The Black Male and the United States Economy

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the current status of black males in the United States economy and emphasizes several positive aspects of the changing status of black males over time. While we acknowledge that the social and economic conditions of black males in the United States are troubling in many respects, our objective is to highlight the progress and achievements of black males. Most research on black males focuses solely on the problems and rarely highlights the successes and accomplishments. However, little attention has been paid to the achievements in education, the professional successes, and the positive community and family involvement of black males in the United States.

We consider black male accomplishments in three separate but related contexts. First, a significant number of black males have received a bachelor’s degree or postgraduate degree in recent decades. Second, black males have made inroads to professional occupations in increasing numbers. Finally, a significant number of black males are supporting themselves and their families. Although many barriers make it difficult for black males to take advantage of economic opportunities in this country, there are still a number of black males who are taking the steps necessary to achieve economic success. As authors of this paper, we do not wish to diminish the efforts of scholars and journalists who examine the problems of black males. Rather, this paper focuses on the enormous progress black males have made in the U.S. economy and their many outstanding achievements. Similarly, by writing about black males, we do not mean to suggest that black females have not also made significant gains in and contributions to the U.S. economy. But our objective here is to call attention to and document some of the contributions black males have made and continue to make to the economy.
INTRODUCTION: THE CONTRADICTORY POSITION OF BLACK MALES IN THE UNITED STATES ECONOMY

If one had to choose a single word to describe the position of the black male in the United States economy, a fitting word would be “contradictory.” Black males are in a precarious position in the labor market. Their unemployment rates are among the highest of any demographic group (Farley 1987, Schwartzman 1997, McElroy and Darity 1999). Their rates of participation in the paid labor force have declined during recent decades (Parsons 1980, Brown 1984, Juhn 1992). They earn less than their white male counterparts, (Carnoy 1994, Schmitz, Williams, and Gabriel 1994, Durden and Gaynor 1998), even when they have completed the same amount of education (McElroy and Darity 1999). As McElroy and Darity reported, in 1998, black males age 16 and over who were employed full-time earned an average of $468 per week, as compared with white males who earned an average of $615 per week (McElroy and Darity 1999). In relative terms, then, black males employed full-time earned 76 cents for every dollar that white males earned. Despite evidence of persistent inequality in the labor market, black males still continue to make progress in higher education, professional and managerial occupations, and entrepreneurial ventures.

By focusing solely on the difficulties facing black males in the economy, one runs the risk of overlooking the many positive advances made by black males. Some of the gains made by black males have been documented by different research efforts. For instance, economists have noted that the earnings gap between black and white males has reduced over time. They often point to black males’ rising educational attainment as the central factor that explains why the
earnings gap between black and white males narrowed between 1940 and 1980 (Smith and Welch 1986). While it is certainly important to document the changes over time in income disparities between black and white males, it is also essential to examine some of the other positive dimensions of the status of black males in the economy.

This paper examines the current status of black males in the United States economy and emphasizes several positive aspects of their changing status over time. While we acknowledge that the social and economic conditions of black males in the United States are troubling in many respects, our objective is to highlight the achievements of black males. Much of the research on black males focuses solely on the problems and rarely highlights the successes and accomplishments. The research discusses high crime rates, high incarceration rates, high unemployment rates, and low educational attainment among black males. However, less attention has been paid to the achievements in education, the professional successes, and the positive community and family involvement of black males in the United States.

We consider black male accomplishments in three separate but related contexts. First, a significant number of Black males have received a Bachelor’s degree or higher in recent decades. Second, black males have made inroads in professional occupations in increasing numbers. Finally, a significant number of black males are supporting themselves and their families. Although many barriers make it difficult for black males to take advantage of economic opportunities in this country, there are still a number of black males who are taking the steps
necessary to achieve economic success. As authors of this paper, we do not wish to diminish the efforts of scholars and journalists who examine the problems of black males. Rather, this paper focuses on the enormous progress black males have made in the economy and their outstanding achievements.

BLACK MALES AND EDUCATION

While there are numerous determinants of economic success, few single factors have the impact that educational attainment does. Level of educational attainment is both a significant determinant of economic success and a major component of human capital development. We can think of human capital as the productive capacities and abilities developed within a person. Labor economists generally agree that high levels of educational attainment contribute to higher earnings. With higher levels of educational attainment, one has greater access to jobs with higher pay, better benefits, greater security, better working conditions, and more opportunities for advancement (Doeringer and Piore 1971).

Black Male Advancement in Educational Attainment

Black males have made tremendous strides in attaining higher levels of education. As a result, they have increased their potential for greater access to jobs. Let us examine the impacts of black males in education over the last thirty years and their steady improvement in earnings potential.

During the period from 1969 to the present, the average level of educational attainment for adult black males (age 25 and over) has increased markedly from ninth grade to high school graduate. In 1969, the median years of schooling completed for black males age 25 and over was 9.6 years, roughly a

Another indicator of black males’ rising educational attainment is the percentage of black males who have completed high school and college. Both high school and college completion rates of black males have notably increased. We review the evidence on high school completion rates first.

**High School Completion Rates of Black Males**

In 1964, 24% of black males age 25 and over had completed high school. By 1998, the completion figure had tripled to 75%, as shown in the figure below (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1998a).
This remarkable progress in the black male high school completion rate over the past 24 years is noteworthy for at least two reasons. First, the sheer magnitude of the increase merits mention, that is, a tripling in the percentage of adult black males who had completed high school. Second, this dramatic increase in high school completion rates occurred over a relatively short period of time.

The amount of education black males have completed impacts their earnings potential and their ability to support themselves and other persons who are dependent on them financially. The steady increase over time in the percentage of black males who have completed a high school education deserves special mention. A high school diploma has become the minimum level of educational attainment required for access to jobs that pay a “living wage,” that is, enough to support oneself and one’s family.

The employment prospects for males (of all races) with less than a high school diploma have deteriorated remarkably in recent decades, in part because the demands of the labor market have changed so drastically. The United States economy has transformed itself from a primarily goods-producing to a primarily service-producing economy. One of the most profound effects of this shift has been a sizeable reduction in the number of jobs in the economy for lower-skilled workers as compared with previous decades.

Furthermore, in the 1960s, and to a lesser extent, in the 1970s, there were greater opportunities for a male high school dropout (of any race) to earn enough to support himself and his family as compared with today. In today’s labor market, however, high school dropouts and others at the lower end of the
educational attainment spectrum face increasingly bleak prospects for earning a living wage. Clearly, the level of formal education one attains has a major effect on employment prospects and earnings potential.

In general, among workers in the U.S. labor market, there is a financial payoff in continuing one’s education to high school completion and beyond. At each higher level of education, employed black males earn more on average. In 1997, black males age 25 and over who had completed high school but no further schooling earned $22,174 per year on average.iii Black male high school graduates earned $6,593 more (or 42% more) than black males who had completed 9th to 11th grade (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1998b).

High school graduates with no further formal schooling are the single largest educational category of black males age 25 and over and account for 37% of all black males age 25 and over. A smaller percentage of black males (16%) are high school dropouts (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1998b), which means that adult black males who have completed high school outnumber black males who have not completed high school by more than 2 to 1. Clearly, more black males are completing their high school education thereby increasing their earnings potential.

**Degree Completion among Black Males**

What about college enrollment and completion of degrees at the higher education levels among black males? Let us take a moment to summarize what we know about degree completion among black males. Are black males making progress on this front? Yes, an increasing number of black males are enrolling in
and completing college. The percentage of black males age 25 and over who have completed college has more than tripled since the mid-1960s (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992).

While the relative increase in college completion rates of black males highly parallels the relative increase in high school completion rates of black males, the percentage of black males who complete college is far below the percentage who complete high school (13.9% in 1998 for college completion and 75% in 1998 for high school completion). In 1964, 4.5% of black men age 25 and over had completed four years or more of college (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992). By 1998, 13.9% of black men had completed this level of education (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1998b).

Also, there has been a significant increase in the number of black men receiving degrees over the past 30 years. As noted in a 1998 report by the Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute, “African Americans have made steady progress in gaining access to and achieving success in higher education.” (Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute 1999). Although the statement we quote here refers to black females as well as to black males, the Patterson Institute report serves to demonstrate the significant strides black males are making in higher education.

**The Impact of Educational Attainment on the Earnings of Black Males**

Clearly, not everyone who enrolls in college actually completes a degree. However, even if a black male enrolls in college and never graduates, he can
expect to earn more after having completed some college than if he had not completed any college after receiving his high school diploma.

In 1997, black males ages 25 and over who had completed some college but no degree earned $26,635 per year on average (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1998b). They earned $4,461 more per year than their fellow black male high school graduates ($22,174) who had not attended college at all. In percentage terms, then, those who had attended some college earned 20% more than those who had not attended any college.

From 1989 to 1996, there was a noticeable increase in the number of black males completing higher educational degrees. The number of black males receiving Bachelor’s, Master’s, professional, and doctorate degrees has increased over the last ten years, with the largest increase occurring in the number of black males who received their Bachelor’s degrees (from 22,370 in 1989 to 32,852 in 1996) (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics 1998).

In 1997, black males with a Bachelor’s degree earned $31,631, while black males with a high school diploma earned $22,174, a differential of 43% (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1998b). Black males who earn Bachelor’s degrees clearly increase their earnings potential relative to black male high school graduates. Today, many black males now have a greater probability of being in a higher income bracket and, thereby enhancing their ability to provide financially for themselves and their families.
Degree completions are a clear indicator of the progress black males have made in higher education in the United States. The number of black males completing bachelor’s and graduate degrees (Master’s and professional degrees) has increased markedly during recent decades. More black males are graduating with professional degrees and becoming lawyers, doctors, and engineers than in past decades.

BLACK MALES, PROFESSIONAL OCCUPATIONS, AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Black males have made notable inroads into the professional occupations. The occupational upgrading of black males in the U.S. labor market during recent decades has been nothing short of dramatic. Black males have moved out of agricultural and private household occupations into professional and managerial occupations in increasing numbers. This occupational change resulted in more black males assuming positions of leadership and authority in the last 20 years. Black males occupy jobs ranging from high-level positions in the armed forces to the federal government to private industry. Other black males have ventured into the entrepreneurial arena, and many have found economic success and other rewards there.

Black Male Leadership in the Public Sector

In the public sector, increasing numbers of black males received appointments to some of the top positions in government. Some of these men include Rodney Slater, Secretary of Transportation; Colin Powell, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Andrew Young, former U.S. Ambassador
to the United Nations; and Roger W. Ferguson, Jr., Vice-Chairman and Governor of the U.S. Federal Reserve.

Rodney Slater’s appointment to the Transportation cabinet position in 1997 by President Clinton is an example of the high achievement black males have made in the public sector. The Department of Transportation under Slater’s guidance has been largely responsible for unprecedented improvements in the transportation infrastructure of America over the last two years (U.S. Department of Transportation, Office of Public Affairs 1999).

Colin Powell was named Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1989 under President George Bush, making him the most powerful military officer in the United States. He spearheaded Operation Desert Storm in 1992, where he commanded a successful mission of U.S. troops in the Persian Gulf. Since his retirement from the military, Powell has been actively led the President’s national volunteer program. Colin Powell’s efforts connect positively to the importance of black males in the family, a topic to which we turn in the next section.

Andrew Young had already had a long and distinguished career as a civil rights advocate before entering electoral politics during the 1970s. Young fought many civil rights battles beside Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. before he was elected mayor of the city of Atlanta. Mayor Andrew Young’s leadership helped usher in a period of economic and political advancement of many African Americans in the city of Atlanta. Young’s skill and diplomacy were not to go unnoticed. President Carter recognized Young’s enormous value and appointed him Ambassador to the United Nations where he served from 1977 to 1979.
Roger W. Ferguson, Jr. received the presidential appointment to the position of Governor of the U.S. Federal Reserve in 1997. In September 1999, Ferguson was confirmed by the U.S. Senate as Vice-Chairman of the Federal Reserve’s Board of Governors. The appointment of Ferguson to this position elevates him to the second most powerful position in the world’s premiere central banking system. Ferguson’s accomplishments at the Federal Reserve Bank are noteworthy, including his leadership in the Bank’s planning and preparations to address the Year 2000 computer problem (Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System 1999). He follows two other distinguished black men – Andrew Brimmer and Emmett Rice – who also served as Governors of the U.S. Federal Reserve.

Black Male Corporate Executives

In the private sector, several African American men are managing the affairs of major corporations and emerging as leaders in their respective fields. Reginald Lewis and Kenneth Chenault are excellent examples of the accomplishments African American men have made in the private sector.

Reginald Lewis is best known throughout the financing world as one of the most successful financiers during the late 1980s. Lewis’ success in the business world is attached to the leverage buyout deal that created TLC Beatrice, one of the nation’s largest black-owned companies. TLC Beatrice is one of the world’s largest food and beverage holding companies. Many blacks have realized success in the business world, but the success attained by Lewis clearly exemplified the growing opportunities available to other black business people.
The Lewis family maintained ownership of TLC Beatrice after Reginald Lewis’ death in 1993. The successful rise of Reginald Lewis is recounted in his co-authored autobiography, *Why Should White Guys Have All the Fun?* (Hays 1999).

Kenneth Chenault is the current Chief Operating Officer (COO) of American Express. Chenault holds the highest position of any black executive in a Fortune 500 Company. He has been designated to become the company’s next Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in 2001. Some of Chenault’s greatest abilities are his ingenuity, persuasiveness, and foresight. One of Chenault’s major accomplishments at American Express involved cutting $3 billion in operating costs. Under his leadership, American Express developed strategies to diversify current business operations (Whigham-Desir 1999).

Providing examples of black males who receive high accolades and some notoriety for their positions and responsibilities tends to overlook how other black males are making significant strides. Let us examine how more black males are impacting these positions.

In the 1950s and 1960s, fewer black men had the education and skills required to qualify for professional and managerial positions than is the case today. Even for black males with a degree during that time period, having a college degree did not necessarily ensure them access to these positions because of racial barriers. Some of the barriers for black men may still exist, but now they are not as severe as they were in the 1950s and 1960s.
Today, increasing numbers of black males are afforded access to greater opportunities with the attainment of higher levels of education. As mentioned earlier, there are significantly more black males receiving higher education, thereby enabling them to qualify for professional and managerial positions in existing organizations. As an alternative, other black males with similar levels of education choose the entrepreneurial path. Regardless of the path chosen, more black males are unquestionably carving out a niche in the United States economy.

**Black Male Entrepreneurs**

Black males are experiencing increasing success in their entrepreneurial quests. There are more financially successful black male entrepreneurs than 20 years ago. Examples include Earl G. Graves, John H. Johnson, Russell Simmons, and Percy Miller (better known as Master P). Each of these men provides a better understanding of the impacts black male entrepreneurs have in this economy.

A visionary entrepreneur, Earl G. Graves is publisher and CEO of *Black Enterprise* magazine. *Black Enterprise* is instrumental in publicizing the successes of black male executives. Graves has received numerous awards for his accomplishments in the business world. He provides leadership to the black community. Graves is very outspoken about the importance of blacks investing and supporting black businesses (Graves 1997). Graves’ accomplishments and ingenuity have allowed *Black Enterprise* to develop and maintain outstanding loyalty among its readership.
Another successful black male entrepreneur is John H. Johnson. He is the CEO of Johnson Publishing Company, which publishes *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines. Johnson started this company in 1942 with a $500 loan on his mother’s furniture. In the ensuing decades, Johnson Publishing Company grew into a multi-million dollar business (Johnson Publishing Company 1999). Johnson has established himself as a leader in the publishing world and an eminently successful risk taker.

Russell Simmons used his ingenuity to start and develop a small record label into a major entertainment enterprise. While some observers questioned his judgment in developing a business around rap and hip-hop music, Simmons demonstrated that he possessed a keen business savvy. He understood the market. He has established himself as one of the premier promoters of rap and hip-hop entertainment and is credited with expanding this genre of music into popular culture (Jeff Stark 1999).

Finally, Percy Miller, better known as Master P, is the youngest black male who has achieved the greatest financial success. He developed a unique understanding of how to produce and market music that originally started in an underground market but propelled quickly into popular culture. Miller exploited what is known as “gangsta rap” and used this success to explore other business ventures. As a result of his efforts and successful risks, Master P is now regarded by *Fortune* magazine as the 28th wealthiest man under 40 years old. Miller’s net worth is estimated at over $360 million, exceeding that of Michael Jordan (Borden and Koudsi 1999).
Black Males in the Professions

Now let us observe black males’ success in the professional and managerial occupations. In earlier decades, such positions were less open to black males than is the case today. Overt and less subtle forms of discrimination in the labor market ensured that the number of black males employed as professionals and managers remained small. The economic shift from goods-producing to service-producing industries impacts black males in terms of the different types of jobs they hold. This is evident when we consider the increase in the number of black males in professional occupations since 1960.

The number and percentage of black males in professional occupations has increased dramatically since 1960. In 1960, only 5% of the approximately 3.64 million black males in the labor force were professional, technical workers, managers, officers, or proprietors (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1963). Counted among these black males were physicians, dentists, clergyman, engineers, lawyers, and schoolteachers. By 1990, 12% of the approximately 4.67 million black males in the labor force were employed in managerial and professional specialty occupations (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993a). The percentage of black males in managerial and professional occupations has more than doubled in the last 30 years. This is a significant and admirable feat for black males.

Several professional specialty occupations have been particularly important for black males. Among these occupational categories are physicians and lawyers. Black males are entering professional fields in greater numbers than ever before. There still exists a need to continue with efforts that develop
and sustain black males in their pursuit of professional degrees. Nevertheless, there are currently many positive stories to discuss about the professional achievements of black males.

The number of black male physicians have increased significantly and contributed greatly to the advancement of medicine in numerous fields throughout this century. The number of black male physicians increased over the last 30 years. There are black male physicians who routinely make major contributions to the advancement of medicine. In 1960, there were approximately 4,216 black male physicians and surgeons in the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1963). By 1990, their numbers had grown to 13,707 physicians and surgeons (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993a). The number of black male physicians more than tripled over the last three decades.

Although the number of black male physicians is partly due to a population increase over time, the increase in black male physicians is still very positive and significant. The growing number of black male physicians reflects changes in opportunities available to black men in medicine over the last 30 years.

The legal profession provides yet another example of black males’ inroads into the professions. Over the past few decades, black males have been influential in various aspects of the legal profession, particularly in the area of civil rights. The late Thurgood Marshall played a pivotal role in the 1954 *Brown versus the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* case that mandated the end to segregation in public schools in the United States. He was later appointed U.S. Supreme Court Justice where he served until his retirement in 1991.
Today, black male lawyers have impacts in the courtroom as criminal lawyers, in popular culture as entertainment lawyers, and in the boardroom as corporate lawyers. There are more opportunities available for black male lawyers in the different fields than ever before.

While a variety of opportunities in the legal profession have opened up to black males, the representation of black males among lawyers and judges in the U.S. did not increase substantially between 1960 and 1990 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1963, 1993a). Nevertheless, the increase in the number of black male lawyers and judges is notable and significant.

In 1990, there were an estimated 15,542 black male lawyers and judges in the U.S., nearly 7 times the number as in 1960 (2,004). During the same 30-year period, the total number of judges and lawyers in the U.S. increased only threefold, one-half the rate of increase for black judges and lawyers (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1963, 1993a).

BLACK MALES AND THEIR FAMILIES

An important though often overlooked aspect of the role and position of black males in the economy is that there are important links among family formation, marriage, child rearing, community development, and economic status. Black males contribute to the functioning of the family at both the “micro” and “macro” levels. The contributions of black males to the family are important to the economy because their efforts build and strengthen opportunities for themselves and their families to succeed in the economy.
We first consider black males at the “micro” level, which is the role of the black male in family formation and functioning. In this light, we consider marital status, family structure, and the economic status of black families, particularly married-couple families and families headed by a black male with no spouse present. In addition, we consider the role of black males in families and communities at the “macro” level, that is, the building, fostering, and support of neighborhoods and communities. We begin with the “micro” level.

Black Family Households Headed by a Male with no Spouse Present

The growth in the number of families headed by a female with no spouse present in recent decades has received enormous attention (Ross and Sawhill 1975, Garfinkel and McLanahan 1986). Family households headed by women with no spouse present account for an increasingly large share of all black families, increasing from less than one third (28%) of all black family households in 1970 to nearly half (47%) of all family households in 1998 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993b, 1999). In numerical terms, the number of such black family households headed by women doubled during this period (from 1,358,000 in 1970 to 3,926,000 in 1998).

A fact that is much less well known is that the number of black family households headed by a male with no spouse present has also doubled since 1970. The Census Bureau estimated that in 1970 there were 181,000 families headed by a black male with no spouse present, or 4% of all black family households. By 1998, the number had increased to 562,000, or 7% of all black family households.
(U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993b, 1999). It would be misleading to point out
the rise in the number of black family households headed by a male with no
spouse present without placing this trend in perspective relative to the growth in
the number of black family households headed by a female with no spouse
present.

Certainly the number of black family households headed by a male with
no spouse present is on a scale much smaller than the number of black family
households headed by a woman with no spouse present. Nevertheless, the growth
in the number of black family households headed by a male with no spouse
present has also been tremendous.

The growth in the number of black family households headed by a male
with no spouse present must be taken into account when assessing the role of the
black male in the family and the resulting impacts on the economy. There are
numerous reports suggesting that black males are not being responsible family
men. The increase in the number of family households headed by a black male
with no spouse present is evidence of black males being responsible family men.

Indeed there is a restructuring of the nuclear or two-parent family, and
marriage rates among blacks have been on the decline in recent decades (CITE).
Nevertheless, there are positive impacts for black males who decide to marry.
Specifically, black males with higher education who marry increase the potential
of having a family with a higher income.
Marital Status, Educational Attainment, and Black Family Income

There is a connection between marital status and educational attainment among black males. More highly educated black males are more likely to be married than are black males with less education. In 1997, 56% of black male college graduates age 25 and over were married and living with their spouse, as compared with 45% of black male high school graduates (those who had completed high school but no further schooling) and 37% of black male high school dropouts (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1998b).

We are not suggesting that black men will be more likely to marry because they have higher education. However, the higher rates of marriage among black males with more education do carry implications for the economic status of black families. The logic is simple. Black males with more education are more likely to be in the paid labor force and less likely to be unemployed. As discussed earlier, black males with more education earn considerably more on average than black males with less education.

An educated black man in the labor force who is earning a high wage or salary will have a higher probability of getting married than someone who does not fit this criteria. By completing higher education, black males increase their chances of being employed as well as the chances of securing a position that pays a higher salary. College-educated black males who marry become part of a married-couple, which is the family type that has the highest incomes of all black families.
In 1997, the median annual income of black married-couple families was $45,372. The median income of black married-couple families with both husband and wife in the paid labor force ($51,702) is the highest of all black family types and also has the highest income relative to white families, or 88 cents to the dollar (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1999). Because there are more black males receiving higher education today than in past decades, black males are increasing the probability of getting married. Getting married, in turn, increases the probability of having a better level of financial and economic stability for black males and their families.

**Black Males and Families at the “Macro” Level**

Finally, we consider the role of black males in families and communities at the “macro” level. Here we adopt a view of “family” that extends beyond one’s immediate family, and even beyond the extended family. Strong and thriving family units produce strong and thriving communities. Likewise, strong communities result in more persons employed and earning a wage to better take care of themselves and their families. Many black males play vital roles in their neighborhoods and communities.

Black male leadership at the “macro” level takes the form of involvement in professional, community, and social organizations, churches, and public service. Some examples of black males that cover the broad spectrum of roles in the family at the macro level are the professional associations, the black fraternities, the Church, and the black males in politics.
In 1900, black dentists, comprised almost exclusively of black males, came together in Washington, D.C. to form the first professional association of black dentists, the Washington Society of Colored Dentists. “The concern for the low economic status of their clientele produced a certain cohesiveness among the black dentists.” (Kidd 1979, 68). This statement serves as a testament to the agenda of black male dentists that extended to the well being of the black community.

Because of segregation, through the 1960s and into the 1970s, black male dentists and other black male professionals primarily serviced the black community exclusively. Historically, black universities and colleges (Howard University and Meharry Medical College) have educated the majority of black dentists. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have a long history of providing the necessary education and training for many black male professionals.

One example of a community and social organization that provides support and empowerment to families and neighborhoods is 100 Black Men, Inc. This organization provides numerous activities and programs that serve over 60,000 young people. They are a constant presence in the community and have a long history of carrying a significant impact in the lives of young black males. Their efforts assist black males with rebuilding their lives and becoming a valuable asset to their neighborhood and to the economy (100 Black Men of America, Inc. 1998). The National African American Male Collaboration
deserves special mention because it is an umbrella organization devoted to a single common purpose, that of improving the status of black males.

Black fraternities existed since the turn of the century. There are five black fraternities – Omega Psi Phi, Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Phi Beta Sigma, and Iota Phi Theta. Each fraternity provides a strong support base for black males. Their purpose encompasses the principles of encouragement, empowerment, and service to each other and the community. With tens of thousands of black males actively involved in their respective fraternities, there are a plethora of programs that target volunteerism in the community and activities that empower youth, families, and neighborhoods.

An integral part of the family and neighborhoods are the churches and mosques. These religious organizations carry a long-standing tradition in the black family. Over the last two decades, many churches and mosques in black neighborhoods have expanded and provided services to more families. For instance, Ebenezer A.M.E. Church, pastored by Reverend Grainger Browning, relocated to Fort Washington, Maryland in 1983 with 13 members. Today, Ebenezer is serving over 10,000 members. They, like similar black churches that serve a large membership base, provide numerous services and programs to black families.

Black males assume many leadership roles in churches and mosques that serve black families. The involvement of black males in both churches and mosques serves to demonstrate the efforts made by black males to be involved in
families and the impact black males have in participating in activities that create sustainability and economic opportunities for families.

Another form of black male leadership is public service, which range from U.S. Secretary to Governor to Mayor. Black males hold positions of authority and responsibility at all levels of government: federal, state, and local. We already discussed earlier the leadership roles of black males at the federal level. There are also black males who assume leadership roles at the state level. Douglas Wilder, former Governor of Virginia, has governed at the state level. At the local level, among the major cities in the U.S. that currently have black male mayors are San Francisco, California; Atlanta, Georgia; Dallas, Texas; Baltimore, Maryland; Seattle, Washington; Cleveland, Ohio; Denver, Colorado; St. Louis, Missouri; and Washington, D.C.

In addition to the many black males who hold the position of mayor in these major cities, there are also a number of black males who serve their districts in the U.S. House of Representatives. The positions at the federal, state, and local levels where black males assume leadership and maintain high levels of responsibility are important to the family at the “micro” and “macro” levels and therefore to the economy. The black men in these positions are representing many families with their public service. Their focus involves addressing the conditions from a policy standpoint that will positively impact the families and create economic opportunities.

At both the micro and macro levels, black men have played and continue to play a vital role in the family. The oft-discussed perspective that black males
are not meeting their responsibilities does not completely hold true. As authors, we realize that more black males need to take responsibility for their families. However, we also recognize that there are a significant number and percentage of black males who are responsible and active in the family at both the micro and macro levels.

As discussed above, the increase in the number of black family households headed by a male with no spouse present more than doubled in the past 30 years. With higher education, black males are more likely to marry, which increases the potential of sustaining higher financial and economic security and stability for themselves and their families.

There are many black males who are actively involved in the family from a macro level with their volunteerism, mentoring, and leadership in family programs and activities. We have discussed only a select few. The efforts of many black males have produced and continue to produce successful impacts on the family, which create better economic opportunities for them. For both the micro and macro level of the family, black male involvement is notable and provides a context that demonstrates the increase and potential increase of black male involvement in the family and related impacts in the economy.

CONCLUSION

This article demonstrated how black males are making significant strides in the U.S. economy. Again, the article does not refute the reports about the conditions impacting black males, but as authors, we highlighted the progress and
accomplishments of black males in the economy. The positive accomplishments and impact of black males are often overlooked or neglected because of the myriad problems that confront them. We demonstrated that many black males, although faced with problems, are overcoming these obstacles and carving a piece of the U.S. economy for themselves.
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The averages reported in this section of the paper are median weekly earnings and are based on data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

In 1998, the total number of black males age 25 and over in the United States population was 8,578,000, and of those, 6,449,000 had completed a high school diploma or had received a GED (General Educational Development) equivalency credential.

Throughout this paper, we use the median when we report average earnings.

The Census Bureau distinguishes between a household and a family. “A household comprises all persons who occupy a housing unit, that is, a house, and apartment or other group of rooms, or a single room that constitutes ‘separate living quarters.’” A family is defined as “a group of two or more persons related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together in a household. Families headed by women with no spouse present used to be called “female-headed families.” “The householder is the first adult member listed on the questionnaire. The instructions call for listing the person (or one of the persons) in whose name the home is owned or rented. If a home is owned or rented jointly by a married couple, either the husband or the wife may be listed first. Prior to 1980, the husband was always considered the household head (householder) in married-couple households.” (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1998a).

In 1997, the median income of white married-couple families was $52,098.