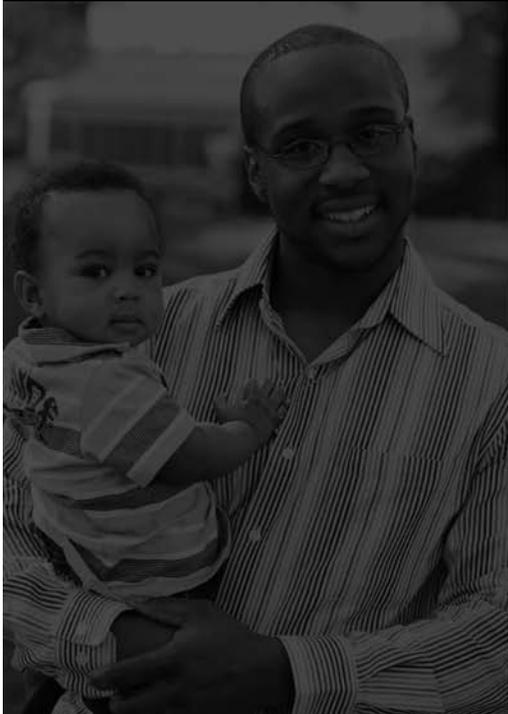
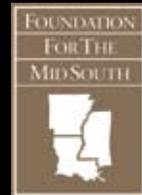




# BLACK MALE

WHY THE MID SOUTH CANNOT AFFORD TO IGNORE THE DISPARITIES  
FACING ITS BLACK MEN AND BOYS





# BLACK MALE :

WHY THE MID SOUTH CANNOT AFFORD TO IGNORE  
THE DISPARITIES FACING ITS BLACK MEN AND BOYS

AN ESSAY TO FACILITATE DIALOGUE ON EQUITY ISSUES AFFECTING  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES AGES 16-44 IN ARKANSAS, LOUISIANA, AND  
MISSISSIPPI.

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# YES, YOU CAN



## MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN SOME YOUNG MAN'S LIFE

I am pleased the Foundation for the Mid South asked me to write this foreword. As I read the essay, I thought about my friends, my relatives, and myself—all Black males trying not to become a statistic. I guess my younger brother and I made it. Statistically speaking, we, in the words of Marvin Sapp, “Never should have made it.” Nevertheless, we did, but only by God’s amazing grace.

The report before you provides some dramatic data and some fundamental information that we, as people who care about equity and a better future for all, may use to make a difference. The indicators of disparity—education, health, and criminal justice—are sounding an alarm. If you are in the public, private, or nonprofit sector or advocate on behalf of others or provide direct or indirect services, there is something you can do.

My challenge to you and others after you read this essay is to at least have the conversation and at best take action and make a difference in some young man’s life.

Make a difference,

Naccaman G. Williams, Ed. D.  
*Walton Family Foundation, Inc.*

## CHAPTER 1

# BLACK MALES IN THE MID SOUTH

### WHY BLACK MEN AND BOYS? WHY NOW?

Recent attention on the status of black men and boys has begun to raise awareness to the disparities and difficulties that they are experiencing. From the stark images of African-American males portrayed on television and in the news to the alarming statistics that surface in reports regarding the status of black males in America, the image that is portrayed suggests that these young men are in the midst of crisis.

The Foundation for the Mid South (FMS) recently participated in discussions that brought together foundations and others to discuss the state of black men and boys both nationally and in the American South.<sup>1</sup> The intent of the meetings was to act as a springboard for dialogue and to call philanthropy's attention to this subject. Furthermore, the meetings encouraged philanthropic organizations and leaders to take action by using their expertise, resources, and influence to improve the outlook for black men and boys in the areas they serve.

From both the foundation's experiences researching data and engaging in discussion and analysis on the issues facing black males, we believe that it is extremely important to further and deepen the conversation on improving the outlook for black men and boys in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Quality of life measures for black males in the Mid South are incredibly low, as we will show in this report. Specifically, studies on issues from student achievement and graduation rates, to violence and incarceration, to health status demonstrate that not only are the indicators extremely low for black men and boys, but wide gaps exist between them and their white counterparts. In many cases, the gaps are widening. Without attention, intervention, and action, the situation will more than likely continue to deteriorate, ultimately making future efforts to reverse the direction in which black males are headed considerably more difficult.

It has been the opinion of FMS since our inception—nearly two decades ago—that quality of life improves for all people when the social and economic issues that negatively affect those who are most vulnerable and/or disenfranchised are aggressively addressed. These issues are not solely “theirs.” They are “ours” and reach all people regardless of what one looks like or where one lives or works. The foundation believes that being born an African-American male should not statistically dictate one's future or stereotype one's behavior. Yet, at this time, being a black male in America or in the Mid South makes one much more likely to achieve less academically, drop out of high school and/or college, possess no health insurance, and die as a result of homicide than their white male peers.

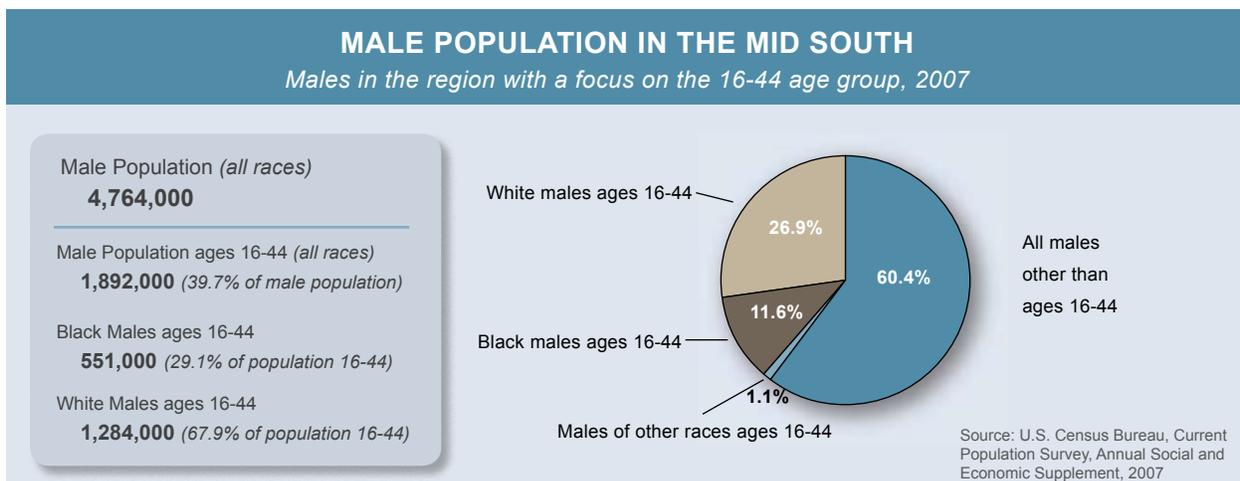
## WHAT SHOULD YOU TAKE AWAY FROM THIS REPORT?

The objective of the report is to broaden the conversation and encourage businesses, governments, and nonprofits to adopt the roles of participant, advocate, and ally in the work to improve the outcomes of black males. This essay focuses on men and boys ages 16 to 44 in the Mid South because, in our research, this age group tends to reflect large numbers facing multiple disparities including poverty, low graduation rates, high unemployment, poor health, and high incarceration rates, among others.

It is important to note that, as black male issues gain attention, those interested in addressing them should consider ensuring that the conversation is framed appropriately. One approach that we have discussed is to demonstrate how issues facing black men and boys also impact others in society. Of course, a great deal of reliable data and research specific to these issues is necessary to support such an approach. Researching this essay, for example, some data that we sought on black males in the Mid South were available only by race and/or gender or as estimates. To facilitate thorough, thoughtful discussions on the status of black males in the region, a need exists for even more data in a disaggregate form. Conversely, we also believe that the data and research that does currently exist is not being used effectively enough in dialogue and action by service providers and policy makers. An example: Where is the outcry around The Pew Center on the State's 2008 report showing that one in every 100 American adults is now in jail or prison? All too often, important research is only news for a day or two and then fades away from the public eye.

If this essay causes policy, community, nonprofit, and business leaders to rethink how they work, their strategies and expectations, and their levels of engagement in issues affecting black men and boys, then it will have served its intended purpose. And if communities organize or rally around its concepts or if state and local policies come under scrutiny because of it, the report will have successfully shown that these issues deserve special attention by those who believe in democracy and the benefits it can provide to all people. Ultimately, we hope that this essay will shake up the apathy that has helped to create a chasm between society and too many of our black men and boys.

Figure 1.0



# A SNAPSHOT OF THE MID SOUTH

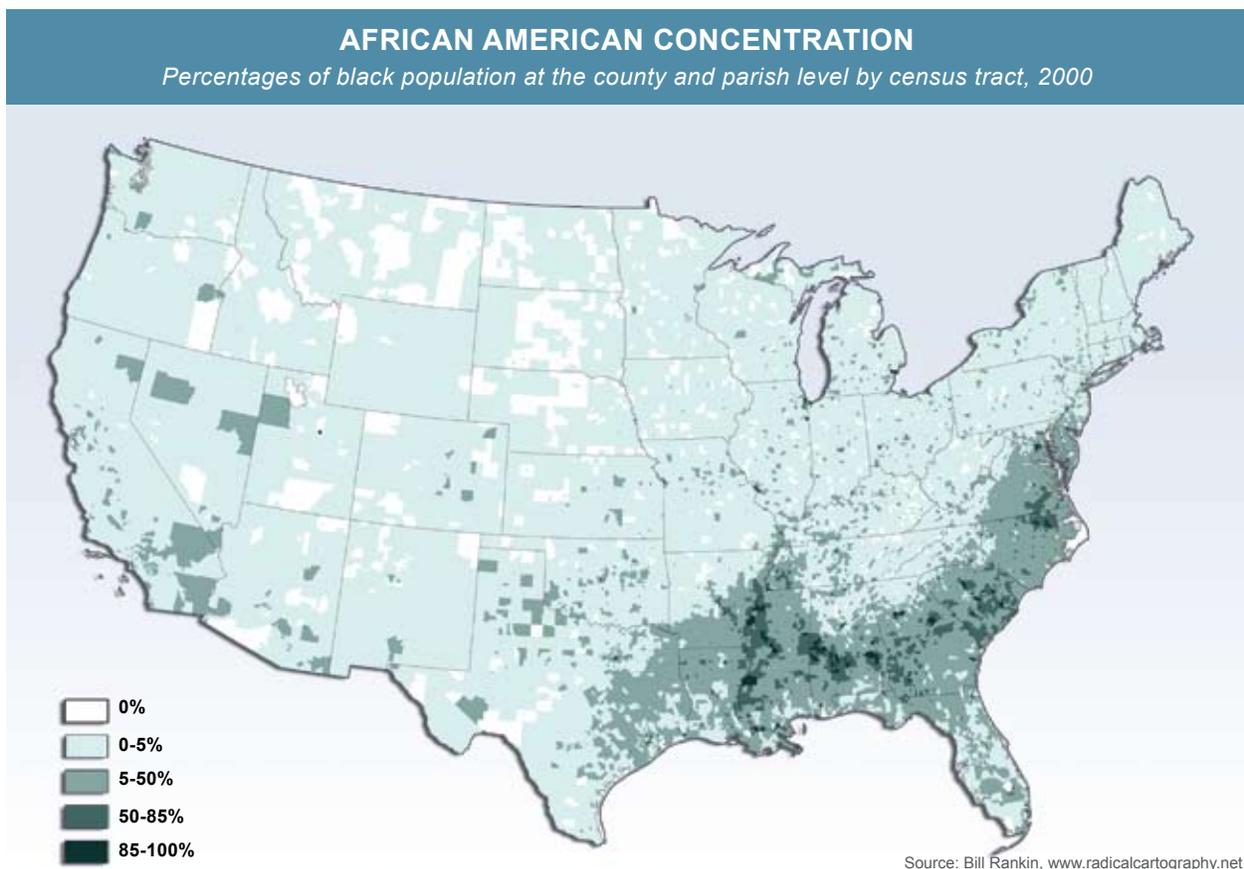
In order for this report to be both useful to help facilitate a regional discussion and unique from others focusing on the national status and trends affecting black men and boys, it attempts to provide relevant and specific information about African-American males in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi or all three states combined as the Mid South. Much of what we wish to understand is difficult to glean because of the lack of reliable data, but the Foundation hopes this observation piece will help further the dialogue on black males between the ages of 16 and 44 and provide some attention and new information in the process.

First, before any specific information on black males is shared, it is important to set the stage for the conversation. We will point to a number of factors that exist in the region which makes the Mid South unique from other regions with regard to the status of black males. Of course, one could jump ahead, review the data as it is represented, and make judgments about the causes or provide cursory solutions to the inequities, but understanding the issues that affect the Mid South as a region can help facilitate far more enriching and productive discussions and analysis.

## THE MID SOUTH POSSESSES A LARGE AFRICAN-AMERICAN POPULATION

Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi, or the Mid South, is home to just shy of 10 million people—roughly 3.3% of the U.S. population. These three states, although majority white, possess a significantly high number of counties and parishes where African Americans comprise over 50 percent or more of the population.<sup>2</sup> Overall, African Americans make up 12% of the United States’s population. In the Mid

Figure 2.0



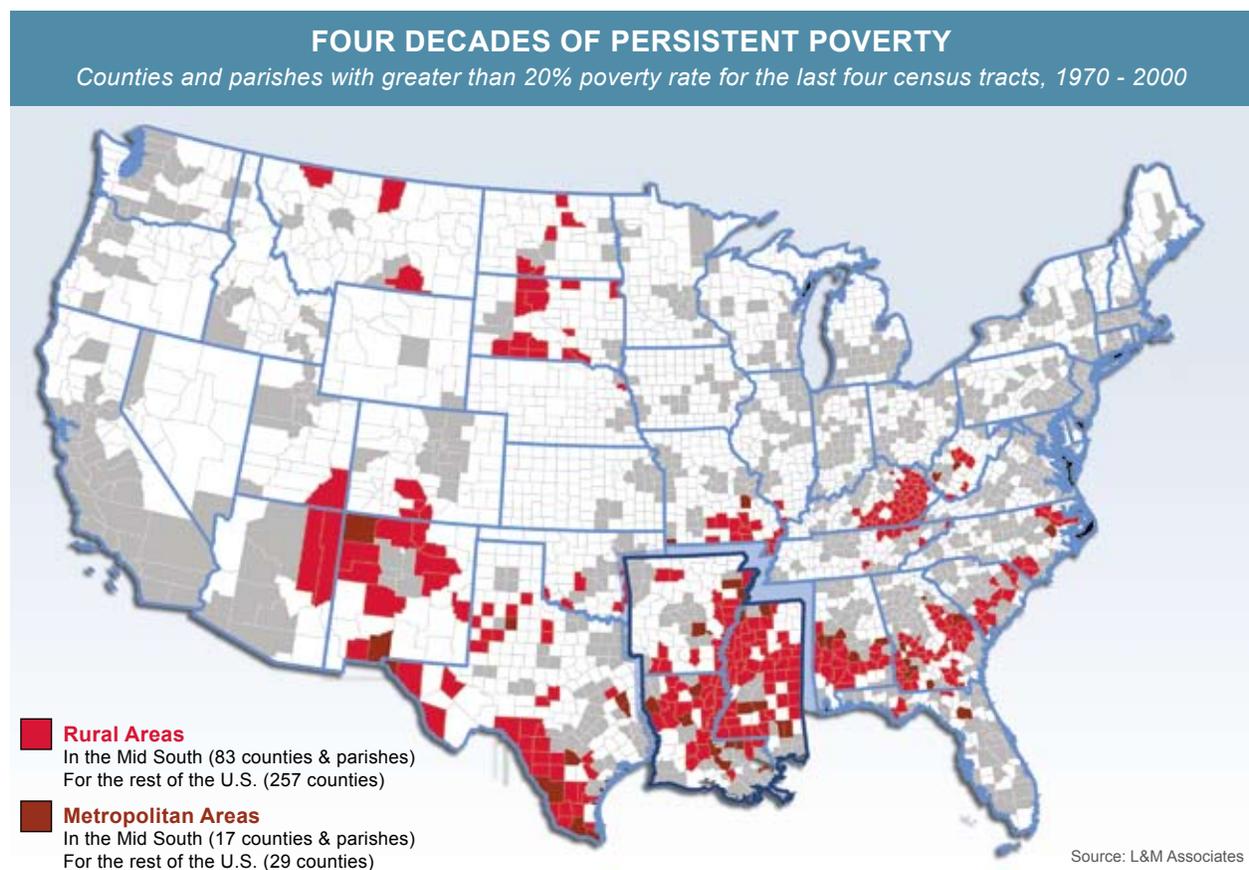
South, the 2006 population was 29% black with the highest percentage concentration of African Americans in Mississippi at a little over a third of its population.

## THE MID SOUTH IS CHALLENGED ECONOMICALLY

It stands to reason that income and wealth greatly determine a person's health status, educational attainment, and access to capital and opportunity. In the Mid South, disparities in economics for generations of families—especially African Americans—have created a legacy of poverty primarily by families inheriting debt instead of wealth. Whether this result stems from our region's history of segregation and inequity or the poor educational status of its workforce and its general inability to compete in today's global economy, the gaps between the *haves* and the *have nots* are widening.

Unfortunately, poverty is a term that is too often synonymous with the Mid South. Our region, based on household income, possesses an average poverty rate of 17.3%—5% higher than the national average—that affects 1.7 million Mid Southerners.<sup>3</sup> And when majority black counties and parishes are compared to those with over 40 years of persistent poverty, one can literally see that African Americans possess a disproportionate share of poverty in our region.<sup>4</sup> As figures 2.0 and 3.0 demonstrate, a large percentage of Mid South persistent poverty counties and parishes reside in the Delta region along the Mississippi River—an historically rural and economically challenged area—and possess high concentrations of African Americans.

Figure 3.0

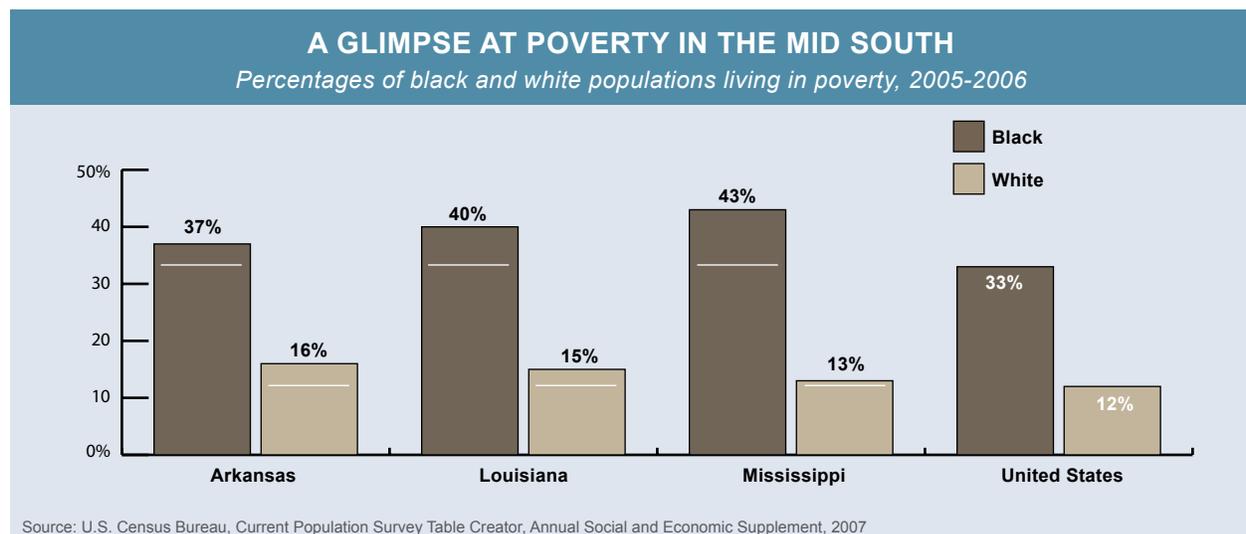


In 2007, the Mid South’s average per capita income was \$31,220—well below the national average of \$38,611.<sup>5</sup> When the data is disaggregated to compare black and white males, it shows that African-American males make considerably less than their white peers.<sup>6</sup> And when male households making less than \$20,000 annually are considered, African Americans are twice as likely (27.2%) to comprise this group than whites (12.8%).

The Foundation’s priority on building wealth for the low-income population is driven by a simple assertion: assets are essential components of wealth. In the region, there exists a huge disparity in asset distribution between white and non-white households. In fact, in just Louisiana and Mississippi alone, non-white households’ average median net worth is \$5,100, which is 14 times less than that of their white peers.<sup>7</sup> This lack of wealth will continue to impact minority populations well into the future as, in many cases, they will leave a legacy of debt to the generations that follow.

At the release of this report, the American economy is in a downturn. Homeowners are losing their homes to foreclosure in record numbers. And just a few years earlier, savings rate percentages dropped below zero—matching Depression-era rates. Essentially, a negative percentage meant that Americans spent all of their disposable income and dipped into savings or borrowed money. In working-poor communities where many live from paycheck to paycheck, people cannot simply transfer funds from savings in case of financial short falls; too many households depend on predatory lenders and credit cards to stay afloat. Similarly, in order to own a home, many only qualify for subprime loans because of poor credit or limited credit history. Ultimately, this reliance on credit leaves borrowers in a financial deficit that is difficult to overcome because of high interest rates, late fees, prepayment penalties, or credit card abuse. The ability to set money aside and save is key to financial independence, but too few Americans—especially African Americans and other minorities—have the wherewithal to do so. To make ends meet, many low-income families and individuals rely on short-term financial “solutions” that ultimately undermine their financial well-being.

Figure 4.0





## THE MID SOUTH IS LARGELY RURAL

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service estimates that 3.9 million Mid Southerners—39% of the total population in the region—live in rural areas. The Mid South is largely made up of expansive, open areas of farmland that, at one time, helped to make cotton king and placed the region’s economy among the most vibrant and economically flush in the nation. That status changed considerably after the Civil War and left the Mid South economy struggling to find a competitive advantage in the nation and world’s economies. Today, as wealthy nations are expanding their goods-based economies to include more in the way of information and services, the Mid South’s future outlook is uncertain.

Historically, the Mid South’s economy was based primarily on agriculture and manufacturing. Over the years, though, with the consolidation of agriculture and the decline of manufacturing in the region, the meat processing industry has shown considerable growth. There is a downside. Some processing plants—including chicken and catfish—offer low-wage, non-union jobs to the surrounding rural communities where they locate.<sup>8</sup>

The lack of jobs in rural areas in the region along with other factors contribute to an above-average unemployment rate. With an aging, largely under-educated workforce living in various stages of poverty in these areas, businesses that can pay a “living wage” are not coming *en masse* into the region. Both the high unemployment rate and the low per capita income in rural areas of the Mid South are key indicators of this. In 2006, the Mid South’s rural unemployment rate was 5.8%, a full percentage point greater than both the region’s urban areas and the nation’s rural areas.<sup>9</sup>

Also, many individuals and families in the region’s rural areas—especially those of lesser means—do not benefit from services and infrastructure that those living in metropolitan areas often take for granted. In some rural, isolated areas, one’s residence might be considered too remote for the city, county, or parish to provide water and/or sewage lines, paved roads, or sanitation pick-up close enough to be useful. Another service of particular importance lacking in many rural areas is public transportation. In the Delta, for example, a factory may employ hundreds of people from the surrounding communities, many who may have to travel 20-45 miles twice a day to get to and from work. Without a means of transportation, a person unable to afford the combined costs of a reliable vehicle, insurance, maintenance, and fuel simply cannot get to work consistently. And of those making the daily trek, many can be considered “working poor” because of the low-level jobs and low pay available.

## CHAPTER 2

# INDICATORS OF DISPARITY

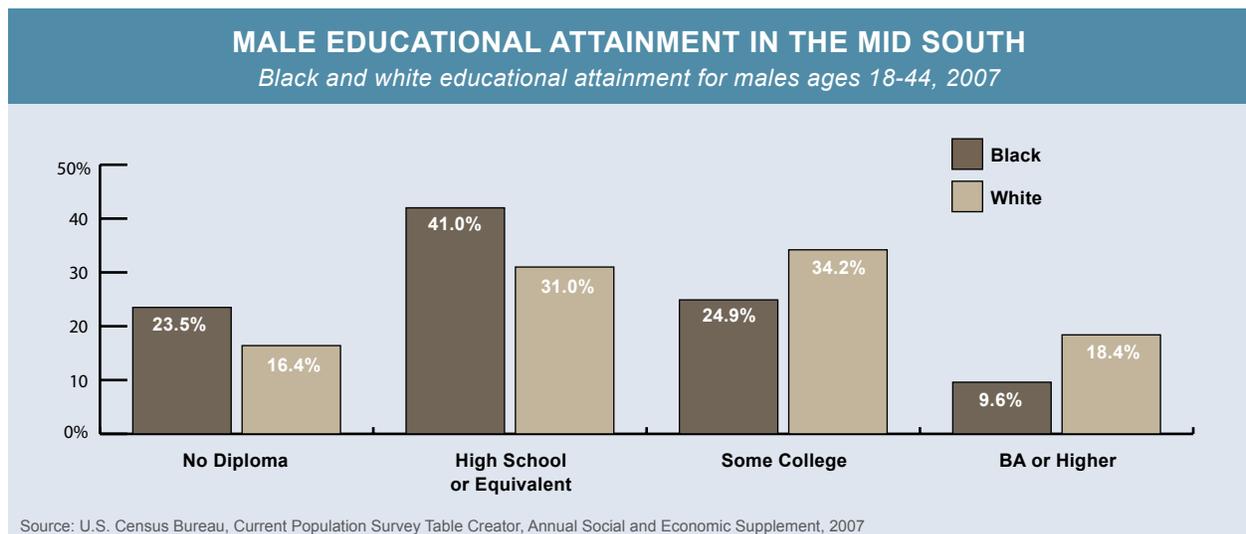
The issues that affect black males are complex and sometimes difficult to unbundle. Considering their interconnectedness, one cannot simply focus on a single issue—such as health care—without acknowledging the relationships between it and education, economic status, and geography. By limiting our focus to only three challenges facing black men in the Mid South—**education**, **health**, and **criminal justice**, we are not suggesting that these issues encompass all that affects them, just that these are important and appropriate places to start a conversation.

## EDUCATION

William F. Winter, former Governor of Mississippi and Director Emeritus of the Foundation for the Mid South, once said that “the only road that runs out of poverty runs by the schoolhouse.” While we endorse this statement, we also recognize that obstacles too often exist for those of lesser means to complete their journey. In MDC, Inc.’s *State of the South 2007* report, for example, it suggests that “poverty is the single greatest impediment to student achievement” with regard to the high number of low-income students who do not graduate from high school.<sup>10</sup>

Two other factors also greatly impact achievement and preparation for postsecondary education: (1) where one lives and (2) one’s access to quality schools. An inability to educate all of our children has long-term implications for the Mid South. It is not only important for individuals to learn and prosper, but the future of our region is inexorably tied to the quality of education that is provided to its children. For the Mid

Figure 5.0



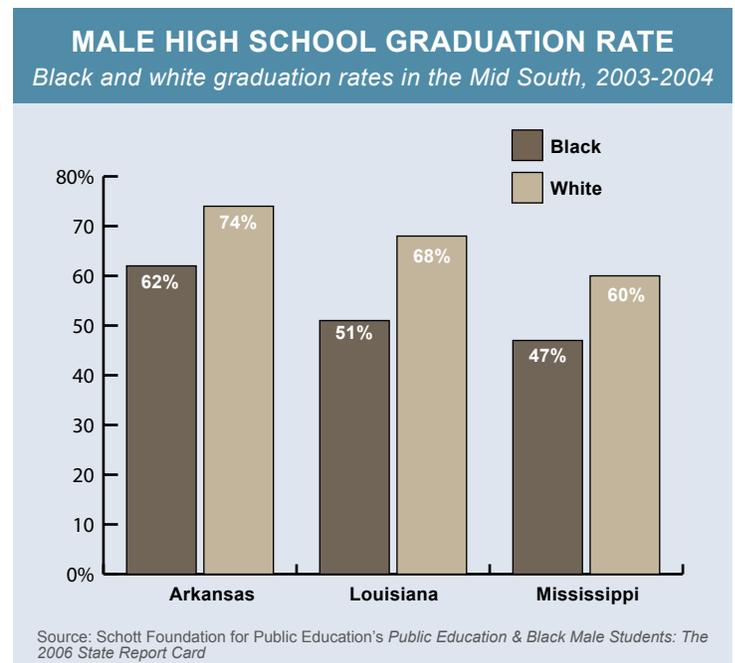
South to be competitive in a global economy, it needs to ramp up its efforts to better-prepare and retain its youth and young adults.

Despite the federal government’s attempt to ensure “quality education for all” through the *No Child Left Behind Act*, disparities still exist in the Mid South with regard to student achievement, graduation rates, and access to high-quality educational opportunities. To complicate matters further, fifty years after *Brown v. the Board of Education*, education in the region is again becoming increasingly segregated. With many white, affluent and middle-income students choosing to attend private schools and academies—especially in areas with high concentrations of African Americans—many public schools in the region are unable to meet the educational needs and provide the quality of education or adequate preparation for continuing education for *all* students in order for them to be competitive in the workforce.

## GRADUATION RATE

The Schott Foundation for Public Education’s *The 2006 State Report Card* reported that in 2003/2004 a staggering 45% of African-American males did not receive diplomas or graduate on schedule. In the Mid South during the same time period, the graduation rate was slightly higher for black males with a regional average of 53% earning diplomas on time.<sup>11</sup> It is also important to note that white males, like their black peers, are not graduating on time; rates for white males in the Mid South are also lower than the national average. But a large 14 percentage point difference still exists in the graduation rates between black and white males in the region.<sup>12</sup>

Figure 6.0



## EVALUATION AND BEHAVIOR

In order to improve the graduation rates of black males, it is important that they remain both engaged and present in school. But on the road to graduation, black males face inequities in performance assessment and discipline in the classroom. The Schott report states that African-American males are 5.6 times more likely to be classified as mentally retarded (usually a score below 70-75 on an IQ test) than enrolled into gifted/talented programs. Black males are also suspended or expelled from schools at a little over twice the rate than their white peers.<sup>13</sup> In Louisiana and Mississippi, the occurrences of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for black male students meet—and sometimes exceed—the national numbers, therefore, further reducing their access to educational opportunities.

## STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

In most education and testing indicators, the Mid South states continually rank at or near the bottom in the nation. For example, 8<sup>th</sup> grade math scores in the Mid South are far below the national average. A large enough gap existed, in fact, that students scored at least one grade-level behind the nation.<sup>14</sup> Huge disparities also exist between Mid South black and white students in state test scores for reading and science. Gaps in excess of over 20 percentage points—sometimes even 40 percentage points—were seen in statewide test results from 2000 and 2005. In fact, test scores in 2000 for the average black student in Arkansas showed a 4 grade-level difference from his white peer in knowledge and mastery of math and science.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, the gaps do not appear to be closing fast enough. One example showed that while test scores in reading increased from 1992 to 2005 for both black and white students in Mississippi, the gap between the two reduced by only 2 percentage points—a relatively insignificant reduction for a span of 13 years.<sup>16</sup>

## COLLEGE PREPAREDNESS AND GRADUATION

Disparities also exist between races in preparation for education beyond high school. A low percentage of all Mid South students take college preparation courses, such as upper-level math and/or science, when compared to the national average. This directly affects student scores on ACT/SAT and college entrance exams.<sup>17</sup> On average in Louisiana and Mississippi—two states with almost equal percentages of black and white male students enrolled in public schools, black males are 3 times more likely to be considered for special education classes and 3 times less likely to be enrolled in gifted or advanced classes than their white counterparts.<sup>18</sup> When the aspirations of young African-American males are stunted and they are grossly over-represented in special education classes, they will remain unprepared and ill-equipped to perform well on college admittance tests.

African Americans who attend colleges or universities have an extremely high incompleteness rate. Education Sector, an independent think tank that analyzes education policy, suggests that over half of black higher education students do not graduate within six years of enrollment and have lower overall graduation rates than their white peers—about 20 percentage points lower.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, due in large part to the effects of socioeconomic status on educational attainment, many low-income, first-generation black students do not receive degrees, thus, widening the graduation gap from their white counterparts.

Based on data available through the U.S. Census Bureau's *Current Population Survey Table Creator (2007)*, disparities are evident in college completion between African-American males and white males in the Mid South. A gap of five percentage points separates black males from white with at least some college experience but no degree for ages 24 to 44—those who either did not receive a diploma or did not receive it within 6 years of high school graduation. White males in the same age range are also more likely to receive a bachelor's degree or above than black males. For example, in the Mid South in 2007, only an average of 33% of the black male population with some college experience earned a degree; nine

percentage points below white males. Both the completion rate and degree attainment rate for black males in the region lag behind U.S. averages.

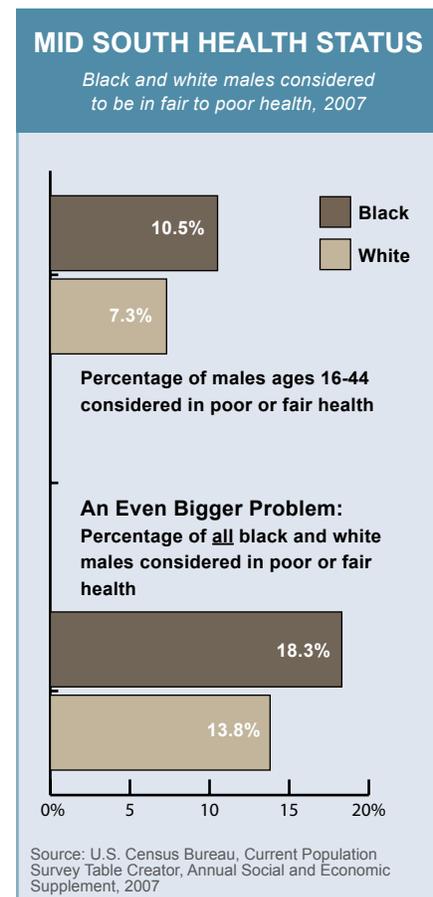
Education can be considered one of the most important economic and health-related issues in the region. If gaps in education between the Mid South and the rest of the nation were reduced, we could expect our citizenry to be: more likely to be employed; more likely to possess retirement accounts; more likely to be healthy and have health insurance; more likely to live longer; less likely to be on welfare or government assistance; and less likely to be overweight. These quality of life measures are all affected by education.<sup>20</sup> But before the Mid South can begin to consider reducing the gaps between it and the rest of the nation, the disparities and gaps that exist within its current education systems between black and white students must be overcome. Without properly educating and graduating its young African-American males, the Mid South cannot hope to successfully improve the quality of life for all of its residents.

## HEALTH

The World Health Organization suggests that poor social and economic conditions directly affect health status, basically “doubling the risk for serious illness and premature death.”<sup>21</sup> Areas containing high concentrations of persistent poverty throughout the nation both reflect poor health status and place significant demands on local health resources. In addition, the residents of these, sometime rural or non-metropolitan, areas are at-risk because of limited access to preventative care, health facilities, and health providers.<sup>22</sup>

Today, it seems as if it is not enough to combat or attempt to prevent disease; individual behavior changes and improvement to health-related policies also play important roles in improving health and wellness. The health status of a community or a region directly affects other quality of life measures and aspects of community development, too, such as economic development. For instance, health can act as an economic driver. Businesses and industries seek healthy communities in which to locate because it means quality health care and a more productive—and essentially a more educated—workforce. Indeed, health does matter, and it benefits an entire community when everyone has access to quality health care and other health-related services.

Figure 7.0

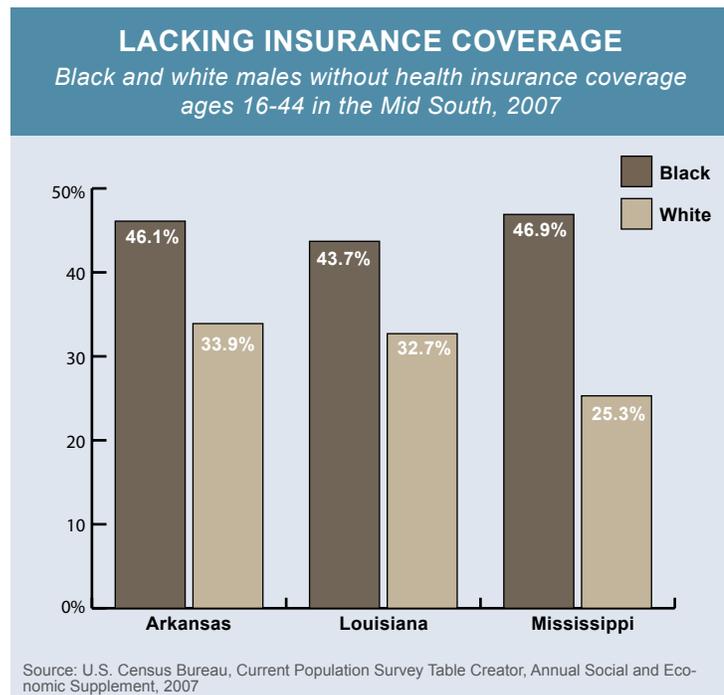


In comparison to the nation, the Mid South’s health status is at or near the bottom in many measures including low birth weights, infant mortality, and chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. A large percentage of the population living in poverty in conjunction with expansive rural areas with limited access to quality health care equates to inequities that disproportionately affect minority populations in many areas of the region—especially in the Delta region of the three states. Health outcomes are also affected by other social and demographic factors including income, education, age, and gender.

## INSURANCE

One of the most pressing factors affecting health and wellness in the region is insurance. With the increase in health care costs over the last several decades, it is now more important than ever for Mid Southerners to possess health insurance. The reality is that the Mid South is home to a large number of residents who possess no health coverage and that, coupled with other factors, is helping to erode the health status in the Mid South, particularly for African-American males. Black males, when compared to their white counterparts, are more likely to be uninsured in the Mid South. The actual rate of uninsured black males is 14.1 percentage points higher than white males ages 16-44 with almost half of the black males in this age group possessing no health coverage.

Figure 8.0



## VIOLENCE

In *Community Returns: Investing in Black Men and Boys*, a report published by the Twenty-First Century Foundation, black male violence is noted as a concern that affects their overall health status. The report says, “The anger within many Black men and boys is deep and unaddressed and often manifests in violence against those that are close by, namely family, friends, and community members or neighbors.”<sup>23</sup> The Bureau of Justice Statistics suggests that while instances of homicide with black males as offenders decreased between 1999 and 2005, African-American male homicide rates were 8.3 times higher than white males (46.6 compared to 5.6). In addition, the relationship to victim and offender is mostly

intra-racial. Black on black offenses accounted for 94% of the homicides between 1976 and 2005.<sup>24</sup> In Louisiana, for example, the age-adjusted homicide rate for black males is 54.0 compared to 5.0 for white males, making African-American males 10 times more likely to be murdered.<sup>25</sup>

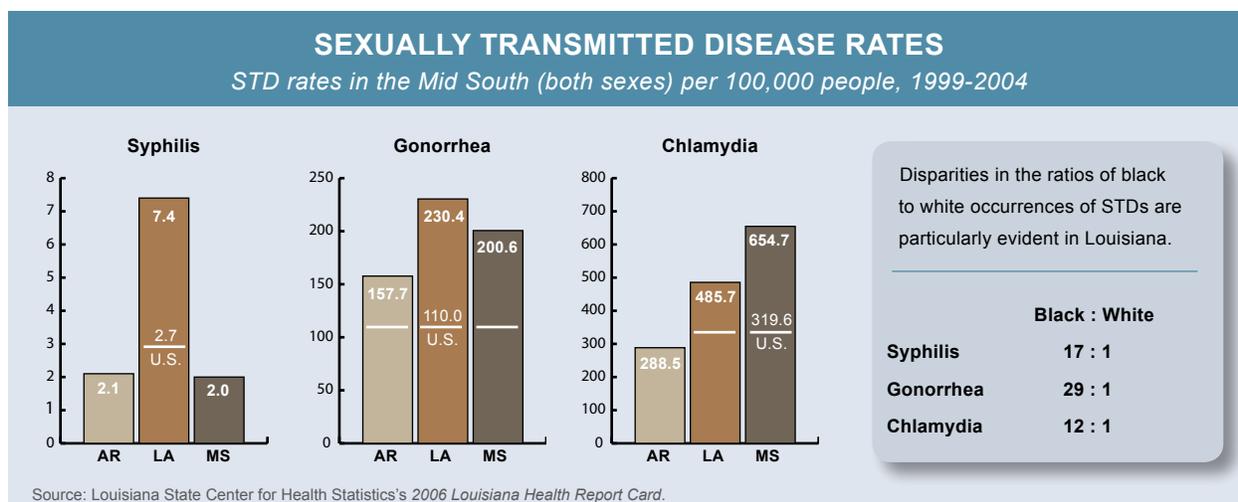
In American culture, men typically avoid displaying emotion or putting themselves into intimate situations. In addition, whereas it is more socially acceptable for women to show or voice emotions or seek therapy or emotional support, it is generally not the same for men. This behavior in combination with stress that can be caused by social and economic circumstances greatly undermines male mental and physical health.<sup>26</sup> High levels of stress can also lead to dependence on drugs and/or alcohol, addiction, depression, and violent and abusive behavior.

## DISEASE

The Mid South's disease profile includes high levels of obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. Given that social, economic, and physical environments affect health status, it is not surprising that those of lesser means are often more vulnerable to disease because of factors including poor diets and a lack of physical activity. While great responsibility exists on the part of the individual to make healthy lifestyle choices, disparities continue to persist despite recent advances in health care and outreach programs that target inequities in race and socioeconomic status.

Among the leading causes of disease-related deaths in the region are heart disease, malignant neoplasms (cancer), and cerebrovascular disease (stroke). Rates for each of these diseases are considerably higher for African-American males—especially for those in Louisiana—than their white counterparts.<sup>27</sup> The Mid South states generally rank among the highest rates in the nation for these diseases. In fact, a study found that black men in Mississippi age 35 and older are among the most likely in the nation to die of heart disease.<sup>28</sup>

Also, understanding how prevalent sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are in the region is extremely important to determining health status, but because of the social and personal nature of these diseases, they are more likely to be under-reported.<sup>29</sup> Based on findings from the Louisiana State Center for Health Statistics, both diagnosed cases and rates per 100,000 people of STDs in black males are significantly higher than their white peers. The Center also compiled regional information that demonstrates that both Louisiana and Mississippi exceed the U.S. rates for cases of Chlamydia and Gonorrhea, but in the Mid South only Louisiana exceeds the national rate for Syphilis cases. The study also reported that 81% of the new cases of Gonorrhea diagnosed occurred in the African-American population.<sup>30</sup>



A Twenty-First Century Foundation report ranked HIV/AIDS among its deep concerns with regard to black men and boys. Between 2001 and 2005, African Americans accounted for 50.5% of new HIV/AIDS diagnoses. In fact, the number of cases diagnosed and the rates for black males were 7 times higher than white males. The largest numbers of diagnoses and percentages of HIV/AIDS cases were documented for black males in the South between the ages of 25 and 44.<sup>31</sup>

In the Mid South, Louisiana leads Arkansas and Mississippi in the number of cases of HIV/AIDS and the infection rate per 100,000 people. In 2005, Louisiana reported 777 new diagnoses of AIDS with 72% of new HIV/AIDS cases occurring in the African-American population. While both Mississippi and Louisiana exceeded the U.S. rate, their rates appear to be dropping slightly. On the other hand, while Arkansas has a much lower rate than the rest of the Mid South, its rate is climbing.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE

African-American males—according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics—have a 29% chance of being incarcerated at some time during their lives.<sup>32</sup> In fact, when compared to white males nationally, the Bureau's website states that the prevalence of imprisonment in 2001 for black males was 6 times higher.<sup>33</sup> Findings from the Justice Policy Institute in 2000 showed that, at the time, more black males were incarcerated in the Mid South than enrolled in higher education. Louisiana, particularly, was the tipping point for the Mid South in that study with over 4,375 more black males in prison than in college—a number much larger than the numbers for both Arkansas and Mississippi combined.<sup>34</sup>

First and foremost, it is the individual's responsibility to adhere to the expectations and limitations placed on him by the larger society. Nevertheless, American society should advocate for equality under the law

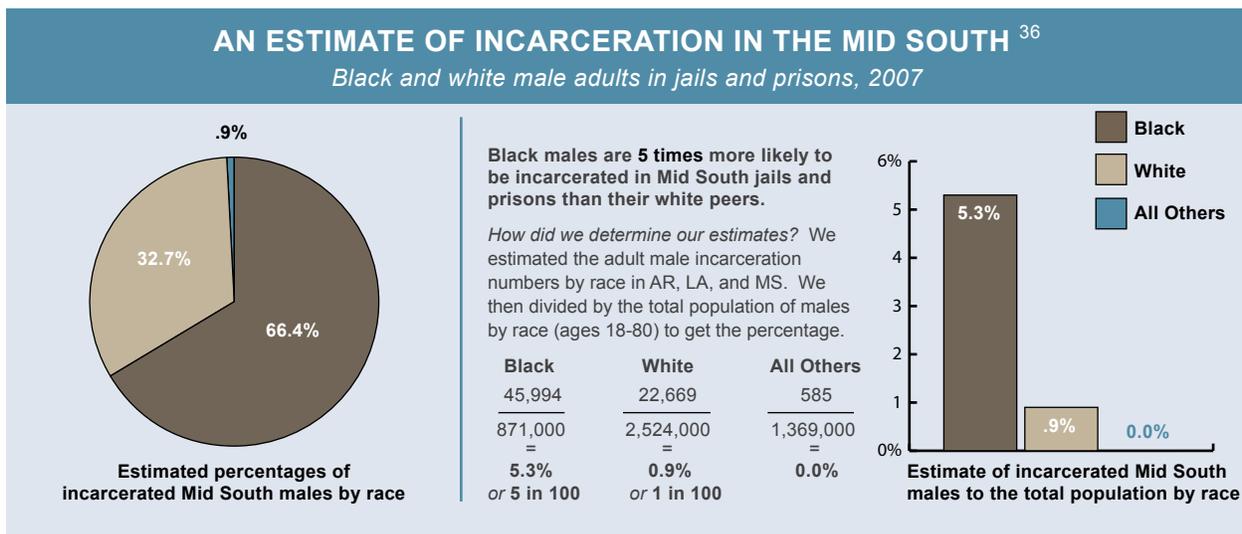
from the criminal justice system for all people. In this respect, it is incumbent on communities to follow and scrutinize the work of law and policy makers, police and Departments of Corrections, public attorneys, and judges. Otherwise, the significant gaps in the admission rates between black and white males will continue to grow, as will the budgets for corrections in the Mid South.

## INCARCERATION

A report recently released from The Pew Center on the States, *One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008*, shows a landmark in that “for the first time, more than one in every 100 adults is now confined in an American jail or prison.”<sup>35</sup> The report goes further to disaggregate its finding and, among others, compares incarceration rates between black and white males. The numbers are staggering: **1 in 15 black males** ages 18 and over are incarcerated versus **1 in 106 white males** ages 18 and over.

Based on the figures provided by each state’s Department of Corrections for mid-2007, the Mid South had approximately 46,000 African-American males imprisoned. Essentially, black males made up about 66% of all male prisoners in the Mid South—twice that of white males. These numbers are significant when one considers the much lower percentage of black males in the overall population in the region in comparison to white males. When these numbers are compared to the overall male population by race in the Mid South in 2007, African-American males were incarcerated at an average rate 5 times greater than their white counterparts (5.3% compared to .9%) although they were only a third of the size of their population.

Figure 10.0



## DRUG POLICY

Between 1994 and 2003, the United States documented a marked increase in the number of people incarcerated in jails and state and federal prisons because of drug offenses.<sup>37</sup> Recently, state governments have been scrutinized for their escalating corrections budgets that, among others, include large expenditures to address the increasing number of drug convictions. Essentially, the debate has centered on whether or not incarceration alone is an effective deterrent to drug-related crime. The Justice Policy Institute suggests it is not. In a three-year study, the Institute found that states that had high incarceration rates also had “higher rates of drug use.”<sup>38</sup>

Disparities are also apparent in drug sentencing policies. Although it has been reported that African Americans and whites both use and sell drugs at nearly the same rates, a disproportionate number of blacks are sentenced to prison.<sup>39</sup> For example, one study shows that in 2002 blacks were incarcerated at 10 times the rate of their white counterparts. The study also demonstrated that 97% of 198 large-population counties and parishes (those over 250,000 residents) in the nation showed racial inequity in their drug sentencing rates.<sup>40</sup>

Another key example of inequity in drug policy was born from a piece of national legislation: the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986. Based on the quantity of the drugs, the Act set mandatory minimum sentences for possession or sale of cocaine with the sentence for crack cocaine considerably higher than that of powder cocaine. The result was a 100 to 1 gap between the two pharmacologically identical drugs. For example, possession of 100 grams of powder cocaine results in a 1-year sentence. On the other hand, possession of only 1 gram of crack cocaine mandates the same 1-year sentence. Since crack cocaine is less expensive than its powder form, it is more likely to be used and sold in low-income communities—especially those of color—and results in disproportionate prison terms and incarceration rates for African Americans in comparison to Caucasian powder cocaine offenders.

While the top admissions offenses varied slightly from state to state, crimes involving drugs were among the most common in the Mid South. Sentencing disparities were also noted in the region between African American and white drug offenders. For example, blacks were incarcerated at a much higher rate than whites in Pulaski County, Arkansas at a rate of 3.0 and Caddo Parish, Louisiana at a rate of 6.0, among several others.<sup>41</sup>

## DISENFRANCHISEMENT

State felony disenfranchisement laws determine the right to vote for citizens convicted of a felony. In almost all states, those in prisons or jails cannot vote while incarcerated. Some states permanently disenfranchise felony convicts based on the nature of the crimes committed, while only a couple of states disenfranchise felons for life. Mississippi has stricter felony disenfranchisement laws than most other states, and its rate, for example, exceeds the national average. Furthermore, African Americans are

represented at a much higher percentage of the state's disenfranchisement rates than their white peers.<sup>42</sup>

Is voting a right or a privilege? Should a convict's right to vote be reinstated after his time is served? These are not issues that will be addressed in this report, but they are important community and regional question, nonetheless. Whether one supports or opposes disenfranchisement laws, millions of black males are affected, and, if prison admission rates remain consistent, many more will be disenfranchised in the years to come. The result will be the erosion of the black male voice at the ballot box.



### CHAPTER 3

## IT IS TIME TO ACT, OUR COMMUNITIES CAN'T WAIT

We encourage community leaders and residents to become involved in efforts to improve the outlook for black males in the Mid South. Specifically, we see that foundation, nonprofit, and faith leaders can be extremely effective at framing and elevating the issues raised in this essay, among others. Then, in conjunction with policy makers and health, legal, business, and education professionals, it is our belief that solutions and real, sustainable change will come about once public and political will has been achieved.

Regardless of mission or structure, foundations, nonprofits, corporations, faith-based organizations and government can and should work to improve the outlook for black males in the Mid South. The Foundation and its partners encourage everyone to become involved; there are many ways to become a change agent in your service area. The following are just a few suggestions to service providers, funders, and policy makers for possible first steps in this work.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FIRST STEPS

### **Invest in research and data collection on black men and boys.**

Data that would support a more thorough assessment of black men and boys in the Mid South is both needed and, indeed, valuable. Especially when analyzing a region such as the Mid South with one of the highest per capita populations of black males in the nation, it is crucial to have available parallel and reliable data that can be compared at the national, state, and county/parish levels.

*Suggestion:* Partnerships could be established with the Southern Rural Development Initiative and the Southern Growth Policy Board to facilitate a relationship with land-grant institutions in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Through these partnerships, research and data specific to black men and boys in the Mid South could be compiled and shared.

### **Develop a *field* that focuses on males at risk.**

Whereas, there are many government, nonprofit, and foundation programs in existence for women and children, there does not seem to exist the same level of attention and support for males—especially those of color. While many service providers and foundations work at some level in this specific arena, there does not seem to be field-wide acknowledgement and support of this specific work. What seems to be lacking at this point in time is an organizer or catalyst—be it individual or organization—to oversee the foundation of this work.<sup>43</sup>

*Suggestion:* Leaders from service providers, foundations, and others could work together to establish a set of guiding principles and over arching goals for a regional or national focus on males at risk. Equipped with data and a vision, partners could possibly begin to tie existing work together, set a framework, and grow the effort through and piggy back on the existing work of affinity groups, such as Grantmakers for Children and Families and Grantmakers in Education, to name a few.

### **Increase public knowledge and will.**

A quintessential component of any campaign for change is the direct support of the public. Support the creation of a communications campaign that provides information and keeps attention focused on the issues affecting black men and boys.

*Suggestion:* Funders and service providers could partner to develop and disseminate education and advocacy campaigns that share information and materials with the general public and organize a movement and a message for change. A possible framework for the campaign could show how quality of life for all people could improve if the issues affecting black males were emphasized and addressed. PR firms, such as the Cirlot Agency and Novia Communications—both African American-owned firms—could be potential consultants / advisors in this work.

### **Advocate for change.**

Lawmakers listen if organized and appropriate demands come from the larger society. Partnerships between foundations, nonprofits, and businesses in conjunction with experienced advisors on the policy process could be formed to create a policy agenda. Once developed, other service providers could be mobilized across the region to advocate for policy change both at the local and state levels.

*Suggestion:* Convene state advocacy institutions around local policies that directly and disproportionately affect black males. Potential regional stakeholders in this partnership could include the Arkansas Public Policy Panel; The Tallulah Prison-to-School conversion campaign; and Mississippi Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Coalition.

## References and Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Funders Dialogue on Black Men and Boys occurred on April 27, 2007, in Seattle, Washington, and was convened by the Ford Foundation and the Open Society Institute and hosted by the Association for Black Foundation Executives and Casey Family Programs.
- Why We Can't Wait: A Southern Funders Dialogue on African-American Males occurred on February 20, 2008, in Little Rock, Arkansas, hosted by the Foundation for the Mid South, Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation and the Community Investment Network, in partnership with the Southeastern Council on Foundations and the Ford Foundation.
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**Chris Crothers, Foundation for the Mid South**  
**AUTHOR, DESIGNER (LAYOUT & GRAPHS), PHOTOGRAPHER**

**Tim Murphy, L&M Associates**  
**Bill Rankin, Radical Cartography**  
**MAPS**

WITH THANKS TO THE FORD FOUNDATION FOR ITS  
 GENEROUS SUPPORT.

SPECIAL THANKS TO JULIUS RAINEY, JR. (PARENTS  
 FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS) AND MICAH GILMER (FRONTLINE  
 SOLUTIONS) FOR INITIATING THIS REPORT.

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 OR CONTACT CHRIS CROTHERS  
 601.355.8167 OR EMAIL [ccrothers@fndmidsouth.org](mailto:ccrothers@fndmidsouth.org)



**FOUNDATION FOR THE MID SOUTH**  
 134 EAST AMITE STREET  
 JACKSON, MS 39201  
 PH 601.355.8167 FX 601.355.6499



# BLACK MALE

WHY THE MID SOUTH CANNOT AFFORD TO IGNORE THE DISPARITIES  
FACING ITS BLACK MEN AND BOYS

