

Issues of Experience

This final issue cluster serves to summarize the impact of the foregoing patterns: family-community experiences, including the pattern of single parenting extant in the lower-class black family, the absence of male role models and the persistent economic depression of the large segments of the black community combine to suppress both ambition and academic attainment. School experiences for the black male child in Florida are profoundly affected by the history of the desegregation process. Suspensions and expulsions of black males appear concurrently with the process of desegregation; and black teachers and administrators disappear as schools are reorganized to accommodate the requirements of racial balance. As Porter and Neyland (1977) observed,

The struggle for desegregation in public schools had both liberating and debilitating effect on blacks in Florida. As desegregation proceeded with all deliberate speed, blacks soon discovered that they were almost always the losers. It was the black teacher or principal who lost his job when desegregation occurred; it was the black school that was closed when a county desegregated its schools; it was the black teacher who was most frequently victimized by laws and ordinances designed to prevent him from exercising his professional rights and privileges.

The experiences of black males in the world of work and the society of ideas have been characterized by prejudice, failure and, in many cases, resignation. Of the 8.8 million black men who are of working age, more than 4 million are "discouraged workers"; that is, they no longer have any hope that they will find suitable employment and have dropped out of the labor force. Of the 26,000 inmates in Florida's prisons, over 46% are black males; yet black males constitute only 6.5% of Florida's population as a whole (Wainwright, 1984).

The PEPC report (*op. cit.*) aptly describes the crisis Florida faces when it views the condition of black male academic attainment and progress:

Florida is at a critical juncture in its efforts to increase and to enhance the participation of minority and disadvantaged students in postsecondary education, and the stakes are high. [Quality]. . . education will be required for the vast majority to function in a society increasingly based in information, technology and, most of all, on the ability to learn new ideas and skills. [Many]. . . racial and ethnic groups of [Florida's] population [however] are disadvantaged with respect to the preparation and motivation to participate in education after high school.

A good education is viewed as the primary route to economic stability for American families, however, the black male is not obtaining this foundation and as a result is employed in lower-paying occupational categories. The high number of unemployed black men and its concomitant problem produce instability in the home as well as impose tremendous social costs on the entire nation.

Communication media are yet another factor working against productive experiences for black males. These present very few positive images of the black male, but many negative images. Mass media, a major influence in the educational process, contribute to the development of low self-concepts in black males — particularly for low academic achievers. School publications, textbooks, and teaching materials also reflect an under-representation of and an insensitivity to blacks.