



Joseph C. Cornwall Center  
for Metropolitan Studies

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#### Our Vision

The Joseph C. Cornwall Center strives to be:

- A key resource in the production of “usable” knowledge for the public, private, and nonprofit sector
- development in Newark, the northern region of New Jersey and beyond.
- A central force convening key civil society individuals and institutions as they engage in and pursue the economic, political, and cultural revitalization of Newark.
- A forceful agent for the economic and administrative coordination and cooperation of Newark and its surrounding communities.
- A national model for what a university-based center can accomplish working with regional, local, and community partners.

## From the Director's Desk

Monday, April 21, 2014

Greetings.

Please see attached article.

All the best.

RVA

# OPINION: CAN I BE MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?

ROLAND V. ANGLIN | MARCH 3, 2014

The statistics associated with young men of color are grim, but race and gender are only one part of a complex equation



President Barack Obama recently announced an initiative to help young men of color fare better on any number of life outcomes such as health, education, and participation in the workforce. The components of the initiative have not yet been described in detail.

As reported in the general media, the Department of Education will find ways to work with states, localities, and school districts to discourage out-of school suspensions -- which have been a [distinct problem](#) for young males of color.

The initiative lifts up an entire industry that has emerged over the past 20 years centered on assisting males of color. Much of it is supported by philanthropy and increasingly the public sector through local school districts searching for ways to narrow the educational achievement gap. These programs span a wide range of issues, including fatherhood counseling, workforce development, paths to manhood, and getting disconnected youth back in school.

By and large, the necessity and strength of these programs are clear.

Most American adolescents successfully transition to adulthood. A disproportionate share of African-American, Latino, Native American, and southeast Asian males, however, are trapped in a cycle of limited opportunity, poverty, and then prison.

National data shows that males of color are underperforming at alarming rates across a number of success indicators compared with their peers. Although black and Latino students each account for approximately 15 percent of K-12 enrollment, they represent 30 percent and 20 percent of all twelfth-grade suspensions and expulsions, respectively. They are also four times more likely to be placed in special education classes, and twice as likely as whites to drop out of school.

Juvenile males of color have the highest rates of arrests and detention while awaiting trial and are more likely to be tried as adults and to be incarcerated in a secure juvenile or adult correctional facility. For these males, the confluence of deteriorated schools and neighborhoods, poor health, and limited job opportunities restricts productivity and participation in the economy and eventually upward mobility.

Although I recognize the complex interplay between race and gender, and difficulties males of color face in transitioning to adulthood, I nonetheless struggle with an overreliance on any policy or strategy that targets a subset of the population based on its race and gender. Note, I said "struggle," not oppose. Targeting can lead to invidious distinctions, an unsustainable competition for limited resources among groups, and -- even more damaging -- possibly obscure a larger problem.

For instance, each year thousands of students exit the educational pipeline prior to graduation, while many others graduate without having mastered the knowledge and skills necessary for success after high school. In addressing the graduation crisis, social science literature has come to identify students who are overage and under-credited (OA-UC) as most prone to dropping out of school.

This population, also referred to as "off-track" students, has been targeted for interventions by many other jurisdictions, most notably by the New York Department of Education's Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation (OMPG). In its analysis of the New York City's youth population between the ages of 16 and 21, the OMPG discovered that nearly all high school dropouts, at one time during their educational tenure, were at least two years off track toward graduation in terms of their age and/or credit accumulation.

Although the OMPG data indicated that the city's dropout population consisted disproportionately of males of color, the data also revealed that the dropout population was also made up of students who had failed to receive intervention services that might have prevented them from becoming OA-UC and had not received remedial attention once they had become OA-UC.

Consequently, the OMPG's approach to increasing graduation rates was to rely on data to develop a thorough understanding of the problem; an understanding in which race and gender composed one variable (albeit an important one) in a much larger equation. The focus on race and gender was neither exclusive nor a substitute for a comprehensive review and understanding of the central barriers to success.

My concern is that not only can programs that focus on a subgroup serve to further stigmatize the group but also that targeting will become a replacement for critical analysis. As a social scientist, I know that problems are often more complex than can be seen on the surface. Only by digging deep can we really accomplish the ultimate goal of expanding the success pathways for males of color.

The growing strength of this males-of-color movement should be recognized, and harnessed in support of a wider discussion of educational opportunity. But I believe it can serve as the gateway to a discussion that is wider yet, one about opportunity in this country, and about ways that growing inequality limits upward mobility.

I think the movement is at its best when anchored in specific questions that have a preponderance of research and rigorous policy discussion behind them, such as:

- How can we work with schools and districts to rethink harsh disciplinary practices that often push young males of color to drop out?
- How can we harness connected community and institutional data to identify and prevent the phenomenon of overage, under-credited youth who also then drop out?
- How can we muster targeted support for local districts that are trying various strategies to prevent dropouts?
- How can we improve workforce development programs to actually train and link individuals to a sustainable career?
- How can we use the expanding knowledge base on adolescent brain development to help all young people navigate the shoals of young adulthood?

Can we teach resilience and "grit" to all young people coming from challenging circumstance? Are we as a society prepared to spend the necessary resources for support services for all young people facing these challenging circumstances?

Although there are many other questions to be asked and explored when addressing males of color, those that focus on access to education and opportunity are ones that lead to an open path, the true path to being my brother's and sister's keeper.

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