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Project Gentlemen on the Move: A Model for Developing and Nurturing Academic and Social Excellence in African American Male Youth

A Book Proposal

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Preface

For more than 30 years, the dilemmas of African American adolescent males have been the focus of research studies, books, panels, community forums, and even entire conferences. In these discussions and numerous publications, scholars and practitioners reviewed the plight of African American males and offered suggestions for how to help them maximize their academic, social, and economic potential. In the late 1990's and first part of the twenty-first century, the market saw such publications as: Nathan McCall's *What's Going On* (1997), Ronald Mincy's *Nurturing Young Black Males* (1994), *Working with African American Males* (Davis, ed., 1999), *Educating African American Males: Voices from the Field* (Fashola, ed., 2005), and a collection of essays entitled *The State of Black America 2007: Portrait of the Black Male* (Jones, ed., 2007). These and other publications like them remind us of the potential that is lost each time another African American male experiences one of an array of negative outcomes. Consider the following:

- In 2005, African American men were 30% more likely to die from heart disease, as compared to non-Hispanic White men (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: The Office of Minority Health, 2009, <http://www.omhrc.gov/templates/browse.aspx?lvl=2&lvlID=51>).
- In 2004, African American men were 1.4 times as likely to have new cases of lung and prostate cancer, compared to non-Hispanic White men (U.S. Department

of Health and Human Services: The Office of Minority Health, 2009,

<http://www.omhrc.gov/templates/browse.aspx?lvl=2&lvlID=51>).

- African American men were twice as likely to have new cases of stomach cancer as non-Hispanic White men (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: The Office of Minority Health, 2009, <http://www.omhrc.gov/templates/browse.aspx?lvl=2&lvlID=51>).
- African Americans men had lower 5-year cancer survival rates for lung and pancreatic cancer, compared to non-Hispanic White men (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: The Office of Minority Health, 2009, <http://www.omhrc.gov/templates/browse.aspx?lvl=2&lvlID=51>).
- In 2005, African American men were 2.4 times as likely to die from prostate cancer, as compared to non-Hispanic White men (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: The Office of Minority Health, 2009, <http://www.omhrc.gov/templates/browse.aspx?lvl=2&lvlID=51>).
- In 2002, African American men were 2.1 times as likely to start treatment for end-stage renal disease related to diabetes, compared to non-Hispanic White men. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: The Office of Minority Health, 2009, <http://www.omhrc.gov/templates/browse.aspx?lvl=2&lvlID=51>)
- In 1997, African-American adolescents represented about 15% of the total U.S. adolescent population, but they represented 41% of juvenile delinquency cases involving detention and 52% of juvenile delinquency cases judicially waived to criminal court (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999).

- In 1998, 47% of homicide victims in the 15 to 19-year-old age group were African-American males. The high rate of violence-related mortality is consistent with self-reports of violent behavior by African-American male students (Paschall, Ringwalt, & Flewelling, 2003).
- In 1999, 44% of African-American male high school students reported that they had been in a physical fight in the past 12 months and 23% reported carrying a weapon (gun, knife, or club) at least once in the past 30 days (Paschall, Ringwalt, & Flewelling, 2003).

Because this is the reality for far too many African American men, researchers began to label them as an "endangered species" (Lee, 1992; Majors & Billson, 1992; Vooris, 1992).

To counter these negative outcomes, many herald education as a viable solution; however, it seems that institutional racism has become so entrenched within our educational system, that even here the typical educational experience for many adolescent African American males represents a challenge rather than an opportunity. The following facts demonstrate the disturbing reality for many adolescent African American males relative to their experience in our educational system:

- disparities in educational achievement between African American males and their White male counterparts, begins to begin to emerge as early as the fourth grade (Duncan, 1999; Jones, 2007; National Urban League, 2007).
- In 2001, only 42.8 percent of African-American males graduated from high school, compared to 70.8 percent for their white counterparts (Jones, 2007; National Urban League (2007).

- fewer than 8% of young African American men have graduated from college compared to 17% of Whites and 35% of Asians (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004)

Research investigating this loss of academic potential for adolescent African American males points to a combination of institutional racism, additional developmental tasks, and academic disidentification as possible root causes (Crawley & Freeman, 1993; Steele, 1997; Thernstrom and Thernstrom, 2003). While adolescent African American males may not have control over institutional racism, they will need to learn how to counter its negative impact on their educational experience; ironically, it becomes difficult for them to do this because of the additional development tasks (e.g.,) resulting from institutional racism. These additional tasks include the development of a healthy racial identity and self-concept in spite of negative messages from social inconsistencies (Crawley & Freeman, 1993). If the additional developmental tasks adolescent African American males must work through to produce a healthy and productive identity are not achieved, then developmental and educational gaps begin to emerge and work against this population. The resulting academic and social struggles they experience as part of their educational environment can easily result in what some researchers (Steele, 1992; 1997) refer to as academic disidentification. Steele (1992; 1997) suggests that the cumulative effect of consistent negative learning experiences could eventually result in adolescent African American males disengaging from the educational process and refers to this as academic disidentification. Counseling professionals and others wanting to improve the educational experience for adolescent African American males must understand the complexity of the problem and the need for a solution that is both developmental and comprehensive in its design and has building positive relationships at

its core. An academic and social enrichment program built “from the ground up” and specifically designed for adolescent African American males could represent a viable solution for changing the trajectory for these at-risk young men.

As an African American male entering the counseling profession over 25 years ago, I had to live with the negative statistics associated with being young, Black, and male on a daily basis; they were staring back at me from faces in the hallways of a predominantly Black high school or in reports sitting on top of my desk. During my fifth year as a high school counselor, I was so frustrated with the negative statistics and the negative talk surrounding adolescent African American males that I decided to elevate my talk to action. What began as a series of focus groups during “school club meetings” twenty years ago has evolved into an award-winning developmental and comprehensive enrichment program for adolescent African American males that seeks to develop and nurture the academic and social potential for its participants.

The purpose of this book is to provide the reader with an understanding of why such enrichment programs are still needed today, what is required to begin such a program, and what it will take to sustain a successful program geared specifically to the needs of adolescent African American males. Based on the authors’ personal experiences with implementing an enrichment program, this particular book will review the promises and pitfalls of working with adolescent African American males through the current model, Gentlemen on the Move (GOTM). GOTM is one of three programs that fall under the auspices of a larger project entitled Empowered Youth Programs (EYP).

Coverage

This book will be divided into three parts. Part I, "Understanding the Problem," will consist of two chapters providing an overview of the educational reality for adolescent African American males as well as the beliefs and assumptions necessary to build positive relationships with this population. Part II, "Getting Started," will review staff training, program components, necessary ingredients for maintaining a successful program, and lessons learned in four chapters. Part III, "Staying in the Game," will provide the reader with information concerning evaluation, ways to replicate the program for other populations, and potential funding sources in the final three chapters.