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Strengthening United States National Security Through Education in the African American Community

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a brief overview of the evolution and challenges pertaining to education in the African American community. It also explains the reason why improving education in the community is important for strengthening long term U.S. national security. A wide range of ideas, techniques, and methodologies for improving the quality of education are reviewed and a list of suggestions the Department of Defense can pursue in improving the quality of education in the community are also listed in the conclusion.

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DISCLAIMER

INTRODUCTION

Obtaining a good education has always been an important objective to African Americans. Education has been one of the primary avenues that has enabled African Americans to gain access to mainstream America and become more productive in wider society. This relationship between education, social progress, and productivity has in essence been a mobilizing process leading to numerous accomplishments by members of the African American community. This process is revealed in the backgrounds of former slaves such as Dr. James Derham, who became one of America's foremost specialists in throat disorders (Green, 8); Henry Ossian Flipper, a West Point Graduate, who became an engineer and special agent in the Department of Justice and assistant to the Secretary of the Interior (Green, 10); and in successive generations of African Americans through today, who continue to make progress as productive members in society. It is also important to realize that the educational achievement and subsequent accomplishments made by African Americans have also been achievements and accomplishments made towards the productivity and national growth of America.

The purpose of this paper is to delineate a strategy for improving the quality of education in the African American community. It will review the evolution of education in the community, the circumstances affecting success in educational achievement, the

importance of education to United States national security, and a wide range of solutions for addressing the most critical education problems.

EVOLUTION OF EDUCATION IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Getting an education has sometimes been illegal for African Americans. When Africans were first brought to America as slaves, it was illegal for them to acquire an education or society to offer one. Racism and oppression from white American society dominated attitudes towards the slaves and manual labor duties requiring the lowest level of skills were what was sought from the slaves. As a group, the African slaves were not accepted as members in society and maximizing their human potential for mobilization throughout society was not a national objective. Although this was the case, some slaves were able to learn skills and gain an expertise that improved their productive potential in society.

With the end of slavery, the new African American community was reluctantly accepted in society. Maximizing their potential as a valuable human resource towards the productivity of America was still not a national objective. The resources that were available to the community for acquiring an education were limited and conditions were still difficult. During this phase in America's educational history, Jim Crow laws were also put in place that

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established a segregated societal structure based on race. Under these laws the African American community didn't have access to the better educational resources and facilities in society. Although education in the community took place under these circumstances, the fact that education was now available, enabled a larger segment of the community to acquire added skills and knowledge. This educational opportunity enabled more African Americans to increase their productivity, mobilize further into society, and contribute more towards the national growth of America. The was clearly demonstrated by the experiences of the 99th Pursuit Squadron (Tuskegee Airman) who in the 1940s, received basic military training, flight training, and advanced military training in the U.S. Army Air Forces. The squadron went on to contribute in the World War II effort and established one of the best flying records during the war.

In 1954, Jim Crow school segregation laws were abolished as a result of the Brown versus Board of Education law suit. This landmark decision enabled a larger number of African Americans to gain access to better resources, improve in education, expand access in society, and continue making contributions towards the productivity of America. Although many members of the African American community have been able to make tremendous advances in their educational conditions and achievement since the arrival of their first ancestors, the current state of education in the community is still in need of much improvement. Today the

community on a whole is faced with a wide variety of conditions throughout the educational system that limit educational achievement and productivity by many in the community. The problems are dispersed throughout the educational system, from the earliest levels though college and can be attributed in varying degrees to all involved in the process. Overt racism and discrimination are no longer the predominant issues facing African Americans, although subtle forms of these impediments are still widely reflected in the educational process. Parents, educators of all racial backgrounds, students, community leaders, and society at large are also collectively responsible for the state of education in the community.

Decades of societal neglect, compounded with conditions associated with poverty, inadequate resources, contemporary attitudes, insufficient health care, and limited opportunities are some of the problems that compete with educational achievement in the community. The overall result is that the community is faced with an educational framework where too few are able to succeed in realizing their potential and ultimately give the most towards the national growth and productivity of America. Dr. Margaret Simmons, Director of Research at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies cited the following conditions as being some of the primary impediments to educational success within the African American community.

- Lack of preschool education for young children prior to entering primary school

- Poor teacher attitudes toward students that do not encourage educational achievement

- Inadequate school treatment of the forth grade age group that responds to the group's adolescent behavior characteristics

- Lack of stability in the educational structure for Junior High school students. Students are assigned too many teachers who are not able to provide an anchor or enough stability for the students.

- Quality of teachers need to be improved

- Inadequate support structure (community based groups, mentors, counselors, tutors, parental involvement)

- Lack of educational incentives and objectives for the students (jobs, opportunities)

- Lack of financial resources for the college level students

NATIONAL SECURITY

Improving education in the African American community is important for our country's long term national security. The world is changing. Global economic competition between nations now dominates the world struggle and is a primary determinant of our country's posture, prosperity, and security. In the past, when military strength dominated the world struggle, we were able to endure, prosper, and remain secure for a number of reasons.

- Major military conflicts took place in other countries that damaged their human resource base and infrastructure, while America's domestic environment could continue to grow.

- Threats to our national security were easily defined for the American public, and national cohesion could be developed for retaliation against a specific well defined enemy.

- We had the productive industrial capability to produce a strong military force capable of defeating the enemy and alleviating the threats to our security.

The emergence of competitive economies in other countries is now the threat that jeopardizes our national security. While we invested heavily into our military strength during the cold war

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against the Soviets, countries such as Japan and Germany were free of extensive military expenditures and invested heavily in human capital and infrastructure. We can see visible results of this trend by our dwindling shares of the world market within the automobile industry, computer industry and other high technology areas. We are now behind the curve on the things we need to do as a country to remain economically competitive in the long term and we can't afford to dismiss the productive potential of the entire African American community; nor continue bearing the cost of non-productive cycles of performance and achieve our countrys strongest competitive posture in the global economic environment.

Richard J. Murane and Frank Levy identified four problems that demonstrate American students on a whole are poorly prepared for productive work in the community (189).

- high number of high school dropouts

- poor student transitions from school to work

- inadequate reading skills

- lack of mathematics and science skills

These problems directly affect our overall economic strength and level of productivity, which is largely dependent on the quality of

educational system for preparing our work force. The educational system in America needs to set the students up for success in the work place. The alternative to not establishing an educational system that provides an avenue for success is to allow for the development of non-productive members in society.

THE COST OF DOING NOTHING

The cost of doing nothing to improve education in the African American community will have a long term social-economic cost to society that will continue to weaken our competitive edge and jeopardize long term national security. The social cost will continue to be realized by ongoing crime in society, public disturbances, poverty, and a reduction in the likelihood for strong national cohesion as more people become disenfranchised from main stream America. The economic liability will continue with our funding for increasing cost for criminal justice and welfare programs that result from the conditions of those who are not apart of wider society.

EDUCATION SOLUTIONS

National Strategy Proposal: Education 2000

Public awareness on the need for improvements in our educational system were recently heightened by Former President George Bush

with his proposal of America 2000. The America 2000 proposal recognized a broad range of national level conditions in need of attention and proposed six national goals aimed at improving the education status in America (61-65).

Goal #1, Readiness for school: By the year 2000, all children will start school ready to learn.

Goal #2, High School Completion: By the year 2000, the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.

Goal #3, Student Achievement and Citizenship: American students will leave grades four, eight, and twelve having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography, and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy.

Goal #4, Science and Mathematics: Students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement.

Goal #5, Adult Literacy and Longlife Learning: Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to complete in the global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Goal 6: Safe, Disciplined, and Drug-free Schools: Every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.

Although these goals are consistent with major improvements that need to be made in the African American community, some education professionals have questioned the rationale and methods proposed for educational improvement. In her article, "America 2000 and the National Testing Program: Implications for African American Children and Youth," Sylvia T. Johnson points out that the fundamental weakness in the plan is that it proposes to reform education using student assessments as the major tool. In addition to making a clear distinction between measuring and improving education, she also raises the issue that success of the plan is heavily dependent on involvement and funding by corporations which may ignore the needs of our most troubled school systems. Another issue that the America 2000 proposal doesn't address is how multi-cultural education will be incorporated with the uniformity in curriculum that would be furthered by the national assessment system.

In her article, Ms. Johnson outlines a strategy proposal for the 21st Century, specifically aimed at meeting the America 2000 goals and improving education in the African American community.

(1) concurrent incentives to expand exemplary programs in existing schools, not just in new American Schools

(2) early intervention programs designed to prepare all children in America to start school ready to learn

(3) a plan to reform urban education in the 535-plus neediest schools of the present, using strong schools as models and pairing them with needy schools

(4) a national plan to ensure high-quality teachers from diverse backgrounds for all children, with broader view of certification that requires competence pedagogy, subject matter, and cultural knowledge and sensitivity

(5) better child health, nutrition, and family support programs, in and outside of schools, to eliminate the ma..y problems that impede children's readiness for school

(6) a new entitlement program ensuring every American the opportunity to become literate

(7) the same level of financial commitment and enlistment of public will mustered for military initiatives such as Operation Desert Storm, and the redirection of defense funds to meet pressing educational needs

(8)   clear recognition of the value of acknowledging and using
      diversity to motivate students and to build instructional
      and assessment experiences for them.

"What we do know about educational improvement is that additional
resources combined with effective leadership, efforts aimed at
building a sense of control and high expectations among faculty and
students, and heightened parent and commun   involvement
constitute the essential mix that increases th ikelihood of
successful school achievement" (Johnson, 500).

Schools that Work

Dr. J. Jerome Harris, Superintendent of the Atlanta Public School
System mentions in his Article "Strategies for Success", that there
are many African Americans that have come from backgrounds of
poverty and single-parent families and have succeeded (134). He
goes on to explain that it is not possible for educators to
determine which students will or will not succeed; therefore it is
necessary to set up an educational system designed to educate all
children as if they all could succeed. He asserts that in America,
a fundamental problem is that there hasn't been nor is there a
strong interest or commitment to educate African Americans. Mr.
Harris does however identify the following characteristics that are
inherent in effective schools that do work.

- strong academic leadership by principals that know the curriculum, and ensure that good instruction is the main goal

- a safe, orderly learning environment

- high expectations among principals, teachers, and students

- a monitoring system to gauge the performance of students, teachers, and the school

- an emphasis on "the basics", (reading and math)

Motivating Students: Grades 1-12

In his article "Educating and Motivating African American Males to Succeed," Antoine M. Garibaldi summarized the findings and recommendations made by a task force he chaired which studied the educational status of African American males in the New Orleans public School system. He also noted that their findings were consistent with the results of similar studies conducted in Prince Georges County, Maryland, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The study revealed that although some of the African American male students were able to do well in school, a large group of them were highly represented in almost all categories of academic failure (4-5).

- non-promotions

- suspensions

- expulsions

- dropouts

The task force also recognized similar conditions occurring among the African American females in the school system, although the scope of the problem was not as large. A statistical finding that highlights the scope of the problem was that 800 of the 1,470 non-promotions among first graders and more than 1,600 of the 2,800 non-promotions in the Junior High Schools were African American males. The academic deficiencies among the students tended to be reinforced by negative peer pressure from other students and low student expectations by 60% of the teachers. Both of these conditions discouraged academic achievement and perpetuated the failing performances.

Mr. Garibaldi also stated that systematic solutions are needed to address the type of problems found by the task force and emphasized that more has to be done by parents, communities, the media, and educators in order to encourage the students toward academic success (7-8). His task force also developed more than fifty recommendations for teachers, students, parents, the general

public, and the business community aimed at improving education for the African American male students. Listed below are some the principle recommendations (9-10).

- teach the students values, etiquette, morality, and lessons that counteract negative peer pressure

- encourage students to participate in extracurricular activities that relate to academics and leadership

- provide recognition, and tangible rewards (leather jackets, sweaters, etc.) and other incentives to those who perform well academically

- bring African American college students into the school system as role models and mentors (tutors, aides, speakers, and assistants for extracurricular activities)

- seek volunteers from the media, business, religious, and public service community to come as tutors, counselors, speakers and resource persons

- encourage students in the earliest grades to pursue college or post-secondary education

- increase the number of African American males elementary

teachers and counselors in the school system to reinforce
positive peer pressure toward the students

- promote the idea among businesses to provide rewards and
  incentives to the children of their employees who maintain
  above average grades, good school attendance and participate
  in extra curricular activities. This encourages both students
  and parents to get involved in pushing for academic success.

- encourage businesses to release or allow compensatory time for
  employees to attend their children's school for meetings and
  teacher conferences.

- get teachers to show practical relationships between
  coursework and a persons adult years (budgeting concepts in
  math classes, business and job related communications in
  English classes)

Suburban Schools

Academic improvements have been made in some suburban schools where
administrators have developed initiatives to address the
educational deficiencies of minority students (Levine and Eubanks,
193-194). Some recommendations are:

- collect and publish achievement data that shows the nature and

extent of the problems and then focus attention and resources on solving them.

- establish effective school projects and initiatives that produce demonstrated results in academic improvement

- give teachers adequate development time, manageable class sizes, and appropriate resources to bring about the improvements

- use instructional methods that improve student performance in comprehension and other higher order skills

- curtail the use of ditto sheets, workbooks and other instruction that places to much of an emphasis on low level mechanical skills

- ensure good communication occurs between teachers and students and the students are receiving appropriate assistance and guidance

Television as an Educational Tool

Television has also been recognized as a major element in the educational equation for African American children and adolescents.

It is one of the most common items found in even the poorest of household and has the potential to have either a positive or negative influence on academic achievement. Researchers have found that many school aged children spend more time watching television than they do engaging in formal education. This exposure to television has a socializing affect that establishes role models, shapes attitudes, beliefs and behavior (Stroman, 314).

- Negative Influences of Television

  -- television's potential to incite violence, aggressive, antisocial behavior

  -- television advertising can promote smoking, drinking, poor dietary habits, unnecessary use of over-the-counter drugs

  -- portrayal of minorities in negative stereotypes

  -- televisions potential to lower the self concept among minorities and minimize their importance by excluding their representation in programming

  -- displaces time for reading and homework

- Positive Influences of Television

-- can facilitate development of academic and cognitive
   skills

-- can increase the likelihood of socially desirable behavior
   and cooperative behavior such as helping and sharing

-- may provide knowledge about the world that is not
   available in their immediate environment

- Television as Educator (complement to formal schooling)

  -- Sesame street (letters and numbers recognition)

  -- The Electric Company (elementary reading skills)

  -- 3-2-1 Contact: designed to stimulate 8-12 year old
     children's interest in math and science

  -- Mister Rogers Neighborhood (social lessons)

  -- Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids (social lessons)

In order to promote academic achievement among African American
students and use television as a tool for improving education, Mr.
Stroman recommends direct intervention by parents, and expanding

support by educators and administrators.   He suggests the
following:

- parents control the amount of time allowed for viewing

- parents limit the types of programming allowed to be viewed;
  discourage viewing of programs that present inappropriate
  lessons

- parents watch television with their children and point out
  applicable lessons to everyday occurrences

- pressure institutions and television networks for more
  positive programming by contacting national regulatory
  agencies such as the Federal Communications Commission and
  Federal Trade Commission

- give support to groups such as Action for Children's
  Television and National Coalition on Television Violence that
  advocate media reform

- encourage students to watch programs that provide useful
  information, provide educational commentaries on programs
  viewed in school, develop learning exercises on assigned
  television programs

- **educators and administrators establish training for critical viewing in the school curriculum**

EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

Studies have been conducted by many researchers on the characteristics associated with unusually effective school programs that are capable of producing high levels of academic achievement among the students. Although the criteria seems to be straightforward, principals who only incorporate effective school criteria into their programs can still fall short of meeting the specific needs of poor urban students (Dantley, 585). This is because the "Effective School" movement does not take into account individual values, political circumstances and cultural backgrounds. Mr. Dantly proposes a critical leadership approach that encourages the students to evaluate their present conditions, take a critical look at the social forces that perpetuate their conditions, and proceed to develop remedies to the problems (585-595)

CONCLUSION

Determining what solutions are required to bring about real educational improvements in the African American community is not

a difficult task difficult. We know what does and does not work. Throughout this paper, I presented a widespread summary of ideas, techniques, and methods that are capable of bringing about real improvements in education. The underlying themes that seem to be inherent in all of the proposals are as follows.

- good leadership

- clear set of goals and objectives

- commitment towards improvement by all involved in the process

- availability of adequate resources

- adequate preparation for subsequent educational levels

- educational incentives

As our focus for long term U.S. national security broadens to combat the threats resulting from economic competition from abroad, the opportunity and necessity for improving education in the African American community increases. Not only do we have to maintain a superior military strength, we must also maintain the strongest global economic posture in order to remain secure. This means we must strive for increased efficiencies and productivity

throughout all areas of American society.

A Role for the Department of Defense (DOD)

Of all the American institutions, DOD is one of the best suited for bringing about real improvements in education within the African American community. This is true because the department has not only demonstrated that improving education in the community increases productivity, strengthens national security, and facilitates mobilization; the department also offers a broad range of incentives for achieving a good education and entering military service.

- a rewarding career

- acquiring valuable skills and continued education

- high self-esteem

- an avenue for mobilization in wider society

The department also stands to be one of the leading beneficiaries of educational improvements within the community. As the size of the military force decreases from it's previous levels and competition in society for the best and brightest people increases, it is important that the human resource pool for military service

be as large as possible and highly qualified.

There are a wide range of initiatives that the department can do to help improve education in the community.

- expand ROTC programs in public school systems

- conduct presentations in school systems on the qualifications needed for entering military service, military lifestyles, type of occupations, and rewards

- support school field trips to military facilities and installations

- encourage military volunteers to participate in community development projects and tutoring

- increase public awareness on the contributions African Americans and other minorities have given in defense of America and national security.

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