

Why don't Black men achieve as well academically?

By *Makebra M. Anderson*
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WASHINGTON (NNPA) — On campuses across the nation, it is becoming difficult to distinguish between all-female and co-ed universities. Often, the student government president is female. It is not uncommon for the editor of the school newspaper to be a woman. Walk into any classroom and the overwhelming majority of the students are females.

While unattached single males might applaud that disparity, the absence of Black men in meaningful numbers on college campuses is troubling to many and has profound implications for the future for Black America. If this gender imbalance continues, it could impact future family structures, the type of role models available to Black boys and the vibrancy of the African-American community.

Why are Black males failing to achieve at the same level as females?

"Boys are much more influenced by the streets. The biggest competitors to education are rap, drugs and sports," says Jawanza

Kunjufu, a Chicago-based expert on Black males. "When you think about it, of the number of Black males in college, what percent of them are athletes? Sistas don't seem to be tempted by sports, rap and drugs. There is no question that more brothas lean towards faster money."

Another problem according to Kunjufu is the lack of Black male teachers.

"We really have to look at why 83 percent of the school teachers in elementary are White females, 6 percent are African-American and 1 percent are African-American males," explains Kunjufu, who heads African-American Images, a group that publishes and distributes books that promote self-esteem, collective values, liberation, and skill development. "America has designed a female teaching style. There is a possibility that a male can go K-8 [from kindergarten to eighth grade] and never experience a Black teacher."

That also troubles Robert Lemons, dean of the School of Education at Florida A&M University.

"Whenever we have the opportunity, we talk to the

legislatures and school superintendents asking them to make teaching more attractive for the male. We don't get much response," he says. "This has been a trend in education for a long time. Before the 1980s, most educated Blacks were in teaching. This was when we couldn't go into any other occupations, but as soon as other occupations opened up, Black men left and went into professions they felt made more money."

In 2004, there was a large gap between male and female teachers, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Of the 6.2 million teachers, approximately 4.5 million (71 percent) were women and 1.7 million (29 percent) were men. Of all teachers, only 5.1 million (8 percent) were Black.

"Since 1954 there has been a 66 percent decline in Black teachers," said Kunjufu, who wrote the four-book series "Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys." The paucity of African-American teachers hampers the normal development of Black males, Kunjufu argues.

Derrick Lawson, a 5th

grade teacher in Los Angeles has the same opinion.

"I didn't major in education during college, but I decided to go into the profession after realizing I was going nowhere with my job at the [Department of Motor Vehicles]," Lawson said in an interview. "Once I started teaching, I was surprised at how few Black male teachers there are in California and how much time you spend mentoring as opposed to teaching."

Lawson, a Black man, says the responsibility of male teachers goes far beyond the classroom. "When you are the only male figure some of your students see, it puts additional pressure on you to be their teacher, friend and parent. Many of my male students come to me because I am the only one they know that's not on the streets, selling drugs or gang banging."

Because Lawson is the only "father figure" some of his students have, it's hard for him to leave even though the pressure sometimes seems overwhelming.

"When I started teaching I thought that it would be a typical eight [hour workday],

and when I realized that it was almost 24-hours, I thought about going back to the DMV. What has kept me in the profession for these past five years is my heart. I see first hand how not having a positive male influence can destroy a child's life and I am committed to making sure that I do all I can to ensure that these kids get a fair shot at success — even if it means sacrificing my own wants."

Kunjufu says the lack of positive male role models may even limit their ability to excel personally and academically.

Kunjufu says, "Thirty-two percent of our children have their father in the home. Girls have their mother as a role model, but more than half of boys have no one. Another problem is that many mothers raise their daughters and love their sons. They teach their daughters to be more responsible and more focused."

According to the Census, the number of female-headed homes is higher than 32 percent. In the Black community, 44 percent of homes are headed by a woman, 23.4 percent in the Hispanic com-

munity, 13.2 percent in the Asian community and 12 percent in the White community.

In six years the number of female-headed households in the Black community jumped by 14 percent. In 1999, 30.1 percent of households were headed by women, in 2000, 29.7 percent, in 2001, 28.7 percent, in 2002, 28.8 percent and in 2003, 29.7 percent of households were run by women.

Many feel that these numbers are a direct correlation to the achievement of Black students according to statistics. In 2001, there were slightly more college aged men than women. The Census reports that there were 14.3 million men and 13.6 million women between 18 and 24 years old. HBCU (historically Black college and university) campuses did not follow that trend. During that year, the total fall enrollment in HBCUs was 289,985, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Women made up 177,111 (61 percent) and men 112,874 (39 percent) of that total — a difference of 64,237 (See *Black Men*, Page 15)



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