

Sterling Allen Wilder

Sterling A. Wilder. The co-founder and Executive Director of the Jubilee Family Development Center has devoted his life to helping children and families become self-sufficient and reach higher levels of personal achievement. Mr. Wilder is a graduate of E.C. Glass High School. He received a B.S in Accounting from Virginia State University and a Masters of Education from Lynchburg College. He has done additional study at Harvard University's School of Business; Morehouse College, The Leadership Center and University of Virginia's Darden School of Business. He is a member of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. Mr. Wilder is serving or has served on the boards of numerous local organizations. He has represented Ward II on the Lynchburg School Board for 9 years and served as its Vice Chairman.

The Lost Boys

I am honored to be a participant in the program today. I am humbled to be in the presence of so many great men and women. Your collective accomplishments have helped to shape this nation and I salute you. When I first came to the meeting I was not sure what I was getting into. I was overwhelmed to be in presence of so many astounding leaders. I had to ask myself do I belong in such a great corium of men and women. During the first presentation I had the benefit of hearing a presentation by Michael Gillette his paper was on When KCl is put into solution and a slight current is added what precipitates form at the cathode and anode? After the presentation I knew that I was defiantly in the wrong group.

The Lost Boys

Several years ago I was reading a book by Jawanza Kunjufu, entitled, *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys*. In this book he talks about the Fourth Grade Failure Syndrome. I had been working with youth for several years and noticed that my most challenging questions came when youth who had done well in grades 1 through 3 but after the 4th grade they started to decline and I could not understand what was happening to my bright students. After reading chapter three the Fourth Grade Failure Syndrome so many things started to make sense.

In the study by Dr. Kunjufu he notes that each year one of his students indicates that he likes his teachers a little less each year. At some point the enthusiasm for learning is lost. In primary grades, blacks progress and thrive at the same rate as their white counterparts until the third grade syndrome. After the third grade the achievement rate of blacks began a downward spiral. The classroom environment was transformed from a socially interactive style to a competitive, individualistic, and minimally socially interactive style of learning.

The Fourth Grade Syndrome It is the poor transition boys make between the primary and intermediate division

A study was performed of 20 African American high school males who took the Iowa Reading Test. The study shows their performance and that of 20 students chosen at random. The graph shows how well the students performed over the past five years beginning at the third grade.

Reviewing the scores: fourteen decreased, four improved, and two remained constant. Only one child was able to improve his reading by five years or more during the same period. Two students dropped to 35 and 24, respectively.

In a study by Dr. Nancy Arnez she noted certain bias in I.Q Test and it was a major factor producing racial disproportion, the vulnerability of Black children to the labeling process persisted into subsequent classification stages. The study indicated that disproportionately more of the eligible Black children were actually recommended for placement into special classrooms, while disproportionately fewer eligible White children were recommended for such placement. A large percentage of the Black children in this study were found to be males.

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission data reveal that 83 percent of all elementary school teachers were female, while only 10.1 percent of this number were African American females. African American males constituted only 1.2 of the total 17 percent of elementary teachers who males. African American students can go through school and not see any African American male teacher, counselor or administrator.

	Conspiracy	Countering the Conspiracy
	Lack of African American Male Teachers	
	Curriculum	
	Teachers that are unconcerned	
	Decline in parental involvement An increase in peer pressure A decline in nurturance A decline in teacher expectations Understanding of Learning Styles Lack of male teachers	

Young African American males are walking through life like little lost boys waiting for someone to come and claim them at lost and found. Their inbred desire for kinship often leads them to hook up with the wrong influences. Gangs, peer pressure along with under developed reasoning skills lead to many missteps and pitfalls in their young lives. The Adult African American males must step up to the plate and be the leaders, mentors, fathers these desperate young males need and deserve. Even if they don't know they need this type of bonding and kinship to an older and wiser generation.

Some staggering data on African American male founded in the 2000 census shows that one of the most common characteristics exhibited by prison inmates is the lack of a high school diploma. A total of 75 percent of youths under the age of 18 who have been sentenced to adult prisons have not passed the tenth grade. An estimated 70 percent of the juvenile justice population suffers from learning disabilities and 33 percent read below the fourth grade level. Data from the Juvenile Justice Policy Institute states that there were almost a third more African American men in prison and jail than on college and university campuses at the end of the century. The data revealed that there were more than 791,600 African American men in jail and prison in 2000, while only 603,000 African American men were enrolled in institutions of higher learning. The number of African American males incarcerated each year increases, the number of African American male graduates from college is extremely low. Less than 40,000 African American males graduate from college each year.

The data is clear in showing a pattern regarding the future prospects for a African American male suspended or expelled from school. That young male child is likely to be retained in a grade, commit a crime, drop out of school, and end up incarcerated as a juvenile or adult. It is a shame, but the evidence is clear in documenting the systematic, oppressive and abysmal educational trends that plague young African American males.

THE ROLE OF THE MEN IN THE LIVES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

Over half of our nation children can look forward to spending part of their childhood without their fathers present. The statistics are even more griming for African American males- two-thirds of who are born out of wedlock.

It is believed that the absent father is directly connected to the problem of boys with guns. Some social scientist have made similar links between an absent dad and a child's possibly being a dropout, jobless, a drug addict, a suicide victim, mentally ill , and a target of child sexual abuse (Shapiro et al. 1995,p.39).

It has been suggested that a fatherless home in which no other male models are available, have also been associated with young African American males grater reliance on peers rather than adults and family members. Other researchers have implied that for low-income young males, peer alliances become important during their early development, and that low-income young males tend to align themselves with and become dependent on their peers for support and approval. Gang members replace positive male influence and become role models for young African American males reared to low-income communities.

Young males need their fathers in the home to model acceptable behavior. Without this, they may fall victim to the culture of the streets. When biological fathers are present in the lives of young African American males, he has an even greater impact on determining his chances of success and happiness among them. This fact is a constance regardless of financial status or ethnic make up

Educational Reform—

What African Americans need

Every so often the dominant culture which sets the tone for educational direction in this country hits upon one of its favorite buzz words: *reform*. The meaning of *reform* is to make better, more valuable. Educational reform must be for the purpose of properly preparing all American citizens to lead healthy and productive lives. In many ways education for nonwhite students in this country is reminiscent of the beginning of the United States Constitution, "We, the People." When that was first written, not all of the people—African slaves, American Indians, Asians, Hispanics, and women—were considered. Two Hundred and fifteen years later, as this country approaches the year 2000, the democratic and educational processes remain in a condition in which reformation is the needed prescription. This is especially true for nonwhite students, the African American student in particular.

A society can be measured. As many have said, by the manner in which it nurtures and treats its children. Education—the acquisition of knowledge—is the key ingredient for developing and nurturing children, young adults, and society at large. As my mentor was fond of saying, "When you know better, you do better". Education is paramount for the survival and success of African Americans, other nonwhite races, and the Third World countries. Education's ultimate goal should be training students so they can live full lives, adapt to change, and contribute to productive work and services to others.

African Americans need the same educational opportunities for growth and economic survival as members of the dominant culture. Many recommendations that have been made for the educational reform are appropriate for all; others are designed specifically for nonwhite students or African American students. A composite would include the following:

1. **Partnerships.** Cooperative efforts between local governments, community groups, and business have been suggested by several study groups and educators, including Mary Harwood Futrell, former president of the National Education Association. This would include corporate community schools.

2. **Restructuring.** Adopting some business practices, including management strategies and a willingness to take risks in course offerings for students, parents and teachers.

3. **Selection process of teachers.** Grades and test scores do not always determine who will be an effective teacher. Scores cannot measure the potential of teachers to be dedicated, exhibit patience, motivate, inspire, and to be sensitive to the learning process.

4. **Interdisciplinary activities.** Combining health, recreational, artistic and ethnic agencies in the same building, making it easier for innovative and tutorial – as well as evening and Saturday morning – classes.

5. **Role models.** The use of persons who have overcome hardships in order to achieve a degree of success. This does not always mean the successful middle class or professional but many times includes persons who are living responsible lives and working in vocational and technically-skilled jobs.

6. **Focus on African American males.** A concerted effort must be made to develop positive and responsible African American males. Statistical data abounds as to why this is a population at risk, including contributing factors such as life expectancy, physical health and illness, unemployment, incarcerations, alcohol and drug abuse, education, suspensions from school, selections to gifted or talented programs, and psychological and mental factors. Efforts may include some all-male classes at the elementary school level, male teachers in some instructional situations, use of African American male professional consultants in schools, and cooperative programs with organizations sensitive to the intellectual, emotional and spiritual growth of nonwhite persons.

AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

“Gang gang” is a term that has come to mean illegal or disruptive gang behavior. The involvement of African American males in gangs is more an indication of their participation in an American nightmare rather than an American dream. As a result of racism, disparities have resulted in employment, income, poverty levels, family structure, and education for persons of African descent. These disparities have, in turn, led to escalating crime, drug use, and a shorter life expectancy. However, men descended from Africa **are not**, as many have claimed, an “endangered species.” The term ignores the African American’s ability to identify problems, to organize, to plan, and to counter unjust conditions. The African American community must commit to an improved self-image and in so doing, help their brothers grow and survive.

Racism’s Pus

Racism did not start yesterday. According to Frances Cress Welsing (*The Cress Theory of Color Confrontation and Racism*), it started when Europeans psychologically responded to their numerical inadequacy and color inferiority; that is, that the state of color is the norm for human beings and the state of color absence is abnormal – that whiteness represents a genetic inadequacy. Racist behaviors began to manifest themselves with the exploitation of persons from the African continent. Males were brought to this continent for the purpose of capitalistic gain and women were brought over to perpetuate the workforce – that’s at the crux of America’s problem. In 1903, W.E.B. DuBois stated in his *Souls of Black Folks* that the great problem of the 20th Century would be that of the color-line. It ran true.

The racial disparities are appalling as U.S. society enters the 990s: a huge employment gap remains, with African Americans being unemployed at a rate 2.2 times greater than white Americans (Urban League); there has been a decline in real income for African American males between the ages of 20 and 29 of 27.7 percent, compared to 17.8 percent for all men (Center for Labor Market Studies, Northwestern University); one out of three African Americans live below the poverty level, and children under 18 make up 45.6 percent of those living below the poverty level (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities); and almost six of 10 African American families with children under 18 are headed by a single parent, many or most of whom are women (Census Bureau).

African Americans in public schools remain “largely isolated” and receive an inferior education, despite federal and state efforts to provide equal opportunities (Joint Center for Political Studies). Enrollment in higher education for African American males declined from 470,000 (4.3 percent) in 1976 to 436,000 (3.5 percent) in 1985 (American Council on Education).

One of every four African American men is in jail or under court supervision. There are more men in their 20s under court control than there are all African American men enrolled in college (Department of Justice Crime Data, Sentencing Project). Many of these men have drug related cases and involvement. Wade Nobles, director of the Institute for Advanced Study of Black Family Life and Culture, observed that white control of drug trafficking may be evidence of an organized genocide of African American men. Minister Louis Farakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam, asserts the war on drugs is a disguised war on African Americans by the government.

Homicide for African American men, ages 15 to 24, is the leading cause of death, and one of every three African American men ages 20 to 24 is a homicide victim (Institute for Advanced Study of

Black Family Life). African American men suffer high death rates from heart disease (68 percent higher than the general population), strokes (90 percent higher), cancer (71 percent higher), liver ailments (126 percent higher), and diabetes (86 percent higher), and African American males account for one in four AIDS cases nationwide. As a result, the life expectancy for African American males is down from 69.7 to 69.4, while for white Americans it is up from 75.3 percent to 75.4 (National Center for Health Statistics, Institute for Advanced Study of Black Family Life).

Successful Approaches

There are numerous school programs that are proving effective and others being implemented at the elementary and secondary level which offer promise of success with at-risk and African American youth. Some of the programs and instructional strategies have direct implications for African American males, especially at the elementary grade level.

A process that is now known as the Effective Schools Movement was launched by the late Ronald R. Edmonds and others in the late 1970's. Dr. Edmonds, who at one time worked as the Director of the Center for Urban Studies at Harvard University, at Michigan State University and as a New York City school administrator, put his Effective Schools research to practical application. He concluded that the schools can make a difference when they improve the quality of their leadership, their expectations for student performance, and school climate. Five characteristics which distinguish them from effective schools are:

- (1) Strong leadership at the school level
- (2) High expectations that no child will fall below minimum levels of achievement
- (3) An orderly school atmosphere conducive to learning and teaching
- (4) Students' acquisition of basic and higher order skills taking precedence over all other school activity
- (5) Frequent and consistent evaluation of student programs.

The Committee on Education and Labor, chaired by Congressman Augustus F. Hawkins, issued a report, *Improving Education: School Districts Implementing the Effective Schools Model*, in 1989. The report

provided a detailed description of how nine school districts and one county education office located in various parts of the country developed and implemented an Effective Schools program, based on their own definition of identified needs. Careful attention should be given to the schools participating from the Pittsburgh (PA) Public School District due to its more economically disadvantaged student body (as measured by receipt of free lunches). The program has resulted in a noticeable increase in basic achievement on norm-referenced tests, a reduction of discipline problems, greater collaborative planning and problem solving, increased parental involvement, and a greater corrective remediation of individual students.

Asa Hilliard points out several successful programs in his article, "Public Support for Successful Instructional Practices for At-Risk Students," (*School Success for Students At Risk*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1988). The Dunbar Elementary School, located in a low-income area in Atlanta, Georgia, has ranked near the top of the distribution of school averages on basic skills test for more than a decade. Project SEED was started over 20 years ago by a high school teacher in Berkeley, California, to improve the self-image of minority children through mathematics Project SEED is now demonstrated throughout the United States and in foreign countries. Third graders, who were mostly low-income African Americans, from the Marcus Garvey School in Los Angeles defeated a sixth grade class at a L.A. school for the gifted on a basic skills test. Using *Ball-Stick-Bird*, a reading program, educators have been able to assist children and adults, including "retarded" and "learning disabled," read a simple sentence in the first 20 minutes of instruction, even before the full alphabet and phonics system is learned.

Barbara Sizemore has compiled an impressive list of predominately African American schools which have narrowed and/or closed the achievement gap between African American and white students in public education in her article, "The Algebra of African-American Achievement," (*Effective Schools: Critical Issues in the Education of Black Children*, National Alliance of Black School Educators, 1989). She notes the schools which have narrowed the gap have a principal who serves as the instructional leader and whose cause-belief statements attribute any gap between African American and white youngsters to school routines and societal factors. Testing, she states, is not the aim of education but has become the new lynching tool for the aspirations of African Americans. Sizemore argues that the way to eliminate the prejudicial nature of the tests is to help minority populations to pass them, as effective, high-achieving African American elementary schools are now doing. Tests then can become the diagnostic tool they were designed to be instead of a mechanism of separating groups.

Separating African American males into all-male classes, including the teacher, could be one way of achieving success. Such an arrangement might offset the current trend of disparities that exist in students classified as educable mentally handicapped, in suspensions, failures, and dropouts. Spencer Holland, an educational psychologist in Washington, DC, promotes all-male classes from kindergarten to third grade. He believes such classes would be especially helpful to boys who lack a male figure at home and live in environments where they would be unlikely to encounter African American men working in professional careers. In addition, fraternity alumni groups could be brought in as individual role models while serving as examples of positive group behavior.

Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys, Series

The following is an outline of 20 African American high school males, who took the Iowa Reading Test. This chart shows their performance and that of 20 students chosen at random. Overall, the graph shows how well the students performed over the past five years beginning at the third grade.

Beginning Third Grade Percentile	Ending Seventh Grade Percentile	Reading Progress (Years)
98	35	1.3
97	54	2.7
92	24	2.1
91	68	3.1
81	72	3.9
72	72	3.6
66	59	3.9
63	7	0.7
63	4	0.0
57	39	3.2
47	9	2.1
41	11	2.5
29	12	3.0
21	44	5.6
21	29	4.7
21	17	3.8
18	1	1.3
16	39	4.6
7	30	4.5
5	5	3.2

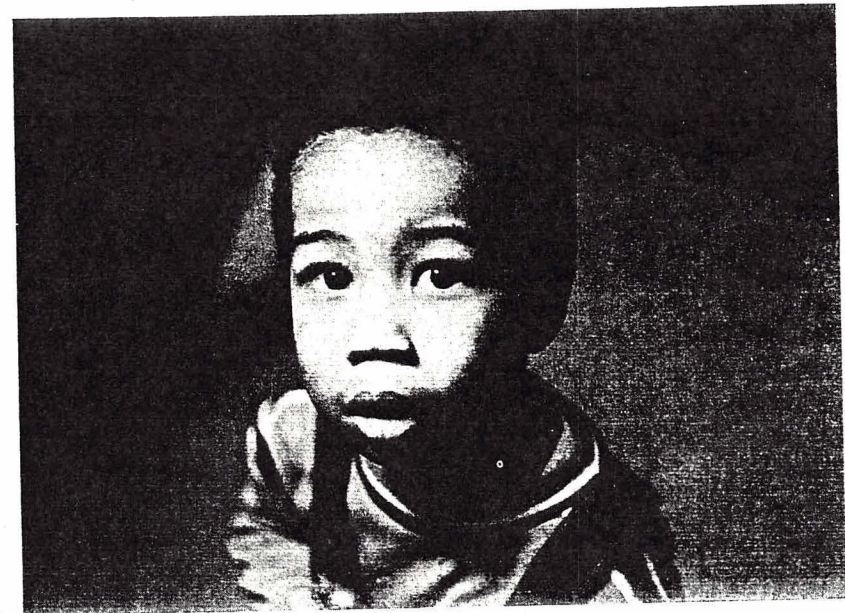


Photo by Kawana Emerson Sherman

The innocence and lively interest typical of the early years change to. . .