

GUEST COLUMN

BY PHILLIP JACKSON

Are Young Black Men Expendable?

A recent study by Northeastern University's Center for Labor Market Studies shows that in Chicago, 45% of the Black men 20-24 years old are out of school and out of work. The authors of the study think this number reflects national trends on this issue. One of the authors, **Dr. Neeta P. Fogg**, says the dropout rates for young Black men are increasing and that

dropping out of high school is *economic suicide*.

Being out of school and out of work makes young Black men more susceptible to illegal activities that might cause them to spend time in jails and prisons. So far, the Black community has not responded sufficiently to this catastrophe involving its young Black men. Each day without an adequate response sends more young Black men into

crime, drugs, gangs, violence, jails, prisons and even to their deaths.

While the problem of Black male failure in education and high unemployment for Black youth are huge and complex issues today, it is still a solvable problem; but it may not be in 10-15 years. A large part of the solution is a return to the basics of family living with parents, families and communities taking the primary responsibility for educating Black male children. The successful education process starts in the home, the family and the community, and continues in school and in life. The extent to which Black parents become actively involved in the education of Black male children is

see Guest Col. page--22-A

Guest Column from page 5-A

the extent to which the destruction of potentially millions of young Black men will stop.

The United States has started not to tolerate young Black men being either non-productive, or counter-productive to the goals of mainstream society. Tough questions need to be asked and tough decisions need to be made. Some of the questions are: "What is the value of young Black men to our society? What do they contribute to our society? What should we do with young Black men? Are young Black men expendable?"

Fixing this problem will take 20-30 years. While many individuals and institutions have a powerful role to play, the Black community must supply the leadership, energy and resolve to fix this problem, and the government must provide the financial resources and the legislative will. The cost to fund this initiative should be diverted from the Department of Justice and front-loaded into the Department of Education. This issue must become a 24-hour a day, 365 days a year issue. The proper and successful education of young Black men must become America's next Civil Rights Movement.

The brunt of this effort will fall to the Black community. This includes:

- Getting Black parents, Black families and the Black community properly involved in the education of Black male children.
- Designing and implementing a way to create and maintain nurturing, effective, supportive, child-centered two-parent families.
- Reconnecting Black male

fathers to their children.

- Creating a strong culture of education for young Black men.

- Developing positive community structures, principles, values, and activities to help young Black men develop socially

- Finding strong, positive role models for young Black men.

Every time anyone encounters a Black male child or teenager (whether a friend, relative or stranger), ask him: (1) how is he doing in school; (2) what college does he plan to attend; and (3) what are his career interests. Additionally, the importance, value and power of education must be reinforced constantly for these young men.

While this is a tough problem now, it may/will become insurmountable unless action is taken immediately. Young Black men want and deserve their piece of the American pie. That's the American way! But who is going to tell these young men that because they grew up in a single-parent household, because they attended lowly - performing public schools, because they have dropped out of high school, because they can't find a job, because they have been to jail... there is no pie for them? Have these young men become expendable?

For more information about engaging Black parents and the Black community in the education of Black children, please call the Illinois Black Parents & Educators Association at (312) 842-3527.

PHILLIP JACKSON
 Director, Illinois Black
 Parents and Educators Assoc.
 Box 20, 1333 S. Wabash Ave.
 Chicago, IL, 60605