Perspectives on the Black Male College Student's Demise in the 1990s: Going, Going, . . . Gone?

INTRODUCTION

It is of no surprise that the African American male is on the verge of vanishing from the college environment. From 1986 to 1988, the number of African American students enrolled in college indicated a "dismal" increase of only 48,000 to 1,130,000. The number of baccalaureate degrees awarded to Blacks in 1989 was 11 percent lower for Black men and 7 percent higher for Black women than it was in 1977 (Gibbs, 1989; Gill, 1991, and Davidson, 1991). The number of masters and doctoral degrees awarded to Blacks in 1989 was down 33 and 15 percent respectively from 1977 levels (National Center for Education Statistics, 1991). Further, Blacks are less likely than Whites to continue on to graduate school immediately after receiving their bachelor's degrees.

Fewer and fewer African American males entering college are completing their degree requirements. Black males earned 22,365 bachelor's degrees in 1989, a 10.2 percent drop from 25,026 degrees earned by African American males in 1977 (National Center for Education Statistics, 1991).

We are seeing a decline in participation of African-American males at every level in higher education. As fewer African-American males attend college, there will be fewer of them in professional and manage-

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Recent studies indicate that the enrollment rate of African American males in higher education is declining steadily. Articulated in this report is a descriptive summary of factors that reflect the African American male status in college. Observations on the following topics are offered: (1) the social-economic status of the African American male; (2) factors discouraging African American students from entering college; (3) problems African American males encountered in college; and (4) efforts utilized to retain the African American student.
The problems of the African American male have been well chronicled by the media with negativity, racial bias and insensitivity. Although accounts of the black male's involvement with drugs, crime, and unemployment are staggering, the reasons for African American males' dismal plight is often trivialized or completely ignored (Hare and Hare, 1991). Yet, it is important to note that African American males have had a historical tradition of achievement in spite of the odds or obstacles. Grim statistics from government, education, and social groups show the plight of African American males:

1. 23 percent of black men aged 20–29 are in prison, on parole or on probation. The comparable figure for white men: 6.2 percent.
2. 19.6 percent of black men aged 18–24 are in college, vs 31.5 of white men.
3. More than half the homicide victims in the United States in 1990 were black, according to law enforcement reports.
4. The leading cause of death for black males 15–24 in 1991 was homicide—101.8 per 100,000. It's the fourth leading cause of death for comparable white males—11.5 per 100,000.
5. The unemployment rate among black male teens in 1990 was 38.4 percent compared with 18.6 percent for white male teens.
6. The imprisonment rate for blacks is 1,092 per 100,000 vs. 164 per 100,000 for whites.
7. AIDS, poor health care and homicides have cut the average life span of black males to 64.9 years. Life expectancy for white males is 72.2 years. (Maver, 1991 and Davidson, 1991).

A bright spot: The graduate rate for black high school students rose to 82 percent in 1990. For whites, the rate slipped to 87 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 1991).