

SUMMARY: This paper discusses African Americans. Young African-Americans, especially males, face particularly acute and limited chances of succeeding in school, as they do socially, a lot they share with other under-served minority and poor populations (Bailey & Paisley, n.d.). Statistics say that African-Americans account for only 17% of the total population of a typical school, yet they comprise 32% of all suspensions and 30% of all expulsions. There are also three times more African-American males in remedial or special education classes than their white male counterparts and only 8.4% of those in gifted and talented classes are African-American.

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African-American

Young African-Americans, especially males, face particularly acute and limited chances of succeeding in school, as they do socially, a lot they share with other under-served minority and poor populations (Bailey & Paisley, n.d.). Statistics say that African-Americans account for only 17% of the total population of a typical school, yet they comprise 32% of all suspensions and 30% of all expulsions. There are also three times more African-American males in remedial or special education classes than their white male counterparts and only 8.4% of those in gifted and talented classes are African-American.

Summing up, studies show that these African-American males have only 1 out of 12 chances of finishing college yet have 1 out of 4 chances of dropping out of high school (Bailey &

Paisley, n.d.). It is, however, believed that it is possible for schools to take action that can reverse the patterns of low achievement among these African-American youngsters (Noguera, 2002).

Much evidence is conclusive that poor children receive inferior schooling and other related services in the inner-cities where there are quite many unmet basic needs (Noguera, 2002). While schools should represent hope and opportunity, young black males are discriminated against, marginalized and stigmatized (Noguera, 2002): in this setting, they are likely to be viewed as misbehaving and stupid or inferior intellectually, are meted harsher punishments even for minor violations of school rules. There is little regard for their welfare. They also have greater chances of getting excluded from competitive classes and from educational opportunities that might otherwise serve to support and encourage them (Noguera, 2002).

American society has long ignored African-American social styles, debased African-American traditions and consistently produced and maintained negative and fearful images of African-Americans (Schwartz, 2001). The result is that educators endorse these images on African-American students and, in fact, avoid teaching them, or at least be

stricter towards them than white Americans, in the assumption that the former are not disciplined enough in their own homes. This behavior and practices in school by teachers, administrators and school personnel do not take into account the inborn knowledge, cognitive abilities, culture and values of such students and, thus, deprive them the same advantages at achieving in school as the whites. The reasons are countless, but the bottom line is that Africa-American students do not feel encouraged to act out. And the comparison is clearly drawn: while a white male student is easily excused for a one-time violation or offense, an African American student who commits the same violation is judged as a troublemaker through-and-through and is unfairly and severely penalized (Schwartz). Even excelling African-American students believe that racist discrimination would limit their chances of succeeding, which are available to whites who similarly achieve.

Providing them with an effective public school education has been such a difficult problem. They attend under-resourced, overcrowded schools, wherein they feel alienated instead of participate in the education process (Schwartz, 2001). The result is that some of these otherwise eager students express their gripe through harmful antisocial acts, in the belief that they are

"unjustly accused, unfairly silenced, and unnecessarily punished (Noguera, 2002).

As a result, many of these adolescent Blacks can be seen loitering in the halls of public schools, sharing a common "American dream" with adolescent white students, but removed from the educational process (Bailey & Paisley, n.d.). If not in the halls or the campus, they can be found in street corners and shopping malls, where they are feared and viewed with contempt. Reports say that many of the will not reach 18 years old because of violent deaths, sometimes over heated arguments over trivialities, like athletic shoes. Or they are forced to leave school and their hopes. These institutions label them collectively without giving them a chance to realize their individual potentials.

Their perceived poor academic and social performance are believed to develop out of a lack of role models, low self-esteem, hopelessness, lack of productivity and low expectations from schools and the community (Bailey & Paisley, n.d.). Teachers, researchers and community leaders discuss the poor performance of these African-Americans, especially males, at professional meetings, but do not know how to help them achieve their potential. This is of serious importance, because these under-served youths are among the number of teen African-Americans (mostly males)

who get rough with the law and land in jail. Reports say that one of 4 African American males are, in fact, behind bars or under court supervision. It must also be noted that there are more of these African-American men below 20 who are under court supervision than in college (Bailey & Paisley, n.d.). In the last decade, data show that black adolescents account for 15% of the young population who comprised 28% of all juvenile arrests made - evidencing their over representation in criminal statistics.

These and other figures spell out the painful dilemma of the young African-American, as predicted a decade ago by the Center for the Study of Social Policy, which said that 70% of all working-age African-American men would be imprisoned, dead, alcoholic or hooked on drugs by the year 2000 (Bailey & Paisley, n.d.). This dark and grim over representation of African-American men prevents them from fruitful or positive involvement in their community, but instead, establishes for them a deleterious self-image and disrespect for authority.

Personal identity, in relation to race, is fostered or constructed within classroom walls or the campus and affects academic performance (Noguera, 2002). Sociologists deviate from psychologists in the view that social roles and identities are fostered by socialization processes,

which form the basis of the assumption that Black males are at-risk, marginal and a danger in school and in American society as a whole. It is in school where children learn how to follow rules, interact with others, deal with authority and what races mean. Children learn more from the informal and unstructured activities about racial prejudices as well as from teachers' lesson plans. At this time, children become aware of physical differences of races and then later on, learn about racial dimensions and the differential treatments of different races (Noguera, 2002). One way that this is done in school is the familiar name-calling of Black students and other minorities.

The structure and culture of a particular school reinforces and maintains these racial categories and stereotypes or they do not. Teachers evaluate children according to their perceived abilities and conduct, and teachers' judgment carries the racial message both explicitly and implicitly. This is the message when African-Americans are over represented in remedial classes, special education programs and in lists of suspensions and expulsions (Noguera, 2002).

Even achieving Black students have a problem for deviating from the "norm": they become the objects of scrutiny from peers who consider the deviation as "selling

out" and "acting white" (Noguera, 2002). Black students resist ostracism by peers. Some studies on peer support and African-American students conclude that such support appears to be social in nature and can only be negative (Taylor, 2000), i.e., a stigma, that affects academic performance.

It is believed that, in order to break these unjust educational and social trends for the young African-Americans, the school environment should introduce and require innovative strategies to reverse these trends (Bailey & Paisley, n.d.). Educators, community leaders and school systems now believe and introduce enrichment initiatives that would serve the needs of these students and reverse the trend that indicates their failure in the current educational system (Bailey & Pailey, n.d.). The observation is that these initiatives introduced and implemented in the last decade have been fruitful and has effected significant changes to the curriculum and school mission and special, after-school programs.

One initiative was the designation of African Immersion Schools in Milwaukee in 1990 as the first to approve such a plan. These schools stress the accomplishments and achievements of African-Americans (Bailey & Paisley, n.d.), teaching the alphabet by using

the first letter of the names of famous African-Americans, and by studying the slave trade. After school, on weekends and in summer, white schools have enrichment programs, which use empowerment strategies, such as the study of African or African American history, positive self-identity building activities and interaction with African-American teachers. One more program aims at developing their positive self-identity through a study of African rituals and African/African history, specifically as a prevention of drug use, involvement in gangs and inferior academic performance. Another program in a non-profit organization aims at providing continual educational and financial help to inner city adolescent African-American men, called "scholars" to participate in after-school study halls, Saturday schools, community service and peer mentorships (Bailey & Paisley, n.d.). It has been observed, though, that these enrichment initiatives have to be developmental and comprehensive in approach - developmental in that each member is compared to where he should be, psychosocially and academically and that activities might include chances for members to fill in developmental gaps and prevent possible gaps in the future. And it is comprehensive in that the planned activities touch on all the aspects of the adolescent's life, because single approaches have limited

chances of success (Bailey & Paisley, n.d.). An example of an initiative that is both developmental and comprehensive is Project: Gentlemen on the Move. It identifies where each member is socially and academically and compares where they should be, according to Bailey and Paisley. The members are also provided with needed skills in order to achieve their full potential or "transformation", which is that positive change in the social and academic performance of the members.

But altering academic outcomes and offsetting risks are not just a matter of developing programs or introducing initiatives to establish or put a stop to unfair educational policies and practices. It needs to be recognized that Blacks, particularly males, often adopt behaviors that make them the accomplice of their own failures (Noguera, 2002). It has been demonstrated that they are more punished and placed in remedial classes than white students, but it has not been adequately searched and demonstrated that they are also likelier to act out in the classroom and avoid challenging themselves academically (Noguera, 2002). Those who must help must first understand and there are dominant theories as to why African-American students, especially males, are and do so.

Structuralism sees individuals as products of their environment, where behavioral changes occur with those of the structure of opportunity, and thus, the individual is disabled in controlling his personal choices. Culturalism, in contrast, suggests that the individual's behavior is a product of beliefs, values, norms and socialization (Noguera, 2002), and that change can occur only if these attitudes - such as towards school or education - are modified from the home, community or neighborhood. But while both so-called structural and cultural influences affect choices and actions, neither has the sole power to determine behavior. The individual has the unique capability to create cultural forms outside, other than or opposed to, these influences.

Even when there is the capability to oppose these forces, it should not be assumed that the individual will or can do so. In the case of Black students, who are mostly poor, the effects of poverty can be so constant and heavy that their life chances are literally determined by environmental and culture factors beyond their control or the community's intervention. Merely an individual's strength of character or some external agency can enable him to avoid the pitfalls and pressure in his environment,

nor is it in any way easy for him to choose outside of the realm of his environment where he was raised.

Looking more closely and realistically, the range of choices available to the typical African-American youngster is severely controlled or constrained and shaped by external forces in his environment. If he must be realistically and meaningfully helped, one should exert effort to discover and understand the reason and motivations behind his behavior. Behavioral outcomes can be changed only after the cognitive processes that influence the person's adapting, coping and responses are understood (Noguera, 2002).

Realizing that, because Black students are as likelier to act out in the classroom and avoid challenging themselves academically as they are to be punished or set up in remedial classes, they become not passive victims but active agents of their own failure (Noguera, 2002). New programs, more initiatives or new opportunities will not accomplish very much unless they and their families' willingness to take responsibility for their own improvement is enlisted or elicited. This requires programmatic interventions that would offset risks to which Black students are particularly susceptible and vulnerable (Noguera, 2002). These should include effective initiatives

that would modify cultural patterns, values and "oppositional identities" maintained by them that undermine their view of education. The best way is to study schools and programs that have succeeded in fulfilling this goal. This should be derived from a theoretical understanding of how the pressures on African-American men can be effectively countered. Only this combination will have any realistic and meaningful impact and chances of change taking place.

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