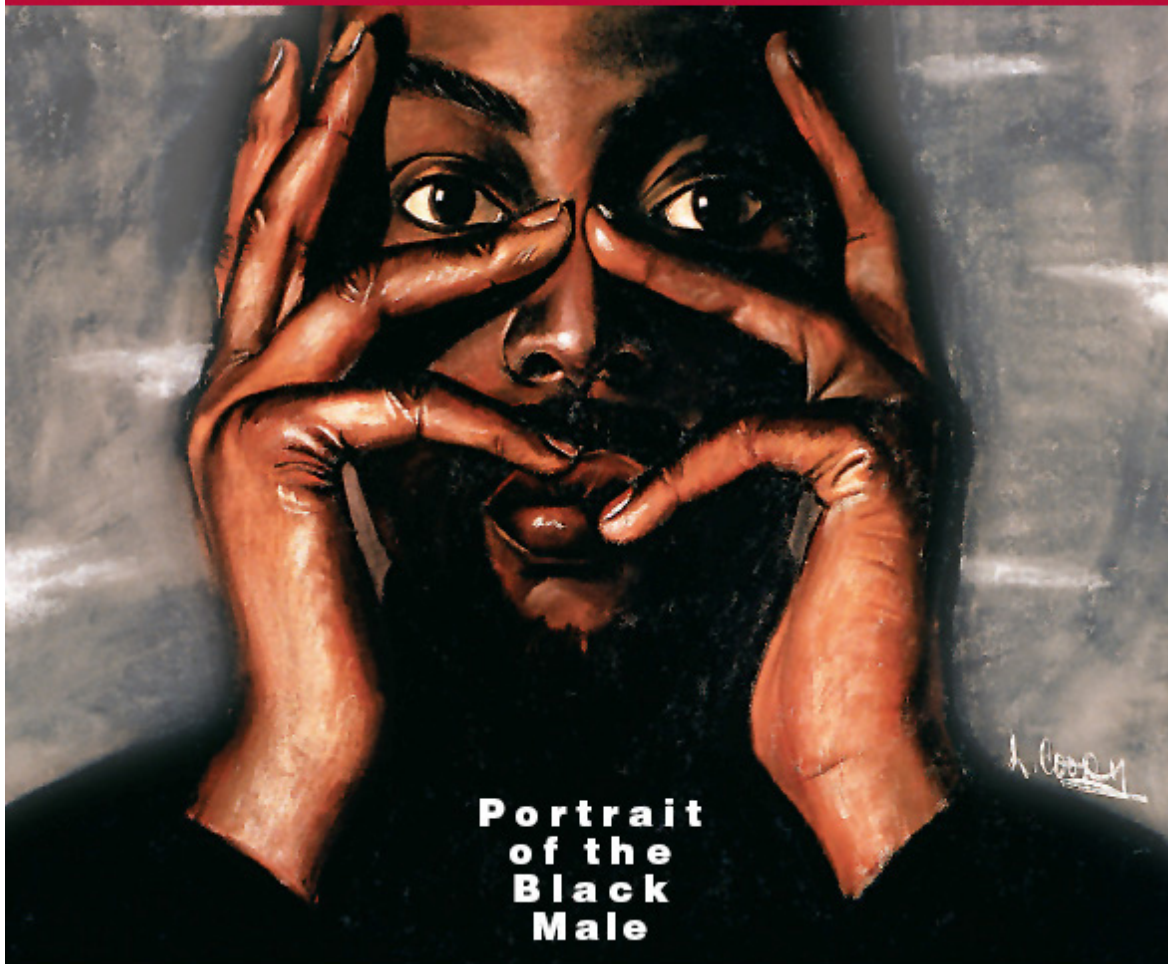


The State of Black America 2007

ABSTRACTS



**Portrait
of the
Black
Male**

Foreword by Senator Barack Obama



National
Urban League

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National Urban League
Policy Institute

***THE STATE OF
BLACK AMERICA®
2007***

PORTRAIT OF THE BLACK MALE

ABSTRACTS

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THE NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE 2007 EQUALITY INDEX™

*By Rondel Thompson and Sophia Parker
Global Insight, Inc.*

The National Urban League's Equality Index™ uses the most recent data available to compare the relative conditions of whites and blacks in the United States today. Using over 300 different variables from the Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bureau of Justice Statistics and other sources, the index creates a statistical snapshot of African-Americans today as well as tracks any changes that have occurred since the index was first created in 2004. The data is broken down into five broad categories—Economics, Health, Education, Social Justice and Civic Engagement—each of which is given its own index value. Every data variable used, as well as the five categories, is given a relative weight in order to create the final index number. Whites are used as the control in this index, so any value less than one indicates that blacks are doing relatively worse than whites in that category. This 2007 Equality Index has a value of 0.7333, fractionally up from 0.73 in 2006. While the overall value is important, a more complete picture of the racial landscape of America can be obtained by looking at the individual components of the index.

The Economics sub-index, weighted at 30% of the total index, has 45 variables divided into six separate categories: Mean Income, Employment Issues, Poverty, Housing and Wealth Formation, Transportation and Digital Divide. The Equality Index for economics in 2007 was calculated at 0.57—a marginal increase over the 2006 figure of 0.56, and the lowest index number of any of the five major categories.

The Health sub-index was weighted at 25% of the total index and contains 101 variables divided into three major categories: Death Rates and Life Expectancy, Life Health Issues and neonatal Care and Related Issues. The health sub-index was calculated at 0.78 in 2007, an increase from the .76 value in 2006.

The Education sub-index is also 25% of the overall index and has 99 variables divided into five major categories: Education Quality, Attainment, Scores, Enrollment and Student Status. The Equality Index for education was calculated at 0.79, slightly above the 0.78 index in 2006.

Social Justice is weighted at 10% of the overall index and its 73 variables are divided into two major components: Equality Before the Law and Victimization. The index value for Social Justice in 2007 was the second lowest of the sub-indices, at 0.66.

Finally, the Civic Engagement sub-index was also 10% of the overall index, and contained 12 variables divided into four categories: Democratic Progress, Volunteerism, Collective Bargaining and Government Employment. Civic Engagement was the only one of the five major categories with an index above 1, meaning blacks are doing comparatively better than whites by these measures. The Civic Engagement index was 1.05 in 2007, slightly higher than the 1.04 value in 2006.

Each of the 330 variables in these five categories shows us part of the picture, and collectively the Equality Index can serve as a map—directing us to both where there are still large gaps between whites and blacks in this country, as well as areas where progress has been made.

ESSAY 1

**RE-IMAGINING BLACK MASCULINE IDENTITY: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE
“PROBLEM” SURROUNDING THE CONSTRUCTION OF BLACK MASCULINITY IN
AMERICA**

by David J. Johns

The social categorization of black maleness, black masculinity, black male identity or any term by which we seek to understand the implications of being both black and male, in the United States, is an imagined social construct. Fashioned during and codified after the formal collapse of the American institution of slavery, black maleness was socially constructed from narrowly defined understandings of white maleness and is heavily imbued with pernicious stereotypes introduced to strip enslaved Africans of humanity.

These stereotypes are still prevalent in contemporary U.S. society as at least one factor contributing to the cyclical nature of black male disengagement, alienation and misrepresentation. The collusion of these factors, being fashioned from restricted definitions of white maleness and the evolution of socially imagined constructs like race, gender and class, has resulted in archetypal categorization of black men and boys, both individually and collectively, as easily understood and readily identifiable. By highlighting the ways in which the social construction of black maleness is imagined and can therefore be re-imagined we can begin to identify, disrupt and possibly supplant negative understandings of black males.

In a study titled "Shadowboxing: Black Male Identity and Independent Schools," Johns builds upon themes presented in this essay to examine how black male adolescents at elite self-selecting independent schools, manage spoiled identities. Contrary to most studies of black male adolescents in schools, the black male sixth grade students at Immaculate have agency that they use strategically to not simply resist or capitulate but to shadowbox in ways that maintain their sense of self. Each of the students understood in some way the benefits of attending a school like Immaculate. Although most felt they owed it to their parents to do well, they struggled to cope with the de facto culture of elite independent schools. For the black male students in this study, being unsuccessful or returning to previous schools was not an option, but being both black and male complicated life at Immaculate. In light of this, students were forced to make sense of and find ways to successfully navigate the expectations, sometimes-pejorative attitudes, and lack of culturally relevant, stimulating, and affirming experiences.

If we have any hope of developing the black community and saving the black family; finding solutions to the crises that continually envelop black males regardless of time and space; or finding ways to support the position of the United States as a global leader, it is critically important that we find ways to challenge, disrupt, and supplant negative and harmful images of black males.

ESSAY 2

RECONNECTING YOUNG BLACK MEN: WHAT POLICIES WOULD HELP?

by Harry J. Holzer, Ph.D
Professor of Public Policy
Georgetown University

The term “disconnected youth” refers to young people who have been out of school and out of work for a year or more. They are not temporarily “idle” but are fully disconnected from the mainstream worlds of schooling and work. They may be incarcerated or on parole or probation; they might be aging out of foster care or still attached to their nuclear families. But, overwhelmingly, they come from low-income families and often grow up in poor and relatively segregated neighborhoods.

Of all racial and gender groups, young black men are by far the most likely to become “disconnected” from school and work. For instance, at the end of the 1990s, employment rates among less-educated young black men (ages 16 through 24) who were not enrolled in school and not institutionalized were nearly 30 percentage points below the employment rates of young whites and Latinos with comparable characteristics, and these gaps grew even larger during the labor market downturn that began in 2001. According to recent data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY97), over 30 percent of young black men drop out of high school – a higher rate than is observed for any other group – and by some estimates, the dropout rates among inner-city youth are much higher than that. On any given day, roughly 12 percent of all black men between the ages of 16 and 34 are incarcerated while roughly twice that number are on parole or probation. On all of these dimensions, the gaps between young black men and other groups have widened over the past few decades. In addition, many young black men are non-custodial fathers with steep child support orders, some of whom are likely to be in “arrears” due to a period of incarceration. Those in arrears are likely to face “tax rates” as high as 65 percent on their meager earnings.

To reverse the negative trends in education and employment that afflict young black men, we need a comprehensive set of efforts that will improve their skills and early employment and prevent disconnection from school and work. Such a set of policies will tend to focus on schools and local communities, but will also demand responsible behavior among young men while augmenting their opportunities. For those still facing the prospects of mostly low-wage employment, their work incentives need to be strengthened. And, for young men who have become incarcerated and are also non-custodial fathers, the barriers they face to stable employment need to be reduced.

ESSAY 3**WHY SHOULD AFRICAN AMERICANS CARE ABOUT
MACROECONOMIC POLICY?**

by William M. Rodgers, III, Ph.D
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African Americans typically have higher rates of unemployment, making them more sensitive to macro shocks like natural disasters and structural changes in the economy. The causes of these high and persistent rates of unemployment are complex and includes factors such as spatial and/or skills mismatch, discrimination and high incarceration rates. Macro policy is particularly important to African Americans because it impacts the breadth and depth of an economic expansion's (recession's) ability to lower (raise) black unemployment rates. However, macroeconomic policies are typically absent from the list of remedies used to combat joblessness.

Two important components of macroeconomic policy are monetary policy and fiscal policy. Setting monetary policy is a primary function of the Federal Reserve. When the goal of monetary policy is to maintain price stability, it often implies a willingness to accept higher unemployment rates which disproportionately impact African Americans and their communities. The goal of contractionary monetary policy is to prevent the economy from overheating and is usually achieved by raising the federal funds rate. Carpenter and Rodgers have shown that an increase in the federal funds rate has disparate negative impacts on African Americans that are more pronounced in lower income counties such as those in the Lower Mississippi Delta.

Fiscal policies, like tax cuts, reflect society's values and priorities and are the framework that shapes government revenue and expenditures. Freeman and Rodgers find that the fiscal stimulus of a tax cut is a major factor in the growth rate of the economy. Yet, because the wealthy have a lower propensity to spend than middle and low income families, tax cuts that benefit the wealthy may result in slower job and GDP growth, making it difficult to lower unemployment rates.

Prescriptions for Change

1. Greater coordination between policymakers and researcher for *full* disclosure of the disparate impacts of monetary and fiscal policy;
2. Increased interaction between African Americans and the regional Federal Reserve Banks which track and monitor regional economies;
3. "Follow the Money" by being aware of how funds are allocated and how this reflects societal values and priorities;
4. African American specific economic forecasts that require leadership to document the consequences of fiscal and monetary policies on African American communities;
5. Educate yourself and your community by keeping abreast of important micro- and macroeconomic data and information.

ESSAY 4**STILL SEGREGATED, STILL UNEQUAL: ANALYZING THE IMPACT OF NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ON AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS**

by Christopher B. Knaus, Ph.D.
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University of California, Berkeley

While No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was touted as a way to address the achievement gap that separates African American, Latino, and Native American children from White and Asian students, public schools have continued to fail African Americans through separate and unequal educational opportunities. According to the Department of Education publication, *The Condition of Education 2006*, high-minority and high-poverty schools perform much lower than do low-minority and low-poverty schools, yet 71 percent of African Americans attend high minority schools and 72 percent of African Americans attend high-poverty schools. By focusing on measuring the outcomes of racial inequalities (such as the achievement gap), NCLB avoids addressing fundamental inequalities in schooling and fails to expose the causes of such inequalities.

Much of the achievement gap is mirrored by the severe gap in teacher quality provided to high-minority and high-poverty schools. Researchers have shown that such schools have the least experienced teachers, the highest teacher turnover rates, the highest percentage of teachers teaching outside of their fields, and often have the highest student-to-teacher ratios.

The curricula in most public schools also fail to adequately engage black students. Disinterested students who are labeled as problems or disruptive often become the victims of “zero tolerance” policies which disproportionately impact African American students, contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline, especially among black males. Furthermore, NCLB advocates for teaching to bare minimums rather than raising the bar on comprehensive education levels that would be more meaningful in terms of preparing all students to enter college or the workforce. As African Americans continue to be punished for the failures of their schools, NCLB has continued a separate and unequal educational system while shifting the debate away from improving schools to a simplified measurement of existing inequalities.

Prescriptions for Change

1. Expand definitions of academic skills beyond math and reading. Important subjects such as art, music, history, biology, speech, and social studies must be included in the fabric of schooling.
2. Reengage African American students in the educational process by implementing culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, curricula, and school structures that are informed by quality research.
3. Expand assessments to include multiple measures of academic success, as an alternative to standardized tests.

ESSAY 5

**ON EQUAL GROUND: CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS FOR LOWER COLLEGE
COMPLETION RATES AMONG BLACK MALES**

by Valerie Rawlston Wilson, Ph.D
Senior Resident Scholar
National Urban League Policy Institute

Black males represented less than one-third of the growth in the total proportion of black undergraduate students in degree-granting institutions nationwide between 1990 and 2004. Degree completion statistics indicate that less than half (43 percent) of all African American students who enrolled in a 4-year college as first-time freshmen in 1995-96 had completed a bachelor's degree by 2001, compared to 63 percent of white students. The college completion rate for black males was only 36 percent.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) have served a unique role in educating and graduating a significant portion of economically (and often otherwise) disadvantaged, college-aged African Americans. However, current estimates suggest that the graduation rate at HBCUs tends to be much lower than the graduation rate for black students at the nation's highest-ranked institutions.

Aggregate enrollment and completion statistics give us a snapshot of students at the beginning and end of the college education process, but fail to address the specific dynamics at work in the decision to remain enrolled and complete a college degree. For example, taking into account individual characteristics, family background, high school academic performance and local labor market conditions, African American students who attended HBCUs were no more likely to leave college before completing a degree than similar students at TWIs. Differences in persistence rates between males and females also diminished once student characteristics were controlled for. Rather, persistence and graduation was most strongly affected by academic preparation and family background.

Prescriptions for Change

1. Minimize the inequalities present in American public schools by correcting the underlying racial and economic segregation of high-poverty and high-minority schools.
2. Provide better access to college preparatory and advanced placement classes for African American students at the high school level. This must be accompanied by preparation to complete these more challenging courses at the middle and elementary school levels
3. Increase mentoring and other means of offering additional support to African American students.
4. Identify problems early in the college experience and intervene accordingly.
5. Strengthen need-based aid programs, like the Pell grant.
6. Collect the detailed, longitudinal data needed to conduct comprehensive and sound research on the African American college experience.

ESSAY 6

**BLACK MALE LIFE EXPECTANCY IN THE UNITED STATES:
A MULTI-LEVEL EXPLORATION OF CAUSES**

by Mercedes R. Carnethon, Ph.D
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Northwestern University

Demographers project that a baby born today in the United States can expect to live 77.85 years. Despite life expectancy gains in the aggregate, the gap in life expectancy between blacks and whites has not narrowed with time. For example, black men born in 2004 are projected to die six years sooner than their white counterparts, and seven years sooner than black women. Although the greatest excess mortality in black compared with white men is most prominent for infant mortality, after the first year, the life expectancy difference is most pronounced for men aged 25 to 34 and 45 to 64 years old.

Homicide accounts for 31 to 51 percent of mortality in 15 to 34 year old black men compared to only 7 to 10 percent in white males in the same age range. While homicide drops out of the top ten causes of death for white men older than 44 years, it remains in the top ten for another decade of life in black men, ending up as the fifth leading cause of death for black men of all ages.⁹

Unlike homicide, however, non-fatal heart disease occurs in roughly equivalent proportion in black and white men. Even still, the life expectancy differential attributable to heart disease is the largest of all at 1.2 years (19%). By contrast, age-adjusted rates of cancer at the three most common sites—prostate, lung, and colorectal are more common among black men.

Disparities in life expectancy along racial and socioeconomic lines are the result of complex social factors in our otherwise low mortality country. Those factors most salient to the disparity in life expectancy include socioeconomic constraints on education and economic opportunity, the health care environment, and housing disparities experienced by black residents. Each of these factors is intertwined and contributes directly to the mortality experience in black men. Shifting the course of this public health crisis requires that we understand the causes of the disparity.

Prescription for Change

There must be collaboration between a number of disciplines in order to generate multi-faceted solutions. Led by academia and government, epidemiologists and demographers should identify and describe the problem and sociologists and other social scientists should place the disparity in its proper social context. Social workers, educators, and the medical establishment should use this information to propose and initiate novel solutions.

ESSAY 7

HOW ARE THE CHILDREN? AFRICAN-AMERICAN BOYS IN FOSTER CARE

by William C. Bell
President and CEO
Casey Family Programs

A new report from the United Nations and UNICEF recently ranked the United States and Great Britain as number 20 and 21 respectively out of 21 countries in the industrialized world with regards to the quality of life and well-being of its children and youth. UNICEF examined 40 factors, such as poverty, deprivation, education, health, relationships and risky behavior and placed the U.S. and Great Britain at the bottom of a list of 21 developed nations. Couple this with the fact that poor children and children of color tend to fair worse than white children and those from higher income families, and one cannot help being alarmed about the well-being of young black males.

Despite evidence of significant differences in maltreatment rates, the percentage of African American children in foster care is 1 ½ to 3 ½ times higher than their percentage of the population. For these children, poorer life outcomes are more likely than their white counterparts. For example, a study of three Midwestern states, in which nearly 60 percent of participants were African American, found that nearly one-third had been arrested, and 12 percent had been convicted of a crime.

A study focused on black males transitioning from foster care found that these youth experienced a high incidence of the suspicion of “doing something wrong” or the expectation that they were about to “do wrong”. These perceptions of the young black male may be major contributors to the reality that young black males are experiencing an increasing rate of suicide and are more likely to be victims of homicide and unemployed.

Prescriptions for Change

1. Increased public awareness about the life outcomes of the most vulnerable children, especially those in the child welfare system
2. Corporative efforts between families, communities, researchers, foundation, and governments
3. Apply the “standard of your own” by asking yourself, “Is this good enough for my child?” If not, then it is not good enough for the most vulnerable.

ESSAY 8

**THE BATTLE OVER AFFIRMATIVE ACTION:
LEGAL CHALLENGES AND OUTLOOK**

by Barbara R. Arnwine, J.D.
Executive Director
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

In the forty years since President Lyndon B. Johnson's historic commencement speech at Howard University, civil rights legislation, court decisions and an evolving national commitment to equality have begun to open the gates of opportunity to all, and affirmative action programs have helped many citizens walk through those gates.

For decades, however, these affirmative action programs have been the subject of controversy. Opponents argue that these measures are tantamount to unlawful preferences, quotas, and reverse discrimination. Traditionally, opponents waged the battle over affirmative action in the courts, challenging publicly-sponsored race-conscious measures as antithetical to Constitutional equal rights principles. One of the now-favored tools of these opposition groups is the ballot referendum. In California, Washington, and Michigan, opponents took the battle directly to the voters and succeeded in passing ballot initiatives that outlaw certain forms of affirmative action.

The negative effects of Proposition 209 have been demonstrated in California through a decline in minority participation in contracting, minority attendance at the state's flagship institutions of higher learning, and minority employment. The experiences in Michigan, Washington, Florida, Texas, and California are at best a warning, at worst a harbinger of things to come. Therefore, it is imperative that we respond immediately to this open hostility to affirmative action by utilizing all of our intellectual and financial resources to counter these appalling set-backs. Supporters of equal access and diversity must join forces to develop counter strategies to combat the well-organized and well-funded attacks on affirmative action.

Prescriptions for Change

1. Supporters of equal access and diversity must join forces to develop counter strategies to combat the well-organized and well-funded attacks on affirmative action.
2. In states where anti-affirmative action measures have been adopted, expand outreach and recruitment efforts to ensure that minorities, as well as non-minorities, are encouraged to apply.
3. Explore efforts to modify or repeal harmful initiatives by sponsoring future pro-affirmative action initiatives in the affected states.
4. An "Equity Agenda" has to be advocated to redress the continuing inequities in our society. Affirmative action is but one very important strategy in achieving a more just and equal society.
5. If you live in a state where an anti-affirmative action movement is brewing, form a local campaign to spread the word about the deleterious effects of these initiatives and to "get out the vote".

ESSAY 9

THE STATE OF CIVIL RIGHTS

by Theodore M. Shaw, J.D.
President and Director-Counsel
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.

The State of Black America 2006 Report defined the state of civil rights as “most precarious.” Sadly, a year later, the state of civil rights is as precarious as ever.

With the ascension of two new conservative justices to the U.S. Supreme Court it appears that the United States has entered into a period of time in which the longstanding role of the law as a force for continued progress by African Americans has changed – for the worse.

While many Americans assume that school desegregation is a bygone issue, it is under serious threat today. Two cases that could significantly undermine voluntary school integration efforts were argued in the U.S. Supreme Court in December of 2006. These cases are important not just on their own terms, but also because of their potential reach.

These measures – and those who support them – ignore the plain fact that massive segregation and educational inequality persist. As we watch the federal courts abandon their protection of school desegregation efforts, we continue to face the challenge of how to improve the quality of education for African American students, the vast majority of whom attend public schools. Although escape hatches in the form of vouchers and charter schools are available for a relative few, we remain challenged to reform public school education for the many.

Although the 1965 Voting Rights Act was reauthorized in 2006, it remains under attack and housing segregation continues to be a hallmark of American life.

But, perhaps the most compelling area of concern for black Americans is the criminal justice arena. According to the 2007 National Urban League Equality Index, African Americans are seven times more likely than whites to be imprisoned. One in 8 black males in their twenties is incarcerated on any given day. The collateral effects of the massive incarceration of African American men and women are devastating to their lives, and to the lives of their families and communities. Felon disfranchisement laws similarly impact the lives of black Americans with felony convictions, and the communities from which they come. Between 4.5 and 5 Million Americans are not permitted to vote because of felony convictions, including more than 2 Million African Americans.

Law continues to define the status of African Americans in the United States in a powerful fashion. However, the law is shifting from an instrument of social change to a tool for obstruction and impediment. The state of civil rights in 2007 is indeed precarious. But it is not too late. More now than ever, we must do everything possible to ensure that the rights of African-Americans are protected. This is the least that we owe to those who stood up when standing up wasn't easy.

ESSAY 10

**WHO'S GOING TO TAKE THE WEIGHT?: AFRICAN AMERICAN AND CIVIC
ENGAGEMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

by Silas Lee, Ph.D
President, Dr. Silas Lee and Associates

The campaign for the 2008 presidential election has many excited as Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton explore the possibility of becoming the nation's first African-American or female president. The question is, "Will the excitement remain or die like a shooting star?"

Nine million eligible African American voters did not vote in the 2004 presidential election; more than enough to overcome the 3 million votes that gave President Bush the victory over John Kerry. However, decreased voter turnout is not just a "black thing", but a broader problem affecting all Americans as more people continue to drop out of the democratic process. The prevailing explanation for the decline in voting in the general population seems to be the perception that elected officials and government leaders have lost touch with the cultural dynamics of voters.

Political operatives seem to forget that African Americans are not monolithic. African American voters are becoming more frustrated with the "Sacrifice – Privilege" or "Losing Ground" strategy. Voters age forty and older identify with the "Sacrifice-Privilege" strategy, but want more communication from elected officials. Those born in the 1980s do not identify with either strategy and are more inconsistent as voters. Both demographic groups have issued a "vote of non-effectiveness" and cite politicians with 1) taking them for granted, 2) one stop messaging, and 3) lack of honesty.

Whatever the cause of the decline in voting, nationally and for African Americans, the one thing that is certain is that the political appetite of the average African American voter is maturing and evolving. Politicians can no longer procrastinate in adopting the new rules for political engagement: less hierarchy, more issue customization and continuous interaction with voters. More African Americans are deciding to vote using a balance sheet perspective. If they do not view positive changes as a result of politics, the less likely they are obligated or motivated to vote.