing at a faster rate than their male counterparts. As a result, because black females disproportionately have university degrees compared with their male counterparts, they stand a chance to take up more leadership positions within the black race in

the decades to come. For example, Bositis (2002) notes that the number of female Black Elected Officials (BEOs) has climbed from 160 (10.9% out of 1,469) in 1970 to 3,119 (34.5% out of 9,040) in 2000. According to Bositis, "Of the net total increase of 104 BEOs added to the grand total between 1999 and 2000, all were women. In fact, there were 122 additional female BEOs and 18 fewer male BEOs in 2000. That was the second year in a row that the number of male BEOs declined and the net national increase in BEOs was entirely accounted for by women" (p.9).

Finally, researchers have pointed out that this wide gap in higher education attainment between black females and black males has resulted in black females having problems finding suitable black males to marry, thus leading to many of these successful black women without husbands. Research show that the higher the level of ones education regardless of sex or race, the more likely that person would like to mate with someone with similar educational credentials (Mare, 1991; Tzeng and Mare, 1995). Mare (1991) points out that: "Numerous empirical studies have described the tendency for persons to choose partners of similar social standing -- on educational attainment..." (p.15). As of March 2000, of the 56,497,000 married couples in the United States, 13,843,000 (24.5%) couples had husbands with more education than their wives, 30,590,000 (54.1%) had husbands and wives with the same level of education, and in 12,064,000 (21.4%) marriages, the wives had more education than their husbands (Casper and Fields, 2001). Among unmarried couples there were more females with more education than their partners. As of March 2000, of the 3,822,000 unmarried partners in the United States, 1,065,000 (27.9%) females had more education than their male partners, 885,000 (23.1%) males had more education than their female partners, and 1,871,000 (48.9%) unmarried partners had the same level of education (Casper and Fields, 2001).

For the first time in history the world is witnessing a situation in the beginning of the 21st century where within the black population in the United States, black females are positioned to obtain more leadership and other important roles than their male counterparts. A similar trend is also slowly developing within the white population.

### **Endnotes**

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<sup>1</sup> Olson, L. (1997). "Race and Demography,"

<sup>2</sup> Olson, L. (1997). "Race and Demography,"

<sup>3</sup> Fletcher, M. (2002, June 25), p. A01

<sup>4</sup> Fletcher, M. (2002, June 25), p. A01

<sup>5</sup> Stahl, L. (2002, October 31).

<sup>6</sup> Stahl, L. (2002, October 31).

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<sup>7</sup> Source from a Documentary: *MTV2*. (2002, September 10). *EMerican Made: MTV News Now Special Report*. Retrieved on September 15, 2002 from <http://www.mtv.com/onair/mtv2/>.

<sup>8</sup> Stahl, L. (2002, October 31).

<sup>9</sup> *The New York Times Almanac*, 2004, p.153.

<sup>10</sup> “Vital Signs: Statistics That Measure the State of Racial Inequality,” 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Quote from an “Interview with Joseph Graves, Jr.,” in the PBS Television Documentary, “Race: The Power of an Illusion,” Retrieved on May 15, 2004, from [http://www.pbs.org/race/000\\_About/002\\_04-background-01-06.htm](http://www.pbs.org/race/000_About/002_04-background-01-06.htm).

<sup>12</sup> *The New York Times Almanac*, 2004, p.370.

<sup>13</sup> *The New York Times Almanac*, 2004, p.31.

<sup>14</sup> *The New York Times Almanac*, 2004, p.310.

<sup>15</sup> *The New York Times Almanac*, 2004, p.310.

<sup>16</sup> *The New York Times Almanac*, 2004, p.310.

<sup>17</sup> “Vital Signs: Statistics That Measure the State of Racial Inequality,” 2004.

<sup>18</sup> *The New York Times Almanac*, 2004, p.310.

<sup>19</sup> Compiled and calculated by this author based on data presented on page15 in: DeNavas Walt, C., and Cleveland, R.W. 2002. *Money Income in the United States: 2001*. U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Report, P60-218. U.S. Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C.



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