



## Moving Men into the Mainstream: The Next Steps in Urban Reform

### Black Men Left Behind: Reflections on Current Research

This bulletin is adapted from the first panel of three at a Manhattan Institute conference, "Moving Men into the Mainstream: The Next Steps in Urban Reform," held in New York on June 21, 2006. The other panel discussions are available in Civic Bulletins 45 and 46.

**JOHN McWHORTER:** Today we are going to discuss the issue of reconnecting a certain segment of disadvantaged men into the workforce. The Manhattan Institute has been instrumental in forging the reform of welfare legislation, beginning with the actual legislation in 1996, and by all measures, this policy has been a success. It certainly has not been a magic bullet, but we are seeing that most of the women who have participated in these programs are working and childhood poverty, especially among African-Americans, is on the decline, and has reduced most quickly since 1996, when these programs were instituted.

It can be said, however, that we have only done half the job in initiating these policies because welfare reform has focused in particular on women. Meanwhile, since about 1966, some men have experienced similar problems. We face a problem in that a very large number of disadvantaged men, particularly Black and Brown men, are disconnected from the workforce, regardless of the state of the economy and with only a fitful relationship to the availability of low skill work. The question we are

here to discuss today is what policies we should pursue to remedy this trend.

The first panel will present an overview of the issues. Ronald Mincy, Professor of Social Policy and Social Work at Columbia University, is the first panelist. Next, we will hear from Hillard Pouncy, Visiting Professor at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public Policy at Princeton and a specialist on anti-poverty legislation, whose work also focuses on bringing ex-offenders back into the workforce. Next, Lawrence Mead is a professor in the Political Science Department at New York University and a specialist on anti-poverty legislation and welfare reform. Our program today also includes the Manhattan Institute's own Abigail Thernstrom, author of *Whose Votes Count?* and *America in Black and White*, which she coauthored with her husband Stephan Thernstrom. More recently, she has written *No Excuses*.

There is an important book that engages on the printed page with the issues this conference will address today: *Black Males Left Behind*. Professor

Mincy is the editor of that book, which is an anthology of papers on this particular issue and what can be done about it.

**PROFESSOR RONALD MINCY:** I have been studying African-American men and boys for about thirty years. In this country we have been circling around the challenges of less educated African-American men and mainstreaming them for at least three decades. There was a book published in 1987 called *Young, Black, and Male in America: An Endangered Species*, and this was the last time I remember a study provoking a major conversation. There were state and local commissions in cities around the country trying to address the issue. I want to suggest several things that I learned from that experience in order to plant some seeds for thinking about what we should be doing in the current environment.

In the first place, we have seen a number of demonstration projects that are targeted at disadvantaged youth, out-of-school youth, high school dropouts and the like over the last 15 years. Often these programs receive boosts in funding and public interest following a spate of information about what is occurring adversely with respect to African-American men.

Most recently this occurred with the genesis of the Youth Opportunity Grant Program, which was a spatially targeted youth-to-adult transition program for all young people residing in 20-percent poverty areas. Though the research that motivated the Youth Opportunity Grant Program focused on inner cities, the program wound up targeting young people who lived in poor neighborhoods in highly concentrated urban areas as well as in rural areas.

What this program and others like it suggest that news about the adverse outcomes of young, less educated African-American men is a catalyst behind

a series of legislative programs and non-profit initiatives targeted at young people more generally. Sometimes they are called "disconnected youth" with the idea that they are young people who are not firmly attached to families; they are high school dropouts and the like. Sometimes the programs target youth who are dropouts, but we rarely have the capacity to target initiatives at African-American males or disadvantaged males specifically. On the other hand, evaluations of existing programs often show that initiatives targeting disadvantaged youth produce decent results for girls, while their impact on boys and young men is disappointing. This has been the case with a major evaluation of the Job Training Partnership Act, which was the major employment program targeting disadvantaged workers. In the late 1980s, evaluations of the youth programs concluded that the results for young women were cost effective, in terms of increasing their employment rates and their earnings, but the impacts of JTPA programs for young males were not statistically significant, and some participants actually did worse than males who were not enrolled in these programs.

A second case in which this trend occurred is the Child Welfare Organizing Project (CWOP). This was also a youth development program targeted initially at the children of welfare recipients, and the objective of the program was to focus on a vulnerable population of young people, providing them with a set of concentrated supports including mentoring, and tutoring. The hope was that by focusing on a vulnerable population before they showed signs of trouble, we could increase graduation rates, college enrollment rates, and more. Again, results showed that these programs work well for girls, but they work poorly for boys.

The most recent information along these lines is the Moving to Opportunity Program. This was a major demonstration that targeted resources to

single mothers who lived in high poverty areas in the city of Chicago. The idea was to move these women and children to lower poverty areas where there were more substantial labor markets, better schools and safer environments. Again, the results showed that moms transitioned to employment, the girls found new friends and connected with new people in the community and the school, and saw improvements in terms of teenage pregnancy rates and high school graduation rates. The boys, on the other hand, tended to return to their old neighborhoods and environments, and their results in terms of high school graduation, college enrollment and crime are disappointing. The single exception, in my reading, was the Career Academy's program—a school-to-work initiative focused on young people who were likely to be high school dropouts. It created a high school environment that focused on a particular career track, and then taught reading, writing and other basics in the context of that career orientation. This was the unique program that I am aware of that showed better results for males than for females.

In summary, over the last 15 years we have seen a few programs targeted at disadvantaged young people who are making the transition from youth to adulthood, often provoked by negative news about the state of African-American males. The results show that the programs work for women or young girls and they do not work for boys.

As we go into the next round of programming to resolve the challenges that young people—especially African-American males—experience, we have to focus on the role of gender in these disadvantages. We have to ask several questions: in what ways do males learn differently in schools than females? What is it about the ability of young males to sit still, to focus on the academic process, and at what time intervals do they need a break from the academic enterprise? Do they need recreation periods that are

longer or more frequent than girls do? Finally, can we create academic environments that focus on the learning styles of males so that we can achieve more success, with males in particular, in terms of making the school to work the youth to adult transition? African-Americans tend to live in highly segregated environments. In the first place, they go to schools that are predominantly Black and Puerto Rican. However, when in the late 1980s we tried to create single gender schools, we ran into huge civil liberty challenges: Why do you need to create special educational environments for Black boys, and when you do so, do you advantage them with respect to girls? My own view is that we short-circuited efforts at creating single-gender schools. In the process, we yielded the kind of challenges that we have today, such as high school graduation rates for African-American males in New York City hovering about a third, declining employment rates, and the other things that we are aware of from recent studies.

We have to think about the role of race and gender especially, and have the courage to carry that thinking through into the kind of programming that we do. That will represent a huge challenge. When we create a set of tools—when we pass legislation that creates youth development, high school drop-out, or ex-offender programs—for working with this population, we cannot forget about the craftsmen. That is, who is it that is able to access the available tools or the funding in order to serve these young men? Programs that tend to focus on African-American males, who often live in a highly segregated environment, tend not to have the capacity to garner the resources available for this population.

In twenty years of working in this area, I have consistently observed the infrastructure of programs that work with young African-American males to be in fundamental disarray. For one reason, we have been very episodic in our interest in this population;

when we create a set of programs and legislation focusing on African-American males, resources are available. But within a few years those resources are used up and the organizations that have acquired some expertise and learned how to serve these populations disappear with the decline in funding. I think this has to do with the disappointing results with respect to African-American males, and a different set of outcomes with respect to women because, as John McWhorter suggested earlier, we have been pursuing teenage pregnancy prevention and welfare reform for 40 years. The efforts around welfare reform that were so successful in 1996 were the culmination of a forty-year effort that began in 1962, and although we have pursued different strategies, we have worked toward welfare reform consistently for a forty-year period. That means that we have tried things, learned certain things, failed sometimes, jettisoned approaches, but the organizations that have been serving young women and girls have had the capacity, over a period of 40 years, to perfect their art. Ultimately we have had the convergence of learning from programming on the one hand and an extraordinary economy on the other, benefiting a policy designed to put women to work. In the absence of such consistent funding, we will never build the capacity that we need among programs that serve young African-American males to deliver the same kinds of results.

In closing, we must pay attention to two things: First we must identify the role of race and gender and decide if we will have the courage to identify how race and gender have created adverse outcomes for young people and incorporate that understanding into the kinds of programming that we do. Secondly, we must be able to support building the infrastructure among programs that work with these young people, so that those who know how to do the job have the capacity to compete in the public arena for funding and deliver the services that are needed.

**PROFESSOR HILLARD POUNCY:** I think there are two separate conversations or dynamics controlling conversations about mainstreaming. I think one conversation is within the broader public, and if you are attentive, you see it. The other one is within the Black community and it is a more difficult conversation to hear. My view is that both conversations have the capacity to reinforce barriers to mainstreaming, or they can help us overcome barriers to mainstreaming. I believe we need both these conversations because they feed off each other, and they go in two very different directions. I want to focus on how to get out of the phase in which conversations increase or reinforce barriers, and create incentives and structures for conversations that help us overcome these barriers.

In the broader public, an example of conversations and dynamics that create barriers to mainstreaming came up about a quarter of a century ago. It essentially said if less educated men in general, and young Black males specifically, are causing trouble, let's lock them up. We are very good at these things, so for the last quarter century we have created structures and incentives for politicians and policymakers alike to operate with the goal of addressing the issues of crime and its connection to less well-educated men. In the book *Black Males Left Behind*, we discuss the recent work of Bruce Western at Princeton University, which shows that we got so good at increasing incarceration and addressing the problems of crime that when we reduced levels of crime in the 1990s, we also increased incarceration. You might think the main goal of locking people up would be to stop crime, but we achieved that goal—we reduced crime—but rather than reducing levels of incarceration, just the opposite happened. According to Bruce Western, during the eighties we took youngsters who had committed a crime and either gave them jail time or a certain number of them would be put into a diversion program. As we rolled into the nineties, we doubled an offender's

chances of going to jail, and if he did go to jail his chances of staying there longer increased. Structures and incentives have led to an ability of our society to incarcerate these young men so effectively that even when the crime rates went down we kept doing it. So the question is, is there another way to think about this? The answer is obvious: to think about mainstreaming. But what does mainstreaming mean?

Using the parallel of the welfare conversation, the goal of welfare reform was self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency, in practical terms, really meant that young mothers who required public assistance were not pushed off the welfare roles into lives of self-sufficiency, rather they were pushed into a process in which they became eligible for a number of supports; they earned income tax credit, child care benefits, food stamps, and so forth. The reality of self-sufficiency for welfare moms was something less than real self-sufficiency, but politically we could gain help for welfare moms in the name of self-sufficiency with the practicality of important supports.

How are we to make that kind of anecdote relevant to the case of less-educated men? The key is to put meaning behind the idea of mainstreaming. If we remember the lessons of welfare reform we might want to think about some sort of minimal standard, which Michael Katz calls the "minimal standards of citizenship." He argues that when we talk about public policy we do one thing for citizens and other things for non-citizens, our immigrants, et cetera. When we talk about the undeserving poor, young Black men, for example, we are in the hidden language of public policy talking about whether these are young citizens or not. We could argue that mainstreaming simply means that we expect young men, from this point on, to do the following: accept and enter the world of work; to honor their obligations to their children; and to obey the law. If

we could strike such a public contract so that young men increasingly find these terms of living in America acceptable, then the lessons of welfare reform would suggest that we create a new set of incentives for our political leaders and policymakers. In *Black Males Left Behind*, we discuss how to create incentives for politicians to mainstream young men. In this sense, mainstreaming would include things such as working with the child support system on behalf of those who choose to be responsible fathers, and finding better employment options for those who choose to avoid a life of crime.

If the first half of the conversation is about how to structure politics and the incentives for policymakers, the other half of the conversation is about what is going on in the Black community. I am going to appeal to a cartoon of this: Bill Cosby and Eric Dyson have been having a public discussion of late about these issues, but it has been a toxic discussion. Bill Cosby says the African-American community should behave more responsibly and its youngsters should become mainstream and not engage in crime. Dyson took offense to Cosby's comments, and they began a policy conversation, which unfortunately degenerated into each saying he didn't like what the other said. The result is not much movement, effectiveness, or fruitful discussion on what should be done.

In the book *Black Males Left Behind*, we try to think of a more productive way of discussing these problems within the Black community, and what came to mind was the Million Man March. In effect, this was a policy idea: why not get a bunch of people together in Washington, D.C. and say we ought to mainstream our young people? In fact, Martin Luther King tried it and it seemed to have worked in the 1960s. So why did it not work in the 1990s? The answer seems to be that one shot is a willful answer to a large social problem. Once the marchers leave town what else happens? Where is the

infrastructure? How do you build on that? It seems to be a situation that leaves the Black community bereft of an opportunity to contribute to this conversation.

In a recent study we looked at some dialog within the political science community of late, and the short version goes something like this: the hidden elephant in the room is a theory that John McWhorter has talked about many times called the special mismatch hypothesis. It says if you put poor people and rich people, or jobs and people who need jobs, in different places bad things are going to happen. This a good theory, and most people find some parts of it right, but most of us find many parts of it wrong. In the African-American community something really interesting has begun to happen as better-off Blacks have separated from less educated, less well-off Blacks by moving to the suburbs: when the Black community pulls apart along socioeconomic fissures the chances of the community thinking holistically about its problems begin to decrease. In other words, the Dyson-Cosby debate is symptomatic of a larger dynamic going on within the Black community, based on survey evidence.

When we looked at some data on communities in Philadelphia we found that in cases where that has not happened—where well off African-Americans still live within the community—dynamics begin to take place so that you create a capacity for a community to host its own conversation about mainstreaming. To conclude, in my view we need these two kinds of conversations—within the policy community and within the Black community—and there is some evidence that both are in progress, but there is also evidence of the toxic alternative to those conversations very much underway. Once we have confirmed that mainstreaming means some minimal set of standards and behaviors that we expect of our young people, and the Black community reinforces that and generates a capacity to echo and reinforce

those conversations, I think there is reason to hope for improvement.

**PROFESSOR LAWRENCE MEAD:** This is an important meeting. I have a sense that there is indeed a new wave of interest in the problem of low-income men, and I hope this time it leads to some fundamental policy changes.

I am going to talk mainly about poor adult men and how we might reconnect with them. Among poor men in 2004, less than 20 percent worked full time and full year, and nearly 60 percent did not work at all. These men often have many problems, and this may not be the most serious, but it is the one that stands out, and the one that I think we can do something about.

Non-work seems to me the immediate reason why these men are poor, and it is also the cause of their problems as husbands and fathers. A man who does not work regularly cannot satisfy his employer and he cannot satisfy his spouse or his children. This problem is of strategic importance, and by addressing it, I think we can make some real progress in reconnecting these men.

In the past, we have approached this problem too much in terms of economics. I am a political scientist, and I believe that politics is the master science and the way we need to solve this. The economists approach the work problem in terms of human capital; they say that the poor men lack skills, so we should invest more in them. In this way economists see them as empty vessels, passive figures into which we have to pour resources. As Ronald Mincy has pointed out, programs that try to do this—training programs—do not evaluate very well, and in fact, they often fail to get the job done, as do most education programs serving this population.

Another economic perspective is that there is something wrong with the labor market or the opportunity structure so that jobs are not available, which was one of the contentions of the mismatch theory that Hillard Pouncy mentioned. Evidence for that claim is not very good. Another claim is that the jobs these men take do not pay enough, which is why they remain poor even if they work. It turns out, however, that the main problem is that these men do not work at all, not that they are working at low wages. The problem has more to do with the fact that these men are not fully engaged in the labor market.

What do we do about that? Liberals tend to propose spending more money on these people and generating more resources for them. Conservatives identify that as the problem—government trying to do too much. Instead, government ought to stop interfering with the labor market and let men find their own best employment. The debate tends to be all about economics and doing more versus doing less.

Welfare reform has shown us that this is fundamentally mistaken. In the welfare arena the way that we solved the problem was we got away from economic thinking. We used to say that welfare mothers lacked human capital too, or that the labor market was inadequate, and for much of the 40 years of welfare reform many of the reforms that we tried were ways to re-jigger the labor market, or change incentives, or have training or investment programs. That approach did not get results.

Then about 20 years ago we hit on the idea of actually requiring the mothers to work, which turned out to be the answer. If we had programs that required welfare mothers to work as a condition of aid, then they would in fact go to work. We had to spend some money too, but the crucial thing was having a clear-cut work requirement. About 20 years ago we began to get positive evaluations for work programs like this—mandatory work programs—and

from that point a snowball started to roll, and it swept right through the welfare system, and today we have a totally different system. The key was not spending more money; the key was accepting that there had to be a work obligation, and the positive effects of that generated the public commitment to spend more as necessary. So we did in fact spend more on childcare, wage subsidies and all these supports, but that was acceptable because it was now going to enforce a value that the public deeply believed in, which was that there should be a work obligation connected to public aid.

The cost of welfare did not upset the public; studies show clearly that it was the work problem that upset the public. They wanted the recipients to work alongside the taxpayers, and once they got it, the coffers opened and money was no object. That, I believe, is the model we need to apply to these men; we have to get away from an economic logic in dealing with them. It is true that they do need some new benefits, such as a higher minimum wage or higher income tax credits, perhaps.

In particular, we have to do something about immigration. Unless we can prevent employers from immediately resorting to hiring illegal immigrants in place of low-skilled Americans, we are not going to get very far. However, all of this is only a small part of the problem. The main problem is that the men we are talking about do not face a serious requirement to work on a regular basis. We have to somehow say to them, "you have to work, and you have to work consistently, and if you do that we will help you in these numerous ways." If we do that, I am quite convinced that the education and training programs will have much greater effect because the men will face a serious requirement to work steadily. This message also addresses the politics. There is an assumption in some of the previous comments that we need to persuade the public to spend money on low-income Black men.

I think the public would be willing to spend money when we show results from serious work programs that require employment; I think the public response to the idea of enforcing a value in which we believe will be generous.

My advice, then, is to ask for the authority to obligate these men with work requirements, and then the money will follow. In a sense, we have to do what Daniel Patrick Moynihan talked about in the Moynihan Report 40 years ago: we have to find a way to put these guys in the army. Because the army is now a volunteer force, we have to find a way to substitute for the army. How might we do that? How do we find an authority structure that will require these guys to work? Unfortunately, we do not have a benefits system like the welfare system with the same breadth and strength that that system offered for the welfare mothers, so it seems to me that we have to resort primarily to two other institutions that already deal with low-income men. One of them is the Child Support System, which is now dedicated to collecting as much money from the unmarried fathers as possible to support the families. We somehow have to shift that system to include focusing on the fathers' employment as well; we have to make that system responsible for getting the fathers working, which is just as important, if not more so, than getting them to pay child support.

Some past experiments have tried to do this; such programs have presented fathers who were in arrears with the choice to pay up, participate in the program or go to prison. They found that to increase the child support payments we have to increase the father's employment. We have not found a way to do that yet. I think we can probably improve on those programs.

The other issue is arrearages: a lot of these men build up substantial debts to the Child Support System, such that they cannot work on the books without the state attacking their wages. We have to make

some tradeoffs to reach some balance between a work obligation and paying every penny that they owe, because employment is probably more important than paying off every penny.

The second major institution that has frequent interaction with low income men is the criminal justice system. This system is currently dedicated to locking up offenders and protecting society, but again, we have to shift its goals to include the employment of people once they leave prison, which is crucial to avoiding recidivism.

We have to make the system become accountable for the employment outcomes of people leaving prison. There are already a number of prison reentry programs, some of which involve job placement and some involve mandatory work in community service positions; both worth discussing. Programs like this, which require people to work in return for support, are exactly the sort of thing that might generate positive results for these men, and then get wide public support.

The ultimate problem is not really money; the real challenge will be changing the institution so that employment becomes part of its core mission - not merely a special program. With welfare reform, we did not have a separate program, rather we built employment into the welfare structure so that it became a central goal of the entire system. That is what we have to do with employment for men through the Child Support and criminal justice systems. When we do so, I think we will finally see these men channeled toward employment and required to work, but also supported to work. The goal is integration. The goal is not to blame, exclude or find fault; rather the goal is to satisfy what I call the common obligation—in this case employment, which will allow these men to fully enter into society.

**ABIGAIL THERNSTROM:** I think, before going any further, it is important to remind ourselves that



not all Black men live in poverty or in inner-city neighborhoods. A third of Black families now live in suburbia-half by self-identification are middle class-and so we are talking here about a sector of the Black male community. Nevertheless, the problem obviously has an impact on American society in general; it ripples through the fabric of the society, and we ignore it at our peril.

I am going to focus on one aspect of the question: education. I found Ronald Mincy's suggestion that we try to shape the school day in different ways to give Black boys more recreational time very interesting. It is a suggestion I am sympathetic to, but I want to make a slightly different point. I will start by telling you a story.

I love the North Star Academy Charter School in Newark, New Jersey. It is hard to find schools that you walk into and just adore, and that is one of them. It started out as a middle school, and then it added a high school, and one of the conditions of going to the high school is that you have attended the middle school, which is fairly gender-balanced. The last time I was there they had just started the high school and they were doing it one grade at a time. I walked into the new ninth grade and I looked around the room and I said, "where are the boys?" They had disappeared. I called the school yesterday, because this took place a couple of years ago now, and I asked what has happened since then. I asked how large the high school is now, and the woman I spoke to told me they had 123 students. I asked, how many of them are male, and she said she did not know exactly, but guessed that about 50 are male. What I saw several years ago remains the case: The boys have gone. Nobody at North Star thinks these young men have dropped out of school, but they will not go along with the personal discipline that North Star demands.

One of Larry Mead's central points is that investing more in giving young Black men education and

training would achieve relatively little because their problem is not a lack of specific job skills. It is more often precisely that lack of personal discipline that North Star and other excellent schools insist upon and that Steve, my husband, and I discuss at some length in our book, *No Excuses*, in a chapter called "Not by Mass Alone." In writing *No Excuses*, we did think about looking at the gender split, but when one writes a book one always gives up certain topics in the interest of getting the book done, and that was one of the topics we did not look at.

But I have just looked at the National Assessment for Educational Progress—the nation's report card on education. I looked at the twelfth grade scores, and they are quite fascinating. They suggest that the huge gender imbalance in college enrollments—the college enrollment ratio of females to males 2:1—is not an indication that Black adolescent males lag far behind Black women in cognitive skills, because they do not. Blacks in general lag behind Whites and Asians, but the gender gap for Blacks is not sufficiently striking to account for that total imbalance in college enrollment. For example, there is not a statistically significant gender difference among Black male and female students in math. In reading, while Black twelfth-grade males are almost a grade level behind their Black sisters in high school, we should note that the gender gap among African-Americans is only half as large as it is among Whites. White males, on the average, are close to two years behind their White female classmates in reading, in contrast to the one year gap between Black students. Perhaps there is an obvious explanation: Results are deceptive because Black males are more likely to drop out of high school and therefore are not available for the twelfth grade test, which makes them a more selective population. However, there is no consensus at present on how to count the drop-out rate. But without wading into that battle I would suggest that neither method yields such large gender differences in drop-out rates for Blacks.

Schools like North Star, the KIPP Academies, and other successful charter schools are all out from under the regular public system. They understand something fundamental: their inner-city children need an education beyond reading, writing and arithmetic. These children need an education in a much broader set of skills. Charter schools focus relentlessly on core academic subjects and provide a safe and orderly environment in which kids can learn, but they also aim to shape the culture of their students. That culture affects academic learning and the acquisition of skills and knowledge that will lead to good jobs in life, as Larry Mead discussed earlier.

Orlando Patterson has written, "The greatest problem now facing African-Americans is their isolation from the tacit norms of the dominant culture." Superb schools uniformly attack that isolation of Black kids from mainstream norms by making certain demands, and the isolation of course seems to be worse among Black males than Black females. These schools insist that their students learn how to speak standard English, show up on time properly dressed, sit up straight in their desks, chairs pulled in, workbooks organized. They are never allowed to waste a minute when they could be learning. They walk down halls quickly and quietly, they always finish their homework, they look at people when they are talking to them, they listen to teachers politely and follow their directions precisely. They treat their classmates with equal respect. They shake hands with visitors into the school introducing themselves. Even minor infractions of the rules—a shirt not tucked in, some foul language—have immediate consequences. In other words, as journalist David Shipler has put to point, the "soft skills of punctuality, diligence, and a can-do attitude," that is internalized self-discipline and believing that your work will matter and pay off, are as important as basic math skills.

Other equally important messages permeate the culture of these schools. They deliver an optimistic message about America and about the rules that govern climbing the ladder of economic opportunity in this country. The message is that the doors are open for those who make the right decisions, opportunities outweigh barriers, and determination pays off. The effort to put disadvantaged youth on the traditional ladder of social mobility has another related component, which is never explicitly articulated. The best inner-city schools and students define themselves as individuals. Ralph Ellison, in the 1970s, wrote, "If White society has tried to do anything to us it has tried to keep us from being individuals, to deprive Blacks of the understanding that individuality is still operative beyond the racial structuring of America." These schools want their students to think of themselves as individuals beyond the racial structuring of America, free to emphasize their racial and ethnic group ties as much or as little as they wish. That is a tall order in contemporary America, which generally delivers such a different message—a message that race is who you are. Race-related public policies reinforce that view. These policies include racial preferences in higher education and contracting employment, racially gerrymandered voting districts, and elementary and secondary school systems that assign people to school based on the color of their skin. Omaha, Nebraska is in the middle of trying to do just that by splitting the district into three racially identifiable sub-districts. All such policies say the same thing: race or ethnicity is the single most important fact about an individual. From there, it is a straight line to the belief, on the part of Blacks themselves, that Whites are powerful and Blacks are helpless. Such a belief leads to their profound alienation from mainstream American society, and is so pernicious that we must address it.

**MALE VOICE:** It seems that as America becomes urbanized, the schools of education have these urban

education formats and programs. There is a growing disconnect between the theorists and the researchers, on the one hand, and the participants, who are largely Black and Latino, from which all of these conclusions are drawn. For example, in the New York school system there are 250 research studies on an increasing Brown and Black population from which we conclude these things. My question is, how can we close the gap between researchers and the research participants?

**DR. THERNSTROM:** My first answer is to close down the education schools. There are so few scholars doing good work on education, and interestingly enough, most of them are economists and are not in education schools. They are people like economist Caroline Hoxby at Harvard, and some others are in think tanks. In a recent meeting to celebrate departing Boston superintendent Tom Payzant, his second-in-command said something very courageous, which made my jaw drop because he has been in a bureaucracy for the last 10 years in Boston. He said that these large urban systems cannot be turned around within the current structure of public education. An outgoing official could say that; if I said it, which I often do, nobody listens to me. But people might listen to him.

**MALE VOICE:** As researchers, and in general, we use the terms "African-American" and "Black" as though they are interchangeable. Who are we talking about? Is it important that we disaggregate cultural experiences of Black folks to understand that, as you point out, not all Black folk have these problems? If we want to disaggregate it today, who are we talking about? African-Americans, Haitians, Jamaicans?

**PROFESSOR MINCY:** I think the point that you raise dissipates across generations. If we were talking about Jamaicans, with whom I went to school, they would possess a culture about education and work that more closely resembled the ideology of their

immigrant parents, and you would see radical differences between their outcomes and those of native born African-Americans. On the other hand, two or three generations later we begin to see, a local context. As we work through cohorts, I think the differences in the outcomes for Jamaican or even for African students who are now in the United States are beginning to show that gender and color are beginning to disadvantage ethnic groups of color in ways that we would only recognize with respect to African-Americans years ago.

**DR. THERNSTROM:** We do not have the data, however, to track these students in the National Assessment for Education Progress.

**PROFESSOR MINCY:** If you look at a study that Doug Massey is conducting on enrollment rates of Black students in historically Black and colleges clearly shows that African-American male students are declining in their enrollment relative to girls.

**DR. THERNSTROM:** I am talking about the rates for Haitians versus the American-born.

**PROFESSOR MINCY:** But he does this across color and ethnicity.

**DR. THERNSTROM:** The foreign-born are a relatively small group. Unfortunately, we do not track them. One of the things NAEP should do is ask for the country of origin of your parents, but now it does not ask that simple question.

**FEMALE VOICE:** Do you think that America is playing African-Americans and the West Indians against each other? I remember, it used to be that the West Indians were getting jobs and African-Americans were not, and then the

next generation became African-American. Now the Latinos are finding jobs and the West Indians cannot get the work. Do you think that anyone that comes to this country will get work before the African-Americans, and that way it keeps everybody divided?

**PROFESSOR MEAD:** It comes to seem that way because the individuals we are talking about primarily here-low-income men who are often Black but could also include other groups-are simply less employable. We have to recognize that there are real issues of employability, and so the new groups-in this case the aliens coming in from Mexico-get the jobs. There is no policy to make this happen - that

is not in the interest of the employers. We have to recognize the need to increase the employability of the native born and to restrain immigration.

**DR. THERNSTROM:** Hillard Pouncy has data that fascinated me: He found that 38 percent of young jobless Black men-men who are out of the labor force entirely-admit to earnings from crime. Then he says that employers do not want to hire young Black men out of fear of crime, but his own chart shows that 30 percent of those who do have jobs are, nevertheless, involved in crime. So maybe employers are reacting to something that is legitimate.



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## NOTES

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