

The African American Male Initiative: Creating Success

Summary Report of the
Study Group of Experts Meeting

Co-Convened by
The Children's Aid Society and
The Institute for Urban and Minority Education,
Teachers College Columbia University

October 2006



The Children's Aid Society

www.childrensaidsociety.org



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Acknowledgments

This daylong meeting of the African American Male Study Group was made possible by the dedication and commitment of the scholars and practitioners who freely gave of their time to help The Children's Aid Society's effort to find programmatic solutions that would significantly improve outcomes for the African American male but also as a result of the guidance offered by a larger group of experts. This project has also been made possible by financial support provided by the Mulago Foundation and technical support provided by the Institute for Urban and Minority Education of the Teachers College Campaign for Educational Equity. To all who contributed we offer our deepest gratitude and appreciation.



Dear Colleagues,

At the conclusion of the first Study Group of Experts gathering, we look back at the steps that made possible such a remarkable discussion and we move forward toward the implementation of the inspired initiatives to help our African American males achieve success. On October 27, 2006 these dedicated scholars and practitioners spent the day discussing the problem and recommending constructive solutions. From this conversation, we have created *The Children's Aid Society Action Agenda* that will reach African American males from 2nd grade to age 24 through an array of programming.

What follows is a summary report that was carefully prepared by Lorna Palacio Morgan, Senior Program Quality Advisor at The Children's Aid Society, whose indispensable vision and leadership has led the *African American Male Initiative* from its inception – through the early stages of researching, conducting one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions, to teaming up with Dr. Edmund W. Gordon to co-chair the Study Group.

As we eagerly embark upon the next phases of our African American Male Initiative, we hope that you will continue your interest and support of our goal to implement the *Action Agenda* and reverse the negative trajectory that has plagued so many African American males.

C. Warren Moses
Chief Executive Officer
The Children's Aid Society

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Introduction

As an organization that has served the needy for more than 150 years, The Children's Aid Society (CAS) is deeply concerned about the victimization and unequal treatment that results from racial, gender, or religious bias, discrimination, and prejudice. There is no question that the inequities faced by African American males are not only disturbing but immoral and the problem is enormous. For example, more than 29% of African American males across the United States who are 15 years old today are likely to go to prison at some point in their lives compared to 4.4% of white males of the same age.¹ In the United States, while Black males represent 49% of prison inmates, only 4% attend college, and 3% obtain a Bachelor's degree.² A recent report by the Community Service Society notes that in 2003, barely one-half of New York's Black men were employed,³ and the high-school dropout rates for African American males are well over 50% in most metropolitan areas. In NYC only 30% of Black males graduate from high school in four years.⁴ The mortality rate from homicide for African American males ages 15- 17 is 34.4 per 100,000, compared to 2.4 per 100,000 for non-Hispanic white males ages 15-17.⁵ Across the United States, homicide remains the leading cause of death for Black males.⁶ Clearly, more needs to be done to alter the negative trajectory for African American males and improve their life outcomes for this population.

Creating Success

In 2005, Children's Aid launched *The African American Male Initiative: Creating Success* to respond to the growing concern for the serious plight of African American males and to bring about change. The initiative aimed to: (1) more fully understand the issues facing our Black male clients and (2) create new program strategies that will better address the needs of this vulnerable population.

○ ***A Literature Review*** – In the first phase of the initiative, the project staff conducted a literature review, studied the statistics, examined and re-examined the problem and produced a research binder, *Factors Affecting the Lives of African American Males*. We found that the literature on African American males did not focus on males who are successful. The data convinced us that we needed to find effective solutions for our African American male clients who face all the issues that other groups encounter, in addition to a unique set of challenges that stem from being Black, male *and* poor.

○ ***Consultation with experts, focus groups & internal review*** – Whereas the literature review confirmed the breadth of the problem, it did not provide us with many solutions. Our goal was to identify effective practices that would improve our work with African American males in achieving socio-emotional development (attitudinal issues, identity development, environmental factors), educational achievement (high-school graduation and college completion) and well-paid employment. In the second phase of the project, we developed a series of interview questions and consulted with a carefully selected

¹ The Dellums Commission. (2006). *A Way Out: Creating Partners for our Nation's Prosperity by Expanding Life Paths of Youth Men of Color: Final Report*. Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, Washington, D. C., p. 3.

² Morgan, L. P., and Bhola, S. (2006). *Creating a Culture of Success: Black Men – Steps Toward Success*. The Children's Aid Society, New York City, p. 2.

³ Morgan and Bhola, 3.

⁴ Morgan and Bhola, 4.

⁵ Dellums Commission, 3.

⁶ Morgan and Bhola, 2.

group of nationally recognized scholars, researchers, practitioners, school leaders and advocacy organizations. We also conducted focus groups with parents, adolescents and Black males on our staff. Finally, we closely examined the work in our own programs to assess what was most and least effective for our Black male clients. Some common themes and strategies emerged: more academic preparation, providing successful Black male role models, starting interventions early (before the 4th grade), teaching African American history, and providing supplementary education and exposure to experiences outside of their neighborhoods. A set of core elements for a possible model also emerged. These include academic values and skills, positive male role models, cultural awareness and positive identity, guidance and advising, manhood training, a safe space, and parent participation. We presented our findings in a report entitled *Creating a Culture of Success: Black Men-Steps Toward Success*.

○ ***A Study Group of Experts*** – In the third phase, The Children’s Aid Society and The Institute for Urban and Minority Education formed a study group of experts composed of scholars and practitioners with extensive expertise, experience and a lifelong commitment to finding solutions faced by the African American male. In October 2006, this group met at The Harvard Club with three objectives: (1) To review the nature of the problem of Black Male Development, (2) To discuss ideas and evidence for the efficacy of interventions that might deliver better outcomes for this particular population, (3) To formulate interventions and strategies for implementing such interventions. The Children’s Aid Society is grateful to our experts for generously giving of their time and freely sharing their wisdom during a day struggling together to arrive at ideas for a set of interventions that would be effective, affordable, and replicable. A summary of these proceedings was prepared by Children’s Aid staff members and approved by members of the Study Group.

○ ***The Problem***

The study group agreed that the dehumanization of Black males over the years has left this population particularly vulnerable and often underdeveloped. *The members of the group concluded that African-American males need a nation that values and protects them from those who use boys as instruments of violence and as agents for social unrest and exploitative economic gain.* The group expressed an urgent commitment to getting beyond the crisis to make sustainable changes at all levels of society – individual, family, school, and policy. Some of the factors and considerations identified as contributing to the success of the African American male are as follows:

- A sense of individual and collective spirituality
- Positive cultural identity
- Decreasing masculine bravado attitudes
- Engaging opportunities and experiencing success
- Family engagement (mothers, fathers, & other key family members)
- Supportive peer groups
- Positive gender identity (including the meaning of masculinity)
- Effective parental supervision and support
- Adult orchestration of redundant developmental resources
- Redundant routines and structures
- Access to positive male role models

- Complementarities between biological sensitivity and social contexts (i.e., influence of gene-environment interaction)
- Understanding both the physical and mental health challenges faced by African American males
- Recognizing the political and economic constraints within which many African American males must operate and removing or reducing such barriers
- Identifying and building on the human and social capital available to African American males
- Situating the challenges and opportunities facing African American males within the context of their families, their communities and the cultures of which they are a part
- Understanding historical and contemporary influences that shape the life experiences of diverse groups of African American males and the intersection of race, gender, and class in the socialization process

- ***Recommendations***

- ***Mentoring:*** Mentors were defined at the meeting as “teachers of relationships, rights, and responsibilities” and the group agreed that African American males really need male role models. *Mentoring* has been used as a protective strategy that exposes males to positive role models who can help with specific life skills, goal setting, and opportunities. The Eagle Academy, a single-sex public school for Black males in New York City, has successfully used this strategy. The Fathers and Sons Program, based in Flint, Michigan, is testing whether non-resident fathers can serve as mentors to their own sons. It was agreed that throughout their various stages of development, African-American boys require communities of men who can ensure their safe passage and celebrate – through ritual and ceremony, fellowship and membership – their ascension to manhood.
- ***Academic support with high teacher expectations:*** Academic success was identified as critical for the success of African American males. Programs such as Early Head Start, STAR and Whole School Reform have successfully supported the academic development of Black males. However, trustful relationships between teachers and African American males was viewed as a risk factor for successful interventions. Thus, *developmental interventions with teachers* is thought to be a useful approach to enhance protective influences in the school environment. Teachers must have high expectations for Black youth and be coached in cultural sensitivity. Given the critical importance of academic success for these youth, special attention will need to be given to the provision of teacher, parent and peer support for the engagement in academic preparation and the achievement of academic competence.
- ***Theory/evidence based practice that considers race, gender and class:*** *Theory driven* interventions are needed to provide a framework for understanding identified risk and protective factors so effective mechanisms for change can be identified and incorporated into interventions, measured and evaluated for effectiveness. This type of intervention will contribute to the small body of knowledge and practice in many areas of intervention. Evaluation should be both formative and summative and should use a community-based participatory research approach.

- ***A multi-tier approach:*** *Comprehensive approaches* to intervention that consider change at multiple levels of influence (i.e., individual, family, community, societal and policy) were endorsed by the Group. Financial incentives have been used to contribute to the entire family's economic well being, for example with neighborhood relocation programs, and they could, if appropriately targeted, be used to influence a sense of individual self-worth among children and adolescents. Interventions with families, schools, and neighborhoods provide additional layers of protection for the child. The Early Head Start Program's family component exemplifies this strategy. With support, extended, surrogate and adoptive families can provide the connectivity and identity needed to achieve self worth, stability and belonging.
- ***Sustainability:*** Finally, the group agreed that it is critical that all interventions are *sustainable* and sustained so that Black males can develop trust in long-term, authentic and meaningful programming and relationships.

The Children's Aid Action Agenda

African-American boys need a nation that is willing to invest in them and provide the resources they need to assemble as communities of men charged with the mandate to care for others as they too were once nurtured and supported and to become productive, contributing, and well respected members of society. With this vision in mind, Children's Aid is prepared to pilot programmatic solutions that could be replicated within our own programs and potentially shared with other service organizations doing similar work. Our interventions support males at critical points in their development as it is widely accepted that low-income Black males confront a multitude of disadvantages, which, when accumulated, makes a successful transition to adulthood unlikely. There will be four main groups targeted for our interventions:

- 2nd to 6th grades
- middle school students
- high-school students
- 17-24 year old young adults

For these groups, we offer five program strategies:

1. Life Coaches – Life coaching provides people the opportunity to have the life of their dreams, to achieve far-reaching goals, to feel more fulfilled and to have more effective relationships. Each of our African American males will be assigned a life coach to help them discover what they want in life, to help clarify personal and career goals, to create multiple paths to achieving those goals and to help them stay on track. It is intended to be a long-term supportive relationship involving mentoring, role modeling, problem solving and advocacy. Life coaches will be Black male staff who will be available 24/7 over an extended number of years.

2. Monetary Incentives – African American males are hemorrhaging from our middle and high-schools. During the middle school years, many of our males are challenged to stay on track but can fall victim to the pull of the streets. There is some evidence that giving kids monetary incentives to attend school helps them maintain good grades. Also, from a practical standpoint, many of the boys need to contribute to their household and without

this financial help might find it necessary to seek employment or to become involved in criminal activity instead.

3. School Reform – Despite the challenge, we believe that schools can be reformed into more effective organizations enabling hundreds of Black males to achieve academic success and escape from poverty. Many reform efforts fail due to the lack of attention paid to the cultural uniqueness of Black men and the shortage of Black male teachers. The quality and commitment of teachers influences the effectiveness of schools for Black males. The *Professional Development* of teachers is paramount, as many have come to believe that teachers can be trained to treat African-American male children in a way that is less likely to turn them off to school and more likely to lead to their success .

4. Teen Leadership – Teens in partnership with adults have an enormous capacity to serve in leadership roles and to act as driving forces for change. Studies show that programs that include youth as part of a solution are far more effective at engaging youth than those that see them as “the problem.” The goal of the Teen Leadership program is to help youth become agents of change, to act as messengers to inspire and to educate other youth and adults about the importance of education, work and positive values. Activities might involve taking the message into the street through peaceful protests, Town Hall meetings and campaigns to raise awareness. Community service projects such as reading to or mentoring younger children can also be effective ways to promote resiliency.

5. Transitions to Adulthood (School to Work) – While young children will be the major focus of our work, another group – males, ages 17-24, who manage to stay in school and graduate but do not plan to attend college – have little or no support system to help them connect to the labor force. Recent studies show that this transition is especially difficult for Black males due to the discrimination by employers who view them as unsuitable for available jobs. It will be worthwhile to focus a portion of our effort to help these youth connect to resources that will help them prepare for work and the job search.

Conclusion

We believe that we have achieved a state of readiness to implement a multi-pronged, multi-phased response that over time will yield positive outcomes for our African American male clients. The basic idea is to use a diverse set of protective strategies to help males by moving them forward, preventing problems, and strengthening their communities. We will intervene both directly with the males and their families but also at structural, political and policy levels. Although program providers do not traditionally have a strong role in policy, our research clearly indicates that we must go beyond our fixation on program and focus also on context---therefore, we are compelled to help alter the status quo, even if it means changing the priorities by which we live, to make the needs of children and youth, especially African American males, our highest priority for change.

This report was prepared by Lorna Palacio-Morgan, Senior Program Quality Advisor at The Children's Aid Society, with assistance from Laura Tomasko, Research Assistant at The Children's Aid Society. For information regarding The Children's Aid Society *African American Male Initiative*, or to see a copy of the full report, *Creating a Culture of Success: Black Men-Steps Toward Success*, please contact Lorna Palacio-Morgan at lornam@childrensaidsociety.org or Laura Tomasko at laurat@childrensaidsociety.org.

Resources Recommended at the Study Group Meeting

Studies

Family and Neighborhood Influences

Kling, J. R., Ludwig, J., & Katz, L. (March 2004). *Youth Criminal Behavior in the Moving to Opportunity Experiment, Working Paper #482*. Industrial Relations Section, Princeton University. Accessed November 30, 2006
<<http://www.irs.princeton.edu/pubs/pdfs/482.pdf>>

Mandara, J. (February 2006). The Impact of Family Functioning on African American Males' Academic Achievement: A Review and Clarification of the Empirical Literature. *Teachers College Record* 108 (2), 206-223. Accessed November 1, 2006
<<http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/publications/184248255243e215eb73fb8.pdf>>

Mandara, J., Murray, C. B., & Joyner, T. N. (August 2005). The Impact of Fathers' Absence on African American Adolescents' Gender Role Development. *Sex Roles* 53 (3/4), 207-220. Accessed November 1, 2006
<<http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/publications/55289106043cd128f67aab.pdf>>

Mentoring

Tierney, J. P., Grossman, J. B., & Resch, N. L. (2000). *Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers Big Sisters*. Public/Private Ventures. Accessed November 2, 2006
<http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/111_publication.pdf>

Monetary Incentives

Reimers, F., DeShano, C., & Trevino, E. (2006). *Where is the "Education" in Conditional Cash Transfers in Education?* UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Montreal. Accessed November 6, 2006
<http://www.uis.unesco.org/TEMPLATE/pdf/EducGeneral/WP4_Reimers.pdf>

Skoufias, E. (2005). *PROGRESA and Its Impacts on the Welfare of Rural Households in Mexico, Research Report 139*. International Food Policy Research Institute. Washington, DC. Accessed November 2, 2006 <<http://www.ifpri.org/pubs/abstract/139/ab139.pdf>>

Spencer, M. B., Noll, E., & Cassidy, E. (June 2005). Monetary Incentives in Support of Academic Achievement: Results of a Randomized Field Trial Involving High Achieving, Low-Resource, Ethnically Diverse Urban Adolescents. *Evaluation Review* 29, (3), 199-222.

Racial Identity

Akom, A. A. (October 2003). Reexamining Resistance as Oppositional Behavior: The Nation of Islam and the Creation of a Black Achievement Ideology. *Sociology of Education* 76 (4), 305-325.

Altschul, I., Oyserman, D., & Bybee, D. (September/October 2006). Racial-Ethnic Identity in Mid Adolescence: Content and Change as Predictors of Academic Achievement. *Child Development* 77 (5), 1155-1169. Accessed November 3, 2006

<http://sitemaker.umich.edu/daphna.oyserman/files/altschul__oyserman__bybee__2006_.pdf>

Oyserman, D., Bybee, D., & Terry, K. (2006). Possible Selves and Academic Outcomes: How and When Possible Selves Impel Action. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 91 (1), 188-204. Accessed November 3, 2006

<http://sitemaker.umich.edu/culture.self/files/oyserman__bybee__terry_2006.pdf>

Oyserman, D., Grant, L., & Ager, J. (1995). A Socially Contextualized Model of African American Identity: Possible Selves and School Persistence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 69 (6), 1216-1232. Accessed November 3, 2006

<http://sitemaker.umich.edu/daphna.oyserman/files/oyserman_gant_ager_1995.p f>

School Reform

Rowan, B., Camburn, E., and Barnes, C. (2004). Benefiting from Comprehensive School Reform: A Review of Research on CSR Implementation. DRAFT. In C. Cross (Ed.). Accessed November 6, 2006

<<http://www.sii.soe.umich.edu/documents/NCCSR%20chapter%20final%20draft%205.24.04.pdf>>

Program Models

- 100 Black Men
<http://www.100blackmen.org/>
- Algebra Project
<http://www.algebra.org/>
- Boys Club in New York
<http://www.bcny.org/>
- Children's Futures
<http://www.childrensfutures.org/>
- Civilian Conversation Corps (CCC)
<http://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/035.html>
- Eagle Academy
<http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/StudentEnroll/HSAAdmissions/HSDirectory/Boo/sid=688>
- Harlem Children's Zone
<http://www.hcz.org/>
- Head Start
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsb/>
 - Early Head Start
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsb/programs/ehs/ehs2.htm>
- Health Information Providers and Promoters (HIPP)
<http://www.gse.upenn.edu/changes/research.html>
- Michael Gurian Institute
<http://www.gurianinstitute.com/>
- Poverty Lab
<http://www.povertyactionlab.com/>

- PROGRESA (Programa de Educacion, Salud, y Alimentacion)
<http://www.oportunidades.gob.mx/>
<http://www.ifpri.org/themes/progres.htm>
- Scholarship Through Academic Resiliency (STAR)
<http://www.gse.upenn.edu/review/archive/fall2003.html>
(From *In Practice: Making Changes with Research on Resiliency* by Vinay Harpalani)
- Start on Success (SOS)
<http://www.startonsuccess.org/>
- Robert Wood Johnson – school readiness project in Trenton
<http://www.rwjf.org/>
- The Bower Foundation
<http://www.bowerfoundation.org/default.htm>
- TRIO
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html>
- Upward Bound
<http://www.ed.gov/programs/trioupbound/index.html>

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- Daphna Oyserman, University of Michigan
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- Howard C. Stevenson, University of Pennsylvania
<http://www.gse.upenn.edu/faculty/stevenson.html>
- Jawanza Kunjufu, African American Images
<http://www.africanamericanimages.com/AAI/Jawanza%20Kunjufu.htm>
- Jelani Mandara, Northwestern University
<http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/common/people/profile/?ProfileID=45>
- Linda Tucker, Southern Arkansas University
<http://www.saumag.edu/tucker/>
- Roland Fryer, Harvard University
<http://www.economics.harvard.edu/faculty/fryer/fryer.html>
- Sally Reis, Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development, University of Connecticut
<http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/>
- Scott Henggeler, Medical University of South Carolina
<http://www.musc.edu/psychiatry/faculty/henggeler.htm>

Books and Articles

Gordon, E. W., Bridglall, B. L., & Meroe, A.S. (2006). *Supplementary Education: The Hidden Curriculum of High Academic Achievement*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Gordon, E. W., & Bridglall, B. L. (2007). *Affirmative Development: The Cultivation of Academic Ability*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Gordon, E. T., Gordon E. W., Nembhard, J. G. (1994). Social Science Literature Concerning African American Men. *The Journal of Negro Education* 63 (4), 508-532.

Newman, K. S. (2006). *Chutes and Ladders: Navigating the Low-Wage Labor Market*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Sen, A., & Gates, H. L., Eds. (2006). *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton, Inc.

Schemo, D. J. (25 October 2006). Change in Federal Rules Backs Single-Sex Public Education. *New York Times*, A1.

Co-Conveners

The Children's Aid Society

To ensure the physical and emotional well being of children and families, and to provide each child with the support and opportunities needed to become a happy, healthy and productive adult.

The Children's Aid Society is a lifeline and a safe haven to New York City's children and families most in need of assistance. We carry out our mission through a broad range of essential health, education and social services.

The Children's Aid Society, founded in 1853, serves more than 150,000 children and their families each year, often helping them overcome tremendous odds. Our network of more than 100 cutting-edge programs and services provided at over 40 sites in and around New York City supplies a full spectrum of support. Our nationally recognized programs are models of social service practice and have impacted national child welfare policy.

The Institute for Urban and Minority Education, Teachers College Columbia University

The Institute conducts research and evaluations, provides information services, and assists schools, community-based organizations, and parent school leaders in program development and evaluation, professional development, and parent education.

Since its beginning at Teachers College in 1973, the Institute for Urban and Minority Education (IUME) has been committed to better understanding the educational, psychological, and social development of urban and minority group students, and the experiences in the home, neighborhoods, communities, and larger society that influence their opportunity for development and social mobility.