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The Plight of Black Men — Another Warning

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The New York Times reports that black men are becoming more and more alienated from the mainstream culture. The trends related to black men are moving downward even as other groups are moving more into the mainstream.

There's something very different happening with young black men, and it's something we can no longer ignore," said Ronald B. Mincy, professor of social work at Columbia University and editor of "Black Males Left Behind" (Urban Institute Press, 2006).

"Over the last two decades, the economy did great," Mr. Mincy said, "and low-skilled women, helped by public policy, latched onto it. But young black men were falling farther back."

Many of the new studies go beyond the traditional approaches to looking at the plight of black men, especially when it comes to determining the scope of joblessness. For example, official unemployment rates can be misleading because they do not include those not seeking work or incarcerated.

"If you look at the numbers, the 1990's was a bad decade for young black men, even though it had the best labor market in 30 years," said Harry J. Holzer, an economist at Georgetown University and co-author, with Peter Edelman and Paul Offner, of "Reconnecting Disadvantaged Young Men" (Urban Institute Press, 2006).

A very important section of the article addresses root causes of this problem:

According to census data, there are about five million black men ages 20 to 39 in the United States. Terrible schools, absent parents, racism, the decline in blue collar jobs and a subculture that glorifies swagger over work have all been cited as causes of the deepening ruin of black youths. Scholars — and the young men themselves — agree that all of these issues must be addressed.

Joseph T. Jones, director of the fatherhood and work skills center here, puts the breakdown of families at the core. "Many of these men grew up fatherless, and they never had good role models," said Mr. Jones, who overcame addiction and prison time. "No one around them knows how to navigate the mainstream society."

No responsible consideration of these issues can ignore the work of [John McWhorter](#), author of *Winning the Race: Beyond the Crisis in Black America*.

In a [recent interview](#), McWhorter went right to the core of modern perceptions about the reality of race in America: *Since I started commenting on race, I have found that it is considered a mark of enlightenment in thought about race to propose — or, as I think most such people are doing deep down, pretend — that black America's problems will sit unsolvable until there is no racism or discrimination at all in American society. For a certain sort — concentrated more in academia and the journalism world than elsewhere — no matter how logical your arguments are, they cannot get beyond an almost ritualistic incantation of the fact that "America remains a racist country." For many of these people, the guiding purpose of ALL discussion of race is to reveal, again and again, that "racism is not dead," despite all evidence that it nearly is.*

Winning the Race is my attempt to make a considered argument that racism — be it "societal racism," "institutional racism," "white privilege" or any of the other terms gleefully tossed around by the aforementioned crowd — does not have to disappear completely before black America can overcome. This requires, for one, undoing the consensus on why the ghettos went to pieces starting in the seventies. The common wisdom is that shades of "institutional racism" were the culprit — factories moved to the suburbs, slums were cleared and replaced by ugly housing project towers, highways split neighborhoods, drugs "came in" and so on. My research has shown me that these assumptions are incorrect — which means that "racism" is not what turned slums into deathscapes. Then I address some other issues, showing that we are dealing less with "racism" than some people's inner need to pretend that "racism" remains the problem it once was.

Note: McWhorter's review of Taylor Branch's *At Canaan's Edge* is invaluable. The review was published by *National Review*. An excerpt:
This last sentiment is the essence of Branch's narrative. In the wake of Watts, President Johnson asked 500 civil-rights leaders a question that interests curiously few historians: Why did Watts burn the same week that the Voting Rights Act was passed? The problem was a new type of black "leader" for whom, as Joseph Alsop put it, "injustice is the theme, not what can be done about it." King was well aware of the threat from this contingent, criticizing a new kind of SNCC demonstration as "expressions of rivalry and rage, without constructive purpose."

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