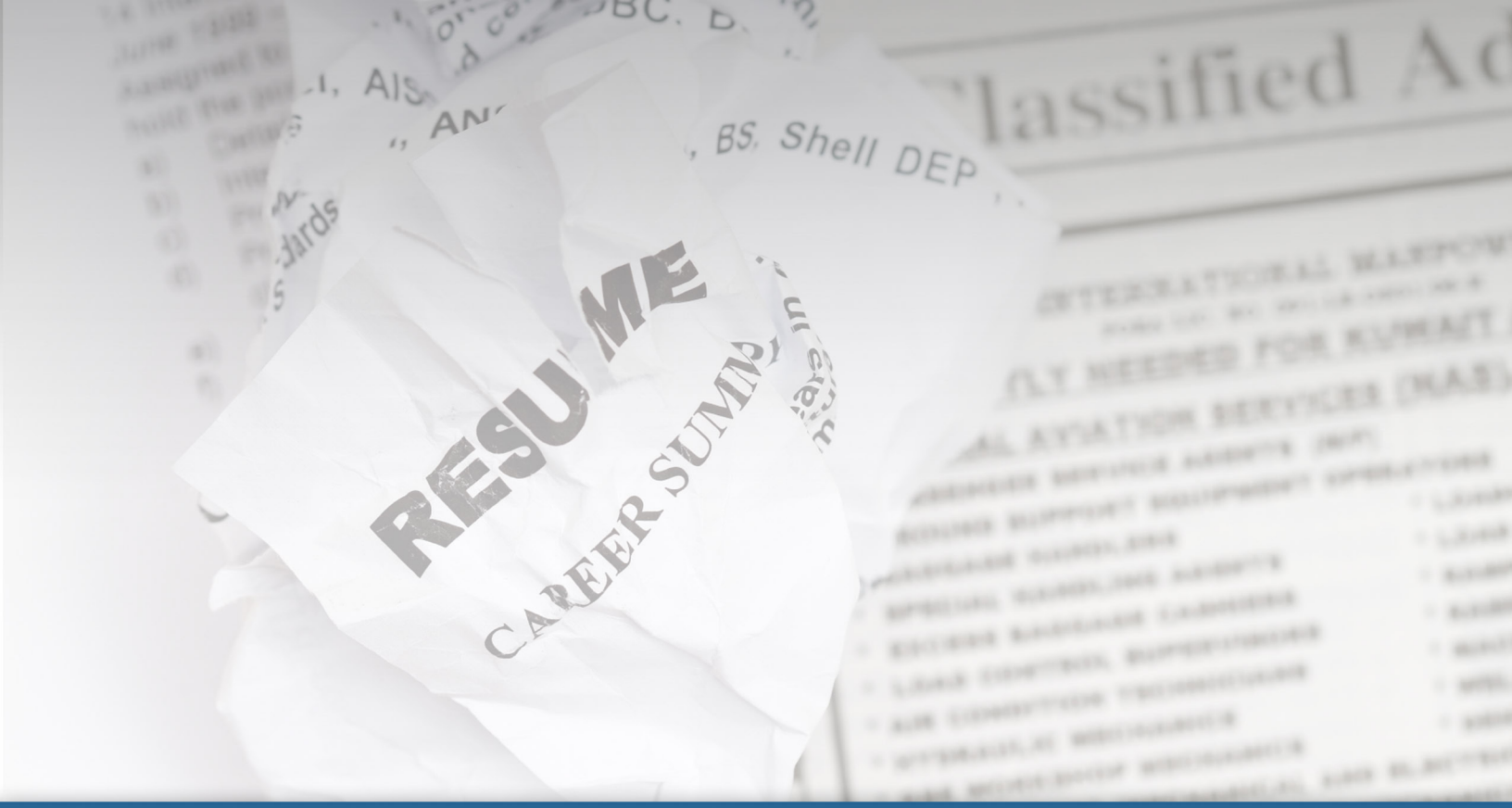

Feel the Heat!

The Unrelenting Challenge of Young Black Male Unemployment

Policies and Practices That Could Make a Difference

Linda Harris

October 2013

CLASP
policy solutions that work for low-income people

ABOUT CLASP

Since 1969, CLASP has been a trusted resource, a creative architect for systems change, and one of the country's most effective voices for low income people. Through careful research and analysis and effective advocacy, CLASP develops and promotes new ideas, mobilizes others, and directly assists governments and advocates to put in place successful strategies that deliver results that matter to people across America. We are nonpartisan and situated at the intersection of local practice, national research, and state and federal policy, and striving to translate each world to each other.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CLASP wishes to acknowledge the Open Society Foundation's Campaign for Black Male Achievement for its support of our policy work addressing issues impacting the education and labor market outcomes of black men and boys. This report is one in a series of reports being released by CLASP on various aspects of black male achievement. The full range of policy documents and resource materials can be accessed at http://www.clasp.org/issues?type=youth

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Introduction

The situation of high unemployment for black men is not new. It has persisted for decades, and scholars, sociologists, economists, policy makers, and advocates have brought attention to various aspects of this challenge and put forth solutions. Yet, it is seemingly an intractable situation. In 2012, three years after the end of the recession, the black male unemployment rate was in the double digits for every age category up to age 65. This was not the case for any other racial group. In 2010, half of working black men were employed in the two occupational clusters with the lowest average earnings. The situation was the same in 2000, and in 1990. In addition to being disproportionately represented in low-wage occupations, black men are much more likely than white men to be working part-time and to experience longer durations of unemployment.

> *"While young people who are currently disconnected from school or work are not contributing to our economy, we see these young people, we see these young people as 'Opportunity Youth' – because of the untapped potential they bring to the Nation... 'America's young people face record unemployment, and we need to do everything we can to make sure they've got the opportunity to earn the skills and a work ethic that come with a job. It's important for their future and for America's... This is an all-hands-on-deck moment."*
>
> *President Barack Obama, January 2012 speech to employers on creating summer jobs*

Ample evidence shows that the contributors to long-term labor market success are at play early in adolescent and young-adult experiences. Academic preparation, early work experience, civic engagement, career exposure, and adult navigation support provide the scaffolding that supports young people as they mature in the work place. All of these types of activities and supports add to the portfolio of experiences that make individuals marketable as they enter the labor market as young adults. It is also quite evident that adolescent black boys and young men lack much of this support as they prepare for the job market. By the time young black boys enter the labor market as young adults they are already at a substantial competitive disadvantage, especially those residing in low income communities. Altering the employment landscape for black men in general will require acknowledging and addressing those issues and circumstances that put young black men at such significant disadvantage in the labor market and making the necessary investments to interrupt the cycle of underachievement and establish new trajectories to adult success.

This challenging environment affects a significant number of black boys and young men. In 2011, there were 3 million young black men age 16 to 24 in the civilian non-institutionalized population and in correctional institutions[i]. Half of them (52 percent) were enrolled in school, evenly split between the secondary and post-secondary levels. Eight percent of those 18 to 24 had a 2 year degree or higher. Of those not enrolled in school, 233,000 were high school dropouts and 201,000 were incarcerated in juvenile or adult facilities.[ii] Of those still enrolled in high school, 259,000 were over-age. Overall, there were 663, 211 who fell into the category of either being a high school dropout, in school but overage, or incarcerated. Add to that number the thousands who graduated high school with insufficient academic skills for postsecondary labor market success and there is a substantial segment of this young black male population in need of additional education and labor market assistance.

In 2012 only 15 percent of black male teens and 49 percent of those 20 to 24 were working – far less than their white male counterparts. These young men represent a tremendous pool of potential talent that deserves the opportunity to rise to greater heights in the labor market and overcome the barriers that constrained the progress of past generations. Reaching those heights – access to high wage jobs, skilled careers, and upward mobility–in today's labor market and in the future will require academic and occupational credentials far beyond just high school completion. The education and employment statistics presented in the body of this paper suggest that there is still much peril for these young men as they attempt to navigate the labor market.

We know many of the factors that contribute to the persistent unemployment and underemployment of black males including disparity in education attainment and their disproportionate contact with the criminal justice system. But the intergenerational persistence of underachievement in the labor market for black men is rooted in much more complex structural elements. Factors such as geography, hiring bias, perception, impenetrable informal networks, and lack of access to early work opportunities all play a part in limiting the labor market prospects for young black men. The collective impact of these factors compounded over years can effectively relegate young black men to cycling in and out of low wage jobs with little opportunity for advancement. Most of these impediments to black male achievement in the labor market are surmountable with intentional strategies targeted to the communities where the challenge is greatest and the assembly of resources, systems, and leadership focused on solutions at sufficient scale to have an impact.

This report reflects on the current labor market situation of young black men and on policies and practices that can be leveraged to dramatically improve their labor market status.

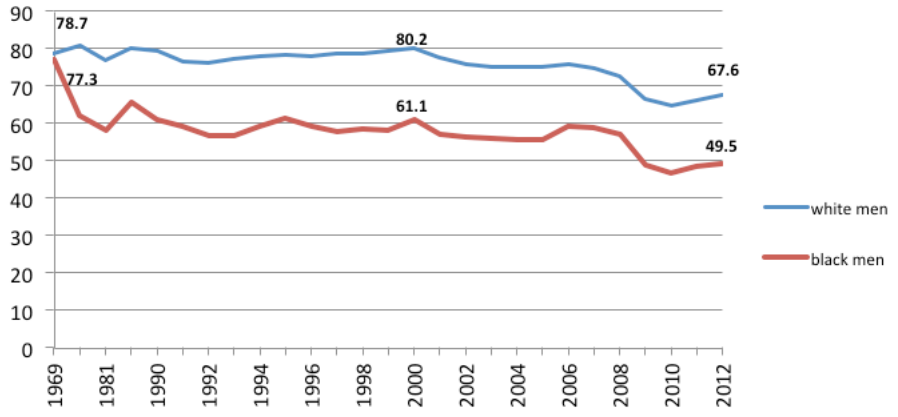
Part 1: The Intractable Challenge of Black Male Unemployment

1.1 | TRENDS IN EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT

Employment for young black males aged 16 to 24 has been steadily declining since the 1970s. Looking back over the past 40 years, young black male employment has lagged substantially behind the rates for young white males and the national average. Official unemployment rates only include those who are actively looking for work. They don't include those who have become discouraged and have stopped looking. Thus the more accurate indicator of employment status for this age group is the percent of those in an age category who are working -- also referred to as the employment-population ratio. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2012, only half of the black men between the ages of 20 and 24 were working. Chart 1 shows the disparities that have existed over the years and the dramatic decline. The employment rate for young black men dropped from 77 percent in 1969, when the employment rates for black and white males were equal, to less than 50 percent in 2012.

In 2000, the nation experienced a period of economic recession that marked the beginning of a free fall in youth employment. In "Boom Times a Bust: Declining Employment Among Less-Educated Young Men" economist Harry Holzer notes that, historically, periods of economic expansion after recession did not lift the employment or earnings of low-income, less-educated

Figure 1. Trends in Employment-Population Ratios for Males 20 to 24 selected years



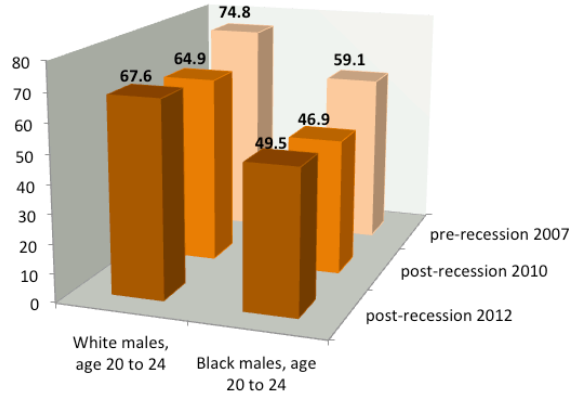
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics – Current Population Survey

men. Such was the case with the recession of 2000 and 2007[iii]. In 2000, as the nation pulled out of the economic recession, adult employment rates recovered to pre-recession levels while youth employment continued to decline and the employment-population ratio for black men age 16 to 24 dropped to under 50 percent. At the same time, Congress eliminated the federal funding for the summer jobs program and thereafter, dramatically reduced spending on employment and training programs that in prior years had been primarily directed at low-income populations in economically distressed local areas. During the early 2000's welfare reform legislation passed in Congress with work requirements that moved hundreds of thousands of recipients into the low-wage job market. By the end of the decade, the economic downturn resulted in many older workers competing for part-time, low-wage jobs to supplement their income. According to economist Andrew Sum of Northeastern University's Center for Labor Market Studies, during the last decade as youth duplicated employment declined dramatically, employment grew for for older workers[iv]. Consequently, for most of the past decade, as the job market became more challenging for young job seekers, little federal investment was made in helping youth with limited skills and limited job access get prepared for, or make, the labor market connections that might lead to higher wage opportunities. The "Great Recession," from 2007 to 2009, further exacerbated the employment situation for black men. While all groups suffered during the recession, black men – in particular young black men – experienced a much lower rate of employment during the recession and much slower growth in employment post-recession.

In 2012, three years after the official end of the recession, the Bureau of Labor Statistic's estimate of unemployment by age group indicated that "black men" was the only racial subgroup where the post-recession unemployment rate remained at 10 percent or above for every age category up to age 65.

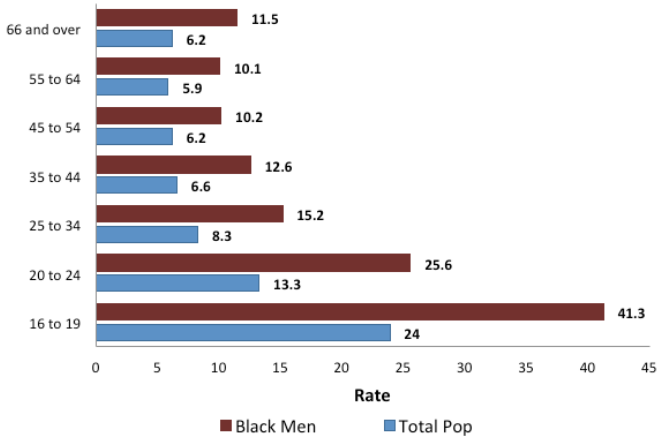
This suggests labor market challenges are not just a by-product of youth and inexperience but an issue black men confront throughout their work-life.

Figure 2. Pre and Post Recession Employment-Population Ratio of Black and White Males Age 20 to 24



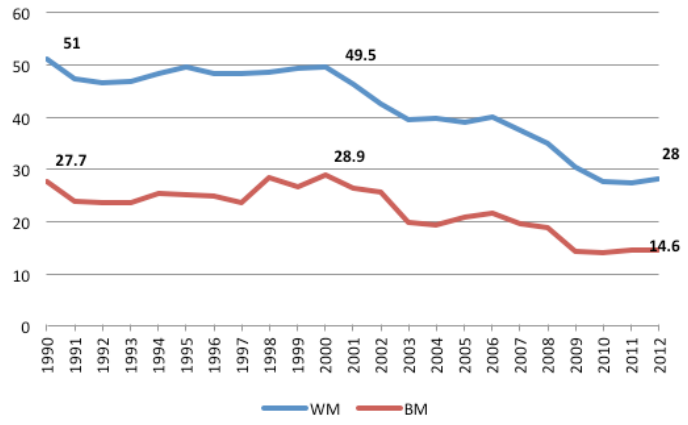
Source: CPS -Household Data: Employment status of the civilian non-institutional population by age, sex, and race

Figure 3. Unemployment Rate for Black Men by Age Category 2012



Source: CPS - Employment Status of the civilian noninstitutional population by age, sex, and race - annual averages - 2012

Figure 4. Percent of Men 16 to 19 Employed 1990 to 2012



The lack of employment opportunity for black boys as they enter their late teen years is particularly concerning. In 2012 only 15 percent of black males ages 16 to 19 were employed compared to 28 percent of their white counterparts. This is a 45 percent drop from 1990. The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, which tracked the education and labor market experiences of a panel of youth as they aged from 1997 through 2011, also documented this disparity. Survey data showed that white youth worked 30 percent more weeks during the ages of 18 and 19 than black youth.v Researchers have documented that early work experience correlates with higher earnings in adult years. Conversely, the lack of early labor market attachment serves to depress the earnings potential.[vi]

Additionally, recent research on brain development has substantiated that the part of the brain related to "executive functioning" such as decision-making, problem solving, weighing consequences and risks, analysis, and impulse control does not fully develop until the mid-twenties vII. The experiences of young people (both positive and negative) during this critical stage of adolescent and young adult development have tremendous ramifications on their ability to function and thrive in adult life. Exposure to work during these years provides the structure, discipline, work ethic, exploration, money-management, and interpersonal experiences that will shape a young person's approach to adult responsibilities. Idleness, transience, and lack of participation in activities that build employability and "soft" skills will make it extremely difficult for young black men to compete for good jobs in the labor market and will put them at greater risk of engaging in illicit or illegal avenues for earning income. The disparity in access to wholesome work experiences between young black boys and young white boys puts young black men at an early disadvantage that persists over time.

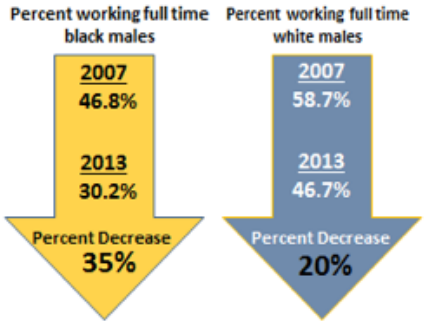
Also impacting the long term labor market prospects for young black males is the growing employer bias against hiring the long-term unemployed. In a recent Op-Ed in the New York Times[viii], economist Paul Krugman suggests that there is now a tainting of the long-term unemployed. He cites the research of Rand Ghayad of Northeastern University that documented employer behavior in the wake of the slow job recovery and growing pool of long-term unemployed. The study indicated that the growing job vacancies in light of high unemployment were not the by-product of a skills gap, but rather the result of employers seeing those with long duration of unemployment as not viable candidates for employment. He posits that this results in a structural impediment in the labor market as increasing numbers of jobseekers fall into the category of long-term unemployed. There is a vicious cycle whereas the longer people are unemployed, the more likely they are to become unemployable. This theory captures the situation that has confronted black men for some time. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the median duration of unemployment for black men in 2012 was 25 weeks, compared to the national average of 19 weeks. This means that half of the unemployed black men had been unemployed for 6 months or more. Economists have noted that long durations of unemployment result in continued structural unemployment for impacted populations, even after the economy improves. Thus, part of the set of solutions for addressing the employment situation of young black men must be directed at the structural factors that are embedded in how the market works.

1.2 | NATURE OF EMPLOYMENT, EARNINGS, AND OPPORTUNITY

While half of the young black men ages 20 to 24 were working in 2012, only 30 percent were working full time compared to 47 percent of their white male counterparts who were working full timex. This was a 35 percent drop from 2007 levels for young black men compared to a 20 percent decline for young white males. For some of the youth population there was an upswing in enrollment in college during the period of economic recession and

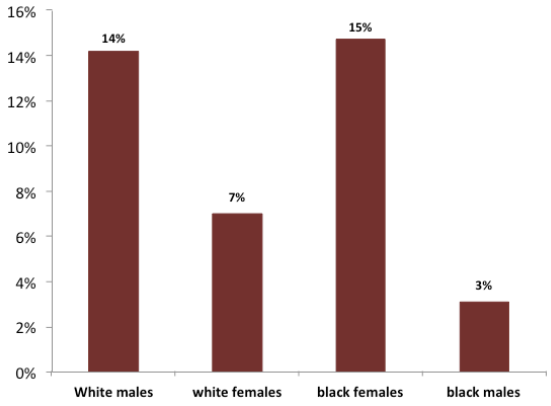
slow job recovery that accounted for some of the drop in employment rate and the shift from full-time to part-time employment. This increased college enrollment was not the case with young black men. During this period, the rate of college enrollment increased for white males and females ages 18 to 24 and for black females in that age category. The increase was substantially smaller for young black men.

Change in Full-time Employment for Men 20-24



BLS Current Population Survey –Table A-18. Employed and unemployed full- and part-time workers by age, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, May 2013 and 2007.

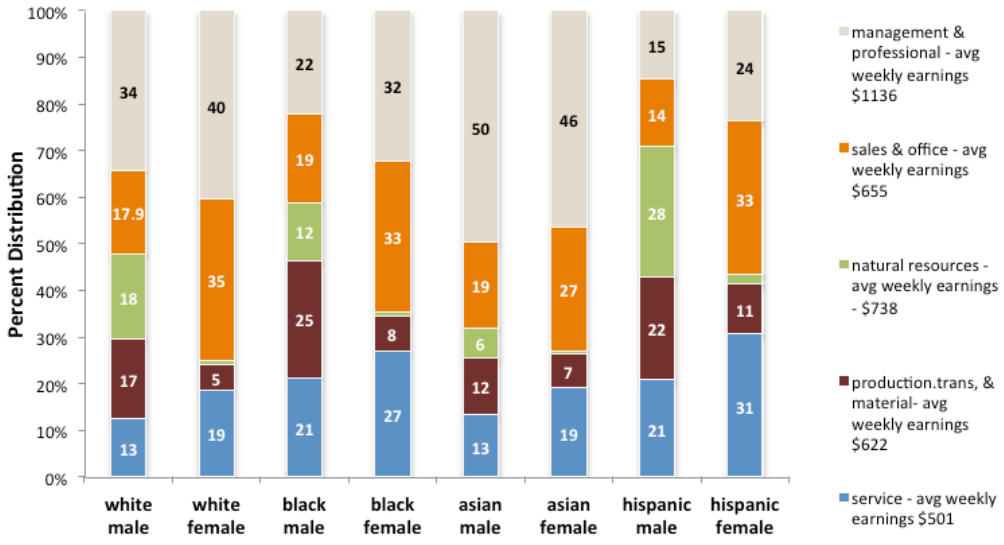
Figure 5. Increase in college enrollment rate from 2007 to 2011 for youth 18 to 24



Source: Current Population Survey - Enrollment Status of the Population 3 Years Old and Over, by Sex, Age, Race

In terms of earnings, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), in 2013 the average weekly earnings for black men working full time was $666 compared to $883 for white men. Weekly earnings averaged $417 for young black men age 16 to 24 compared to $493 for white men of the same age. A good deal of the disparity in wages can be accounted for by the distribution of employment across occupational clusters. As the chart below demonstrates, nearly 50 percent of working black men is accounted for in two occupational groups – 1) Service and 2) Production and Transportation and Material Moving. These are also the two occupational clusters with the lowest earnings. Black men are also substantially under-represented in the Management and Professional category. This occupational clustering for black men in the lower wage categories is almost identical to the distribution two decades ago. According to the 1990 census data[xi] and 2000 BLS statistics[xii] the concentration of black men in the two lowest wage occupation categories has been unchanged for two decades. While there has been an increase since 2000 in the proportion of black men in management and professional occupations (from 20 percent to 23 percent), it is still substantially below all other groups except Hispanic males.

Figure 6. Employed People by Occupation, Race, Sex, and Hispanic Ethnicity, 2010



American Community Survey 2010, Sex by Occupation, table C24010

1.3 | THE IMPACT OF EDUCATION ATTAINMENT ON THE EMPLOYMENT GAP

Although the last decade has shown modest improvement on some of the indicators of educational attainment, young black men still lag substantially behind their peers in many areas. In a highly competitive labor market where credentials count, the disparity in educational attainment greatly disadvantages young black men in securing higher-wage employment. The charts below show educational attainment of black men 18 to 24 compared to white men, white women, and black women in that same age cohort from 2000 to 2010. Several improvements are worth noting. First, looking at credential attainment by age 24, the percent of high school graduates (this includes those with GEDs) increased by 16 percent from 63 percent to 73 percent for black males, still far behind 83 percent for white males. In addition, the percent of those black males by age 24 who had at least some college also improved from 30 percent to 37 percent.

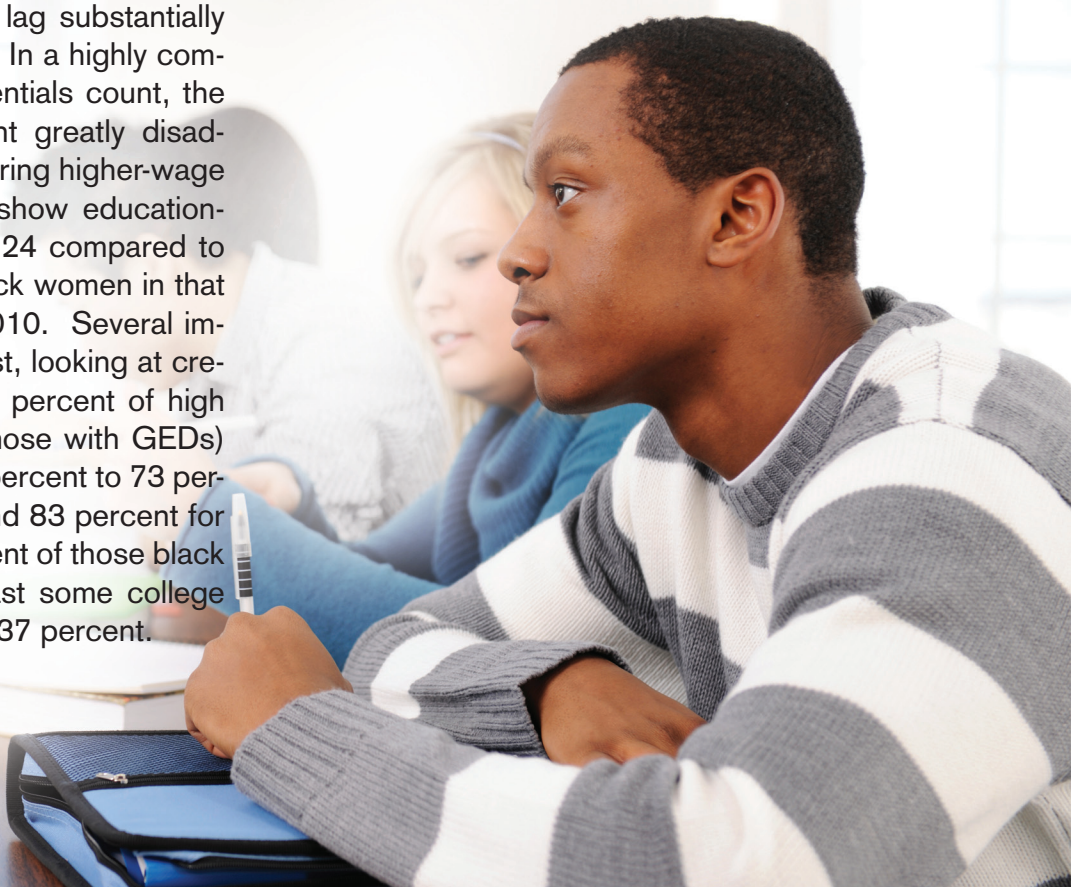
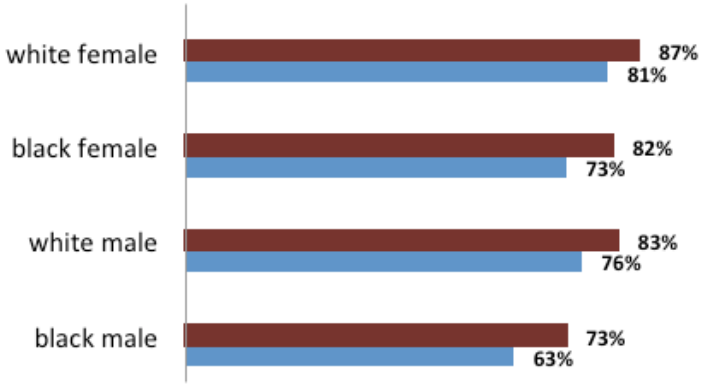


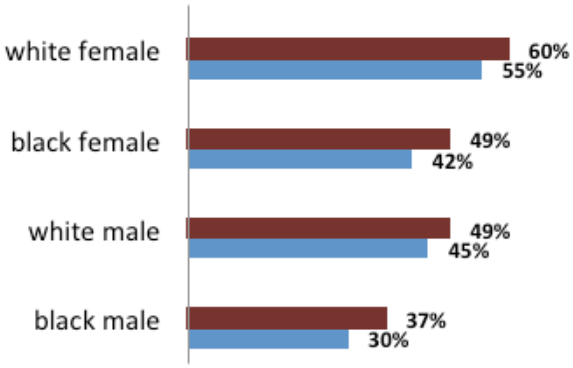
Figure 7. Changes in Educational Attainment from 2000 to 2010

-2000 -2010

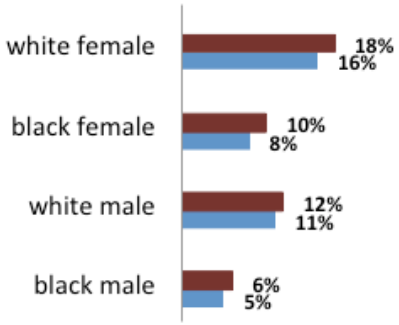
Percent of youth 18 to 24 with at least a high school diploma



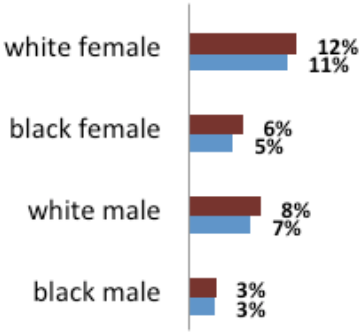
Percent of youth 18 to 24 with at least some college



Percent of youth 18 to 24 with at least a 2 or 4 year degree



Percent of youth 18 to 24 with at least a bachelors degree

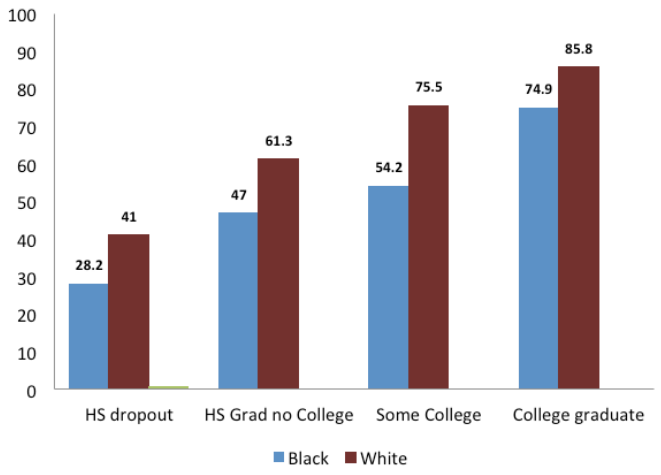


Source: Calculations based on Census 2000 – 2010 – American FactFinder - Sex by age by educational attainment for the population 18 years and over

Although the above statistics show a positive trajectory, there are also very disturbing caveats to the positive trends. White youth are more than twice as likely as black youth to have achieved a college degree by age 24. At the secondary level, black male graduation rates lag substantially behind others. The Schott Foundation on Public Education has been tracking the four-year graduation rates for students, documenting the percentage of students who enter 9th grade that graduates four years later. The foundation's report, The Urgency of Now: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males 2012[xiii] reported a four-year graduation rate for black males of just 52 percent compared to 78 percent for their white peers among the 2009-2010 cohort of graduates nationwide; districts including Detroit, Philadelphia, Jackson, New York, Cleveland had less than 1/3 of the freshman class of black boys graduating four years later. While many of these young men will graduate in their 5th or 6th year in high school, many will simply dropout. In 2010, according to NCES data[xiv], there were 366,000 black male dropouts age 16 to 24 including those in correctional institutions. If you add to that number the 185,000 black male students that are overage and still in high school, there is a substantial pool of over a half million young black men in need of academic support and reconnection to education alternatives. This does not include the sizable number of youth who graduated but are inadequately prepared academically for postsecondary labor market success. There are very few avenues to assist these young men who are academically underprepared to get back on track to earn their high school diploma or postsecondary credentials. Thus, the early loss of footing for black men in our secondary institutions may easily close the doors to economic opportunity for their entire adult work life.

At the postsecondary level, retention and completion are problems for all racial categories, but are the most problematic for black men. Of the cohorts entering four-year institutions from 1999 to 2005, the completion rate after six years averaged only 34 percent for black males compared to 57 percent for white males, 62 percent for white females, and 44 percent for black females. For two-year institutions, only 20 percent of black men achieved a degree within 150 percent of the expected time. And for black males at public two-year institutions, the degree achievement rate within that period was only 13 percent. These completion rates are very discouraging given

Figure 8. Employment rate of youth 16 to 24 not enrolled in school by education attainment



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, table a-16,

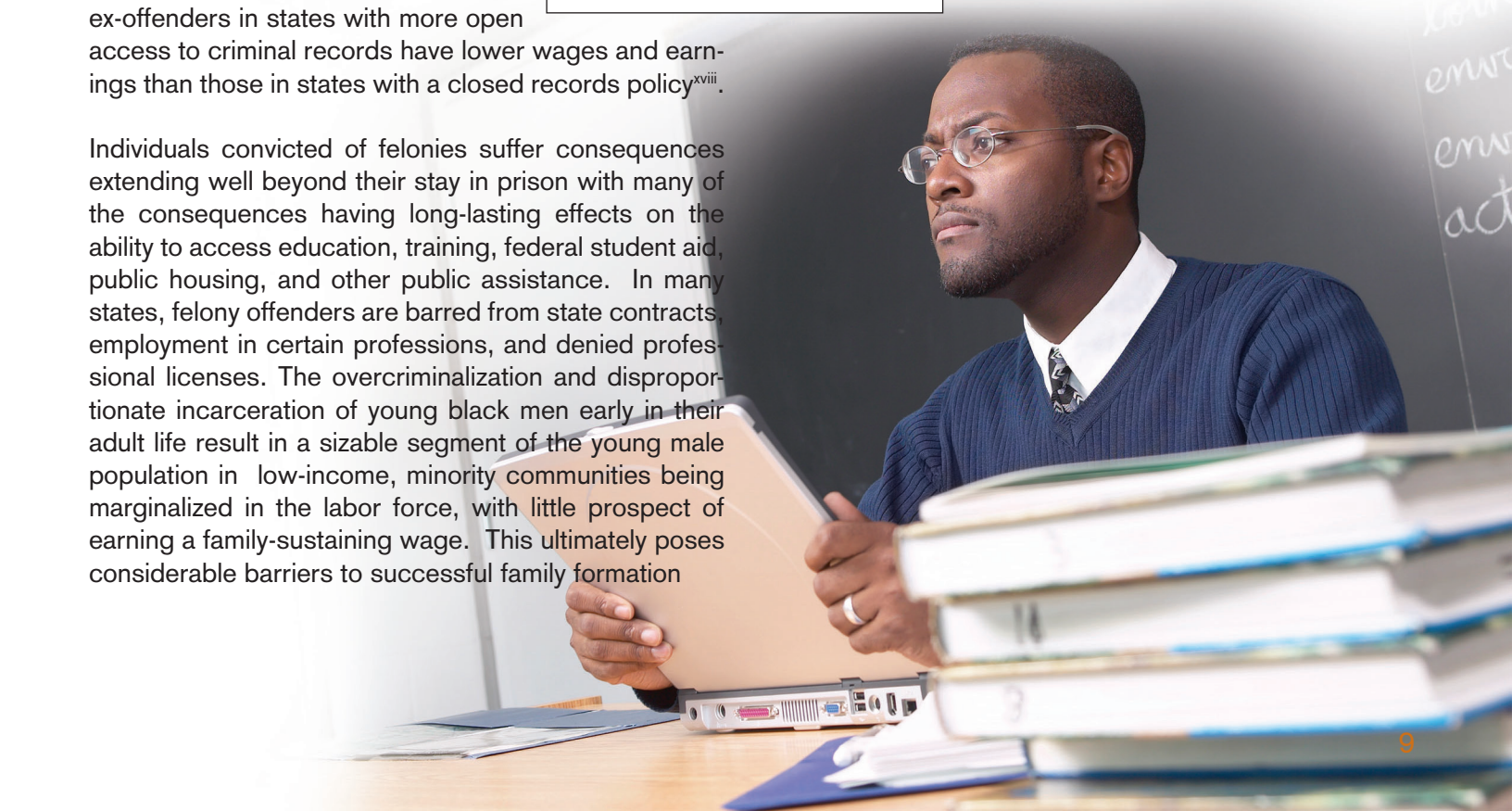
that increased education should serve to equalize the playing field in the labor market. While data show that increased employment and higher earnings are associated with increased educational attainment, simply having some college does little in closing the disparity gap between white and black youth. Figure 8 displays the difference in employment by race and education level for youth ages 16 to 24 that are out of school. It should be noted that even though employment increases for black youth as their education levels rise, the gap persists in comparison with their white peers. Also significant is the fact that black youth with some college are still employed at a lower rate than white high school graduates with no college experience. The employment rate of black youth with college degrees is lower than white youth with no degree but some college. Though the gap lessens for college graduates, college enrollment has not proven to be the great equalizer.

1.4 | THE DEVASTATING IMPACT OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM ON BLACK MALE EMPLOYABILITY

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, one in three black men can expect to go to prison in their lifetime. In its December 2012 bulletin entitled Prisoners in 2011, the US Department of Justice estimated that black men 18 and 19 years of age were imprisoned at more than nine times the rate of white males; among black men ages 20 to 24 the imprisonment rate was 7 times that of white men.[xvi] In a 2003 survey of over 3,000 employers, researchers at Georgetown University reported that only 40 percent would even consider hiring a person with a criminal record[xvii]. A 2008 study by researchers at the National Bureau of Economic Research concluded that the increased availability and accessibility of criminal background data is associated with worse labor market outcomes for ex-offenders and that ex-offenders in states with more open access to criminal records have lower wages and earnings than those in states with a closed records policy[xviii].

> *Crime doesn't just happen. This poisonous fruit grows in a culture that crushes opportunities, security, and hope.... It will continue unless we directly identify and address the conditions that lead to violence.*
>
> *Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter at 9th Annual Mayor's Summit on Race, Culture and Human Relations*

Individuals convicted of felonies suffer consequences extending well beyond their stay in prison with many of the consequences having long-lasting effects on the ability to access education, training, federal student aid, public housing, and other public assistance. In many states, felony offenders are barred from state contracts, employment in certain professions, and denied professional licenses. The overcriminalization and disproportionate incarceration of young black men early in their adult life result in a sizable segment of the young male population in low-income, minority communities being marginalized in the labor force, with little prospect of earning a family-sustaining wage. This ultimately poses considerable barriers to successful family formation and positive civic engagement. This overcriminalization poses employment barriers to both ex-offenders and non-offenders. Researchers have documented that employers, when faced with applicants from an over-criminalized population, minimize their perceived risk by engaging in "statistical discrimination"- that is considering neither offenders nor non-offenders from that population for employment.[xix]



Part 2: On the Ground in Communities of Color

2.1 | YOUNG BLACK MALE UNEMPLOYMENT IN SELECTED COMMUNITIES

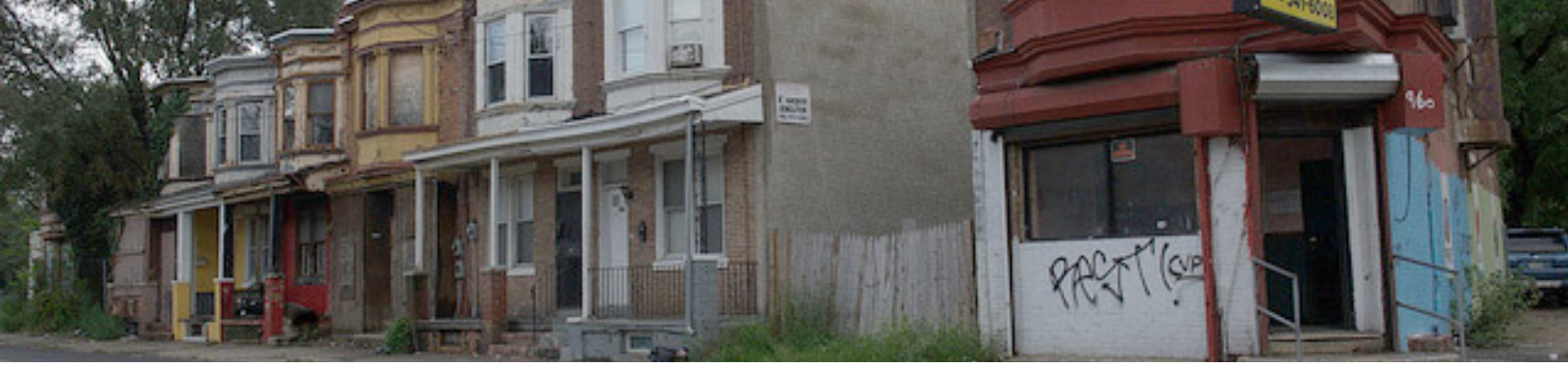
According to The African American Labor Force in the Recovery[xx], a report released by the US Department of Labor in 2012, unemployed African Americans are more likely to live in economically depressed areas with fewer employment opportunities and with much longer commutes to areas of job growth. DOL estimated that over the three years from 2008 to 2010, 63 percent of unemployed African Americans lived in local areas with unemployment rates of 10 percent. This compares with just 39 percent for unemployed whites. In light of the research on employer discrimination against the long-term unemployed, it is safe to conclude that one's place of residence poses almost as much a barrier to employment as does lack of skills and lack of employment access. In communities of economic distress there is a complex set of issues that must be taken into consideration to interrupt the intergenerational situation of low achievement in the labor market for black men, including:

- the concentration of young black men in communities of high economic stress,
- the reluctance of employers to hire from those communities,
- the tremendous reduction in public funding supporting education, training, and employment interventions directed at the high-risk, out-of-school population,
- the dysfunction of the multiple public systems that interact with youth once they go off track – education, justice, foster care, courts – often contributing to the disconnection from the education and labor market mainstreams,
- the high numbers of youth exiting high school without the requisite academic skill or credentials for labor market success,
- the lack of employment opportunities,
- the inordinate exposure to crime, violence, victimization, arrest, and trauma which has an indelible impact on one's view of future prospects,
- the lack of early exposure to college, careers, professions, role models, work places, and cultural experiences that would extend horizons and aspirations, and
- the tremendous deficit that accumulates by age 18 in the academic, interpersonal, and employment skills that are needed for postsecondary labor market success.

No doubt there is an insidious cycle of entrapment at play. Lacking in skills, exposure, and education prerequisites, young black men are more likely than young white men to spend more time idle than employed. They are increasingly exposed to crime, violence, arrest, and incarceration. This renders them unemployable in both the short and long run. This substantially reduces their ability to become productive, civically engaged taxpayers; creates a drain on the tax base; puts a pall on community life; and, suppresses economic investment. Increased policing and incarcerating, which tends to be the first call for action by local officials, simply exacerbates the situation by increasing the number of residents with criminal records who will be unable to obtain economically self-sustaining wages in the legitimate job market. This is a losing strategy.

There needs to be investment in the short-term in building the community's capacity to address the above mentioned issues in a comprehensive manner which will result in long-term pay offs in terms of producing a skilled workforce, increasing tax base, stimulating economic growth, and expanding prosperity for the entire community.

So what does this labor market disconnection look like in these communities? Chart 9 assembles the numbers and percentages on several indicators for selected communities with substantial numbers of young black men. Looking at these numbers, it is easy to envision the combined impact of these negative factors on the health and well-being of the communities. It is not just the young men who are at risk of sustained economic hardship, but the entire community that is subject to the social ills that accompany high unemployment, growing participation in the underground economy as a source of income, increased risk behaviors, and greater dependence on under-resourced public support systems. The data displayed in Chart 9 shows that while there is tremendous disparity between black and white males across all of



the indicators both groups are far below the national average. Thus, the goal of parity is not enough. The goal should be setting the bar high for academic excellence and labor market success for all and ensuring that supports are in place, in particular, for young black men to achieve the higher performance levels.

It is also worth noting in these communities the staggering difference in the number of young black teens who get arrested compared to the number of arrested white teens. The wide gulf between these two populations is a commentary on the increased criminalization of adolescent behavior of black youth and on the unrelenting focus on them by local officials who believe that the answer lies in policing the problem. In nearly every city on the chart, the number of juveniles arrested was more than the number who worked. Consider the manpower and resource costs associated with the high level of arrests. Those same resources could be effectively used to put these same youth to work and would most likely have a greater impact than arrest and incarceration on public safety, reduction in crime and violence, and ultimately improving the tax base.

Figure 9. Education and Labor Market Indicators for Black Males in Selected Cities

		Four year grad rate[1]	Of males 18 to 24[2]			number of juvenile arrests [3]	Number of males 16 to 19	% of males 16 to 19 working	number of males 20 to 24	Percent of males 20 to24 working
			Number and (%) with no HS diploma	Number and (%) with at least a 2 year degree	Number and (%) with a bachelor's or above					
Atlanta	black	52%	3351 (24%)	1242 (9%)	977 (7%)	1522	9702	10%	11178	36%
	white	78%	410 (3%)	3332 (28%)	3107 (26%)	63	3920	10%	9115	49%
Baltimore	black	40%	6161 (28%)	1058 (5%)	579 (3%)	4087	13333	15%	15296	42%
	white	43%	1771 (16%)	2955 (28%)	2643 (25%)	125	3685	22%	8476	61%
Birmingham	black	37%	2711 (34%)	299 (4%)	204 (3%)	586	4582	12%	4501	44%
	white	46%	598 (20%)	688 (23%)	497 (17%)	32	897	30%	2666	56%
Chicago	black	39%	15561(34%)	2544 (5%)	1674 (4%)	17419	31197	9%	31528	37%
	white	66%	8515 (14%)	16818(28%)	14059(23%)	5142	26189	21%	52130	67%
Cleveland	black	28%	4054 (39%)	365 (4%)	129 (1%)	887	6820	15%	7039	37%
	white	37%	1873 (24%)	796 (10%)	648 (8%)	98	4000	30%	5504	56%
Columbus	black	41%	3427 (32%)	759 (7%)	610 (6%)	1024	6919	20%	7831	55%
	white	43%	4425 (12%)	5982 (16%)	5099 (14%)	306	12908	26%	29136	62%
District of Columbia	black	38%	4495 (29%)	1514 (10%)	1198 (8%)	NA	9702	10%	11178	36%
	white	88%	953 (5%)	6309 (36%)	6008 (34%)	NA	5838	6%	13050	57%
Memphis	black	43%	7012 (31%)	732 (3%)	476 (2%)	8388	15324	19%	16123	47%
	white	67%	2122 (19%)	1527 (14%)	1409 (13%)	606	3694	28%	7621	71%
Milwaukee	black	45%	4146 (34%)	395 (3%)	231 (2%)	11120	8978	19%	8506	41%
	white	55%	2210 (11%)	2853 (14)	2543 (13%)	14000	7909	37%	14791	71%
Philadelphia	black	24%	9367 (26%)	2172 (6%)	1405 (4%)	14040	23169	11%	25636	40%
	white	39%	4668 (11%)	7267 (18%)	6116 (15%)	4311	15788	19%	32941	48%
St Louis	black	33%	2778 (32%)	336 (4%)	222 (3%)	1827	5699	10%	5683	38%
	white	41%	1065 (13%)	1956 (24%)	1685 (21%)	143	2690	29%	6254	70%
Pittsburgh	black	44%	810 (18%)	486 (11%)	338 (7%)	1188	3377	12%	3073	39%
	white	68%	1090 (6%	4390 (25%)	3715 (21%)	256	7086	20%	12527	61%

[1]Foundation on Public Education, the Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males 2012. Table 1. www.blackboysreport.org
[2]American Community Survey, Table B15001: Sex by Age by Educational Attainment for the Population 18 Years and Over, 2011, 3 year estimate
[3]Bureau of Justice, Arrest Data Analysis Tool, http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=datool&surl=/arrests/index.cfm
[4]American Community Survey, Table - B23002A: Sex by Age by Employment Status for the Population 16 Years and Over, 2011, 3 year estimate

By providing numbers that quantify the dimension of the situation, we provide a starting point for moving the discussion from the abstract conversation about black men, unemployment, and crime to concrete dialogue about how many young black men are out of work, in need of support, and what it would take to put them on track to economically prosperous futures. The latter conversation leads to far more robust solutions and is what must take place to implement transformative solutions for both the communities and these young men. The numbers provide targets around which community efforts can rally. In 2012, CLASP released a guidebook titled "Finding the Will: A Guidebook for Using Community Distress Data to Promote Community Advocacy and Action",[xxi] which provides links to resource materials for activating a community-based advocacy strategy.

There are many places around the country that are doing innovative work in transforming the pathways for young men of color and many interventions in the youth development field have proven successful in moving young men from the corners to labor market credentials. From 2000 to 2006 federal Youth Opportunity grants were awarded to thirty six high poverty urban, rural, and native American communities to implement large scale interventions directed at disconnected and high risk youth. The Department of Labor estimated that 65 percent of the eligible out-of-school youth participated – attesting to the tremendous desire of young people in high distress communities to work, learn, and achieve labor market success. Nearly 100,000 youth participated; 18,000 participated in college preparatory activities. There was an increase in Pell grant receipt for youth in those communities, a positive impact on employment and earnings, greater involvement of community and faith-based institutions in serving youth. Youth Opportunity Grants had a major impact on how multiple youth serving agencies partnered to provide holistic services.[xxii]

A CLASP report, titled "Opportunity Says It All: How Five Communities Are Supporting the Transformation, Education, and Employment Success of Young Black Men"[xxiii], documents the continued work in several of those communities - the challenges and the successes - along with the insights from local workforce and education leaders, youth advocates, employers, and youth. The field of practice over the decade has demonstrated that the key components of an effective youth delivery system include: caring adult support and navigation, multiple education pathways that accelerates learning and integrates academic and occupational preparation, rich work experiences and work place connections, development of personal, interpersonal, leadership skills, and civic responsibility, and connections to community resources and supports. Considerable knowledge exists in the youth field on successful strategies that are transformative for youth and for the communities.

The challenge for most communities has been amassing the resources to achieve and sustain the interventions, collaborations, staffing infrastructure, and supports at a scale that is commensurate with the magnitude of the problem.

2.2 | UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL – FROM THE VIEW POINT OF YOUNG BLACK MEN

In 2006, CLASP conducted a survey of 200 high school dropouts across 13 communities in an effort to better understand their perspective on their labor market and life prospects. Much of the findings from that survey are documented in a video, "In Our Own Words: the Real Experiences of Young, Disconnected Men of Color"[xxiv]. CLASP found that despite their challenging environments, young black men expressed tremendous desire to get back on track, displayed a great deal of resilience, had much optimism about the future, and – despite their lack of education attainment – had aspirations for careers that required postsecondary credentials. Young fathers were motivated by wanting to provide better futures for their children. In 2013 CLASP conducted a series of focus groups and interviews with young black men who were high school dropouts and with their mentors advocates. The perspectives of the young men are detailed in the previously referenced CLASP report.

When asked to reflect on their employment situation they provided the following insights:

- The Vicious Cycle –"If you're straight out of high school then of course you don't have any experience and if you don't have any experience they aren't trying to give you a job."
- No Network – No references - "It was hard because I could never think of anyone to put as a reference. I never wanted to leave that section blank because I didn't want to turn in an incomplete application, but I didn't have anyone to put."
- Can't Hide the Skin Color or the Tattoos - "Being black – I can put a suit on and try to get a job but they look at me and see that I have tattoos and don't want to even interview me." "Appearance is a huge factor, I'm 6'4 and black and people are intimidated."
- The Criminal Background Check - "I can have an intelligent conversation with anyone but once the employer finds out about my background they aren't interested. They just see a criminal." "Employers need to take the time to get to know the candidate as a person and not as criminal. Employers need to let go of their assumptions."
- Internships Can Help - "Internships put people on a positive path and helps keep money in your pocket so you can take care of your responsibilities." "Doing an internship at my age (16) is going to help me to get a better job in the future."
- Expanding Horizons - "I wasn't even thinking about a GED or getting a job, I was trying to figure out how to survive. But I knew that I didn't want to go back to jail so I enrolled in YO Baltimore. It was the best decision I made in my entire life. Once I started attending the program, I realized that there were so many more opportunities here beyond just getting my GED."

Part 3: The Road Forward – Intentional Strategies to Turn the Tide

Over the next decade, as baby-boomers continue exiting the workforce, the labor force will become younger and increasingly more minority. A decade hence today's cohort of 16- to 24-year-old youth and young adults will be prime working age. The level of investment made today in the development of their academic, occupational, interpersonal, and civic skills will greatly influence the caliber of the future workforce, the nation's global competitiveness, and the quality of community life. Nationally, the disinvestment in youth programming coupled with the plummeting youth employment rates puts the entire generation of low-income youth in peril of underachievement in the labor market. But young black men lag behind on so many indicators of labor market and education success that it calls for intentional strategies to close the gaps in the education and employment outcomes even as policies and interventions are advanced to better prepare all youth for college, careers, and labor market success.

There is quite a distance to travel to close the gaps in labor market achievement for young black men and to assist all youth in maximizing their talents in pursuit of economic success. But the goal of assuring that young black men are adequately prepared and equipped for college, career, and labor market success is quite possible if: 1) this goal is prioritized and leadership at all levels embrace the mandate for action, 2) the resources and expertise of our education, workforce, and youth-serving systems are leveraged to support comprehensive programming to put these young men back on track; 3) we maximize opportunities for job creation, including public job creation; and 4) we build pipelines to jobs in demand industries.

More specifically, the following actions could lead to sustained and meaningful progress in closing the opportunity gaps for young black men:

1. Increase public will and leadership at all levels

We need key leaders at all levels to elevate this issue, expound on the critical need for action, generate public will, and exert sufficient pressure on public education

behalf of these disconnected young men. We need advocacy from the White House and federal agency heads, from governors and mayors, from advocates and community leaders, and from young black men.

In July, 2012, President Obama by executive order created the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans with provisions for the establishment of a commission to advise the process. This is a tremendous opportunity to use the presidential "Bully Pulpit" to draw national attention to the situation facing young black males - both those who are in school and those who have fallen by the wayside. Policymakers and advocates should pay special attention to informing this process to assure that the strategies for education reform and interventions are comprehensive, that the strategies strengthen the role for communities, and that they incorporate provisions for continued education support for students who are struggling, off track, or off the school rolls.

The heavily impacted communities must be "ground zero" in this effort to take back these young men and provide them a future of hope and opportunity. Mayors, county executives, and other civic leaders will need to be at the forefront of a "call to action" that must extend beyond increased policing and violence prevention to include investing in education and dropout prevention, dropout recovery, jobs, pathways to careers, and the ancillary supports and mentoring needed to put and keep these young men on course to better futures. It will take the collective effort of civic leadership, the leadership in the education, justice, and workforce systems, community partnerships, and business engagement to chart the strategies on the ground.

Some mayors are taking up the issue. The U.S. Conference of Mayors at their June 2013 gathering passed a resolution calling on Congress to create an overarching Opportunity Youth policy and comprehensive, targeted and sustained investment to build community capacity to recover and re-engage youth who have disconnected. The USCM also called upon congress and the Administration to invest in summer and year round jobs for youth. The National League of Cities launched the Cities United Initiative bringing together mayors as part of a national effort to reduce violent deaths among African-American males. In August 2011, New York Mayor Bloomberg launched the "Young Men's Initiative" to tackle disparities between young black and Latino males and their peers. He brought city agencies together and pulled in public and private funding to attack the problem and connect young men to education, employment, and mentoring opportunities. In New Orleans, NOLA for Life incorporates violence reduction, dropout prevention, promoting jobs and training opportunity, and neighborhood rebuilding in a holistic effort to confront the challenge of violence and hopelessness.

Efforts like these are the much needed seeds of transformation. However, achieving scale will require the support of state and federal policies and resources to build the capacity of the community efforts and to remove the barriers that make it difficult to assemble funding in ways to implement rational, comprehensive, and effective interventions.

> *"..the individual solutions that we adopted in Baltimore are not a silver bullet for the educational needs of Black male youth or urban youth as a whole. But they show what is possible in the short term, when the unacceptable is named and many rally to change outcomes for kids.*
>
> *I am confident that we as a nation will rally and we will succeed. The cost of continued failure is around us, a disservice to our best hopes. The cost of continued failure should be abhorrent to contemplate."*
>
> *Andrés A. Alonso, Ed.D. Former Chief Executive Officer Baltimore City Public Schools*

2. Shift the Paradigms, Perceptions, and Programming of Our Education and Youth Serving Systems

Delivering young black boys to better education and labor market outcomes will require shifting the paradigms and perceptions of those systems that serve them. These young men must be seen for their potential to become the college graduates, professionals, skilled workers, and civic leaders. Moreover, staff in the various education and youth-serving systems must be adequately trained to see it as their mission to deliver these young men to those outcomes. There is a

pressing need to augment the education and training of all those in the youth-serving professions, including teachers, to better understand adolescent development, impact of trauma, cultural competence in working with various populations, and youth development principles. Better education and labor market outcomes will require equipping the education, justice, workforce, and youth-serving systems to see their essential role in helping these youth achieve success, especially those who fall behind or misstep. It involves establishing accountability systems that push systems to identify those youth with multiple risk factors and rewarding those systems for delivering them to positive outcomes.

In districts where schools are losing more students than they are graduating, systemic education reform and aggressive youth recovery efforts must occur in tandem. There are successful efforts at school reform occurring in districts across the country, but the pace of reform is slow and large numbers of youth, including young black men, are being lost each year. Dropout prevention and recovery efforts must draw from the strength and resources of the broader community to provide rich learning environments, advocacy and mentoring support, and horizon-extending exposure to careers and experiences that will heighten aspirations. Communities are employing a variety of successful dropout re-engagement approaches – credit recovery, dual enrollment strategies, competency based approaches to high school credentials, GED to college, charter schools, wrap-around supports and navigation to postsecondary and labor market options. Creating high-quality and multiple pathways to a high school diploma that adequately prepares youth for post secondary success is essential for moving large numbers of young men from the margins to academic and occupational credentials.

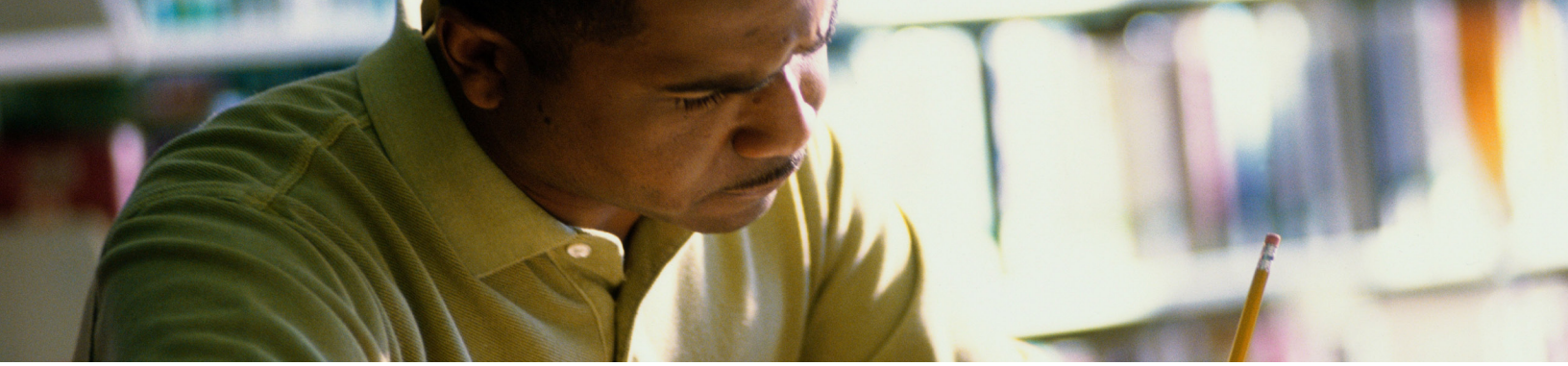
> *"Even though skin color in America no longer determines a child's fate – sadly, it tells us more about a child's future than it should. And so this morning, we are confronting these facts head-on, not to lament them, but to change them, and to ensure that 'equal opportunity' is not an abstract notion but an everyday reality, for all New Yorkers."*
>
> *New York, Mayor Michael Bloomberg on the launch of the Young Men's Initiative (2011)*

3. Job Creation -Subsidize Opportunities to Work, Earn, and Learn

Unless we find ways to put more young black men to work during their teens and early twenties they will remain at a long-term disadvantage in the labor market. The private market is still not creating jobs at a pace that will generate sufficient opportunity for full employment in communities of high poverty and communities of color. Appropriate work ethic and work behavior cannot be learned in workshops, classrooms, and certainly not on the streets. Nor will youth aspire to careers or occupations to which they have not been exposed. The solution, while the unemployment rates remain high, is federal investment in job creation efforts that provide:

- Subsidized jobs in the public and private sectors that will not only provide a source of income but also provide the opportunity to develop marketable labor market and occupational skills, a work portfolio, and transition support to unsubsidized employment;
- Summer and year-round work experiences for teens that will allow consistent attachment to a continuum of graduated work-related experiences and career exposure – internships, work experiences, work study, try-out employment;
- Transitional jobs that will provide more intensive support to individuals who need greater assistance addressing their employment barriers before transitioning to the private labor market.
- On-the-job training that provides subsidies to offset wages for those hired in the private sector after coming out of training programs but who don't have the requisite experience to be hired into the position. Quite often individuals find even after they complete training they can't get employed because they lack experience. This would give the individual a foot in the door to access jobs in the industry/occupation of their training, provide additional hands-on training, and build a work portfolio.

States have demonstrated the ability to implement subsidized jobs programs at considerable scale. The (TANF) Emergency Contingency Fund (also known as the Emergency Fund) enabled states to operate flexible, targeted job programs that subsidized wages for businesses hiring unemployed low-income workers. From 2009 to 2010, this program placed more than 260,000 low-income individuals in subsidized jobs at a total federal cost of $1.32 billion. Local areas, when provided



a $1 billion infusion from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), put nearly 300,000 youth to work in summer and year round jobs.

4. Leverage the public funding streams and federal legislation

Federal and State resources should be directed at 1) creating a policy, legislative, and regulatory environment that affirms a commitment to not leave these youth behind, and 2) providing the incentives and resources, at scale, to stand behind that commitment. Several federal acts that are up for reauthorization could support robust efforts – the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Workforce Investment Act, the Higher Education Act, and the Carl Perkins Career and Technical Education Act. While all of these initiatives include funding streams that can be used to support programing for youth who are off-track or at academic risk, there is no requirement -- and even fewer incentives -- for them to do so. Reauthorization provides the opportunity for Congress to 1) provide greater targeting to assure that higher risk and non-traditional populations are adequately served; 2) make explicit that recovery and education re-engagement of high school dropouts is a priority; 3) ensure greater alignment across the funding streams to make it easier for multiple funding streams to support comprehensive programming; and 4) address the disincentive to serving high-risk individuals that is inherent in all of these acts that are up for reauthorization.

Congress, and the federal agencies through the regulatory process, should use these reauthorizations to specify how the resources will work in tandem with other funding streams to serve high risk and non-traditional populations and to specify how community stakeholders will be strategically engaged.

5. Focus efforts on reducing the over-criminalization of adolescent behaviors

Every effort must be made to stop the early criminalization of disruptive behaviors on the part of young black men. In Los Angeles, community advocates, parents, and civil rights organizations alarmed by the disproportionate contact of young black men with the court system took on a sustained effort to confront the issue. In 2012, they armed themselves with research showing that the first arrest quadrupled the likelihood of dropping out of school. They succeeded in changing the way troubled youth were dealt with by school officials and the police. Rather than imposing punishment and issuing citations for those with minor infractions, students are now referred to trained specialists at geographically dispersed youth centers who assess their needs and connect them with the appropriate programs and services. Districts like Miami-Dade, Baltimore, Denver, and Philadelphia have all dramatically restructured their school discipline policies to eliminate zero tolerance policies and replace them with developmentally appropriate and caring strategies.[xxvi]

Given the high rate of arrest and incarceration of young black men, it is essential that "ban the box"[xxvii] efforts continue to expand in states and municipalities across the country to curtail the indiscriminate use of criminal background checks to deny employment opportunities to a large number of black men. State legislatures and local officials should also ensure that substantial increases in funding for police and public safety activity is accompanied by a concurrent infusion of resources to support the diversion of youth from high risk activities to supported structures that can address their barriers and keep them connected to education, jobs, and training.

6. Build Pathways and Pipelines to Occupations in Demand Industries

In an April 2012 briefing sponsored by EPI on Transporting Black Men to Good Jobs – the Transportation Learning Center (TLC) presented compelling projections from the transportation sector of employment demand required to keep pace with the growing public transportation investments and the pending retirement of the skilled transportation workforce. Presenters noted that traditionally the transportation industry has provided black men with very good access to stable jobs at decent wages although they were still under-repre-

sented in the higher-wage skilled jobs. The TLC noted that the federal investment in the transportation industry workforce is less than 1 percent of its capital investment, well below human resource investment in private industry. The Transportation Learning Center advanced the recommendation that human capital investment be included in transit capital investment funding, that the investment level be raised to 3 percent of payroll, and that funding from that pool be used to support targeted career pathway partnerships that would connect urban youth to quality transportation careers. This approach would insure that major infrastructure investments (not just in transportation) have adequate funding to prepare a skilled pipeline to a high-quality workforce in that area. Ensuring that this type of funding brings opportunities to young black men would require that the community be engaged in the design of the pathways and pipelines that provide the skill development, work experiences, and mentoring experiences that will prepare young black men for those opportunities. This concept could be successfully applied across many sectors where the workforce is aging and where there is a concern that the emerging workforce reflects the growing diversity of the population.

The Capital Workforce Partners in the Hartford, Connecticut region recognized this reality when looking at the aging workforce in the manufacturing industry in areas with high unemployment and economic distress. Capital Workforce Partners saw the solution in marrying the industry representatives, the community college and a high performing community provider of youth services. The result is a pathway program in Hartford preparing low income youth for opportunities in advanced manufacturing.

Alliances like these will need to be negotiated in abundance and should be part of every major economic and community development effort. These alliances should wrestle with the question of how this economic opportunity can leverage employment opportunities for young adults in economically distressed communities; how best to prepare them to access these opportunities; and how to constructively engage the secondary, postsecondary, workforce systems and community providers in the process. No employer or industry will employ individuals who are inadequately skilled for the job, and no amount of incentive will entice them to do so. Therefore the key is to open the door to opportunity -- and then deliver these young men to the door completely prepared for the job. That can't be accomplished without building quality pathways and pipelines in growing industry sectors that are negotiated with employers, enriched with opportunities for young men to experience the workplace and for employers to experience the relationships with these young men and welcome them as the future workforce.

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