Chapter One

African American College Men

Twenty-First-Century Issues and Concerns

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Several years ago, I had what I describe as "epiphany" experiences while attending two events at the end of another academic school year: the junior year awards ceremony at my daughter's high school and the commencement ceremony at the university at which I work. Although somewhat different in focus and scope, these two events had a few similarities. One very apparent aspect they shared was the almost complete absence of African American men among the honorees.

The first half hour of the high school program consisted of about two dozen special awards for academic achievement. Only one African American male was among those honored. During the latter portion of the program, when each student was called to be recognized, very few of the African American males were cited for any "academic" honors or achievements. At my university's commencement event, the first students recognized were the doctoral degree recipients, who were individually hooded by their mentors. No African American men were among the fifty or so new doctorates conferred that day.

Although this is a wholly anecdotal and very unscientific assessment method, these two events nonetheless provided me with an epiphany by giving witness to an important issue in higher education

today: the relative absence of African American men matriculating in college as well as the relatively small pool of academically well-prepared high school students preparing to enter our colleges and universities. The image of these high school and college populations, almost devoid of Black men, with which I was left on each of these days is one borne out by more reliable statistical and demographic measurements, some of which will be reported in this and other chapters in this book. What is less apparent is the impact that the lower percentage of college education among African American men, compared to other groups in our American population, has on a significant number of elements in our society and our communities across the nation.

The issues related to the condition of African American men in American society are far-reaching and complex. Many individuals have addressed various aspects of this broad topic, from the general social conditions that affect African American males to specific instances that have special impact. Particular concerns related to African American men in elementary education, high school education, employment, the criminal justice system, interracial social interactions, and intraracial social interactions have all been examined in both academic literature and the mainstream press. Yet the condition of African American men in higher education seems to have received less attention than some of these other topics, possibly because of the proportionally lower number that are, in fact, part of the condition itself. Among those works that have addressed the concerns of African American men in the college environments, much attention seems to be directed toward faculty and staff rather than undergraduate students. This book focuses attention on a number of issues that affect African American male undergraduate students' matriculation. In doing so, it also identifies some of the efforts being made on campuses across the country to impact these men's lives positively and explores how those programs achieve their success.

This chapter attempts to accomplish several things. First, after a brief examination of some of the statistical information that helps present a picture of the current status of African Americans in American society—particularly at U.S. colleges and universities—it takes a closer look at the dramatic disproportion of African American men and women in college and describes some of the consequences of that imbalance. It also introduces some material

about Black men (sometimes referred to as "manhood" issues) that gives evidence of the differences between Black men and Black women, such that the reader can appreciate the need to see these two populations in light of the differences that exist between them and (more important) can understand that the interventions used to assist them may need to be applied differently. Finally, this chapter introduces a number of the various topics to be explored in more detail in the ensuing chapters of the book.

Identifying the Population

In a data-driven society like ours, there are endless ways to count and measure things and endless ways to compare the results. In these next few pages we look at some of the numbers that inform us about different groups of people in the United States in ways that help us understand the relationships among those groups.

The 2000 census revealed that, at the time of that enumeration, there were 281,421,906 people in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Of that population, 143,368,343 were women and 138,053,563 were men, so in the general population women represented a 50.9 percent majority. Breaking that total number down into segments, using the official U.S. racial and ethnic designations, proved somewhat more complicated in 2000 than in previous U.S. census enumerations, because in 2000, for the first time, when individuals were asked to identify their race they were permitted to indicate more than one choice. However, because 97.57 percent of the populations chose to use only one racial identifier, examining just the numbers for that segment of the population to generate a picture of racial mix of the country is fairly accurate. Using the six racial categories employed in the census, we see that 211,460,626 (75.14 percent) identified themselves as White, 34,658,190 (12.32 percent) identified as Black or African American, 2,475,956 (0.88 percent) identified as American Indian and Alaska Native, 10,242,998 (3.64 percent) identified as Asian, 398,835 (0.14 percent) identified as Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and 15,359,073 (5.46 percent) identified as Some Other Race. The census separately asked individuals if they identified as Hispanic or Latino since that category is designated an ethnic group rather than a racial group. In the 2000 Census, 35,305,818 (12.55 percent) claimed to be members of this classification.

These numbers present a rough benchmark against which comparisons can be made later in this chapter and throughout other portions of this book to see whether the presence of African American men and women in colleges and in other aspects of life in the United States (such as in prisons) are similar to their representation in the general population.

Interestingly, of the 6,826,228 people who identified themselves with two races or more, 6,368,075 named only two races. Thus the single race group and those that used two races account for 99.84 percent of the total population. Of those identifying with two races, 39.69 percent chose White and one other choice, 11.94 percent chose Black or African American and one other choice, 11.14 percent chose American Indian and Alaska Native and one other choice, 11.11 percent chose Asian and one other choice, 2.54 percent chose Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander and one other choice, and 23.57 percent chose Some Other Race and one other choice. When added to the much larger number of persons who identified themselves with only one race, these numbers change the general proportions only slightly. Thus, for discussion, we will use the single-identity numbers and percentages. However, it is curious that Whites, who represent more than three quarters of the total population, comprise only two-fifths of those who identify using two races. One wonders if this group is more certain of its heritage than other groups, ignorant about possible multiracial heritage, or in denial about possible non-White ancestors.

The census numbers of greater significance to the topic of this chapter are not so much the ratios of the various racial or ethnic groups to each other, but the proportions of males and females in each group. Of the 34,658,190 citizens who identified as Black or African American, 47.5 percent were male (16,465,185) and 52.5 percent were female (18,193,005). This presents a male-to-female ratio of 90.5. In comparison, the male-to-female ratio for the U.S. population as a whole was 96.3 (49.01 male/50.99 female); the ratio for Whites, 96.4 (49.1 male/50.9 female); for American Indians or Alaska Natives, 99.4 (49.8 male/50.2 female); for Asians, 93.5 (48.3 male/51.7 female); for Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders, 103.3 (50.8 male/49.2 female); and for Hispanics or Latinos, 105.9 (51.4 male/48.6 female). These figures, showing African Americans with the lowest male-to-female ratio among the

groups measured, present one telling indicator of social difference for African American men in relation to the general U.S. society.

Given these numbers, one might assume that, if opportunities were relatively equitable, the ratio of African American college men to African American college women might be similar to the ratio in the general population. An examination of data on collegiate enrollment in the United States in 2000 reveals that women do indeed continue to attend college in greater numbers than men, but their proportion is somewhat greater than their percentage in the general population, as indicated by the 2000 census data. According to the information compiled in 2005 by the *Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac* (2005), of the 16,611,700 college students enrolled in 2002, 43.4 percent were men and 56.6 percent were women. The *Chronicle* breaks these data into six racial or ethnic categories, with the male/female percentages as follows: American Indian, 39.6 percent men/60.4 percent women; Asian, 46.9 percent men/53.1 percent women; Black, 35.8 percent men/64.2 percent women; Hispanic, 42.1 percent men/57.9 percent women; White, 44.0 percent men/56.0 percent women; and Foreign, 55.3 percent men/44.7 percent women. (The *Chronicle* data do not allow for the multiple identifications offered in the 2000 federal census; the numbers associated with these percentages total 16,611,700.) It is quite evident in these enrollment figures that African American men in 2002 not only attended college in a proportion lower than their percentage in the U.S. African American population, but they also still represented the most skewed male/female ratio of any racial/ethnic group—they were outnumbered in colleges by African American women by almost two to one. There is no indication that this trend has changed since these data were published.

As another point of comparison for the relatively low numbers of African American male college students, the question of whether or not there are more African American men in college or in prison has been debated for years. As an example of the figures available to document these claims, Clarence Page, a columnist for the *Chicago Tribune,* wrote in 2002:

> There are now more black men behind bars in America than in its colleges and universities. So says the Justice Policy Institute, a

> Washington-based research center, which found a black inmate population explosion over the past two decades, an era of booming prison construction and get-tough-anti-crime legislation. In 1980 there were three times more black men enrolled in colleges and universities (463,700) than in prisons (143,000), the study said. By 2000, black male numbers grew to 791,600 in prison, but only to 603,032 on campus. Although the two groups are not directly comparable, since the college figures count a narrower student-age population, the numbers do dramatize a disturbing trend.

THE DISPROPORTION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN AND WOMEN

Although the number of African American college men in the *Chronicle* data previously cited is slightly higher than the number cited by Page in his 2002 article, the *Chronicle* number is still well below the number of African American men in prison. Which category—prisons or colleges—has the larger population at any particular time is less important than the fact that such a comparison gives stark evidence that the number of African American men in postsecondary educational institutions is so much lower than it should be if their representation were anywhere near what it ought to be if that number were proportional to the percentage of African American men in the U.S. population as a whole. Examples span our culture—from the dramatic disproportion of African American males in "behavior disorder" classrooms in almost every urban public school district to the extremely low percentage of African American men in corporate boardrooms. We can see it every day—that is, if we overcome our tendency to ignore it. For example, walking into the faculty club on the campus, I can choose simply to read the menu and pay no attention to the servers' ethnicity, or I can observe the very apparent fact that the clientele is predominantly white and the wait staff is predominantly African American, then decide how best to voice concern why more of these Black men are not in my classes instead of bringing me iced tea.

This is an extremely important concern for American society for several reasons. First, the disproportion of any one segment of our population in any particular demographic component has

far-reaching effects on U.S. society as a whole. Consider for a moment how the disproportion of African American and Latino families concentrated in the lowest economic quadrant of American society casts racial and ethnic overtones onto almost all economic, political, and social policies of federal, state, and municipal government. (This phenomenon was starkly evident among the most severely affected victims of Hurricane Katrina's devastation of New Orleans in 2005.) Logic dictates that if opportunities and resources were available equally and freely to all U.S. residents, the proportional distribution of representatives of various ethnic cultures would be spread across economic levels, throughout occupations, across educational levels, in corporate power structures, and in local, state, and national political arenas. To the contrary, as an example of the existing disproportion, U.S. census data reveal that in 1999, 39.7 percent of African American households and 38.6 percent of Latino households had incomes below $25,000, compared to only 17.8 percent of white households at that level (Wilson, 2000b). Whether or not this issue of the demographic representation of African American men and the places they occupy—or do not occupy—in various components of U.S. society is evidence of institutional racism is a larger and more complex topic than this volume will address. However, the impact of race and economics is one significant reason why some higher education researchers argue for paying close attention to the status of African American men in our colleges and universities—and why they are striving to improve their numbers of attendance and successful matriculation (Arnold, 2001; Brownstein, 2000; Wilson, 2000a).

Impacts of the Male-Female Imbalance

First, a disclaimer of sorts—although I feel strongly that the significantly low proportion of males among the African American college population has some serious effect on the lives of most African Americans—and perhaps on all Americans in numerous social and cultural arenas—there is currently not much empirical research to prove or disprove this opinion. Thus, a number of the factors examined in this section are not yet supported in the literature and warrant additional research.

RELATIONS BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

One result of the low proportion of African American men on the typical four-year college or university campus (this imbalance occurs at HBCUs as well as at PWIs) is the impact on the social climate of the institution, which has several aspects. First, the most apparent result of the proportionally low numbers of African American men on campus is the rather dramatic imbalance of the relative populations of African American men and African American women on the typical campus. As indicated earlier in this chapter, the proportion of men to women among African American undergraduates is more skewed than among any of the other governmental ethnic categories (*Chronicle of Higher Education,* 2005). Dillard University, for example, reported in 2004 a female-to-male gender ratio of 74 percent to 26 percent (Foston, 2004). Despite an increase in interracial dating over the past few years (Hughes, 2003), the fact remains that many African American women seek African American men as potential partners (Porter & Bronzaft, 1995). The relatively low number of these men on the typical campus makes the social dating process on many campuses out of balance. In some cases African American women refuse to date non-African American men and either simply do not date or, if they are fortunate enough to be on a campus in reasonable proximity to a local black community, they seek potential partners off campus. This alternative often proves unsatisfactory as well, since the proportion of men to women in many non-college African American communities is already skewed toward a higher number of women than men, causing competition with the other women in the community. Also, in many cases the available men have less education and a lower socioeconomic status than the college-going females. This may not be a concern of all the women, but it is an issue for many of them (King, 1999).

Although there is little supporting empirical evidence, it seems reasonable to assume that the increasing incidence of interracial dating among African American women at PWIs is exacerbated by the relatively low numbers of African American men among the student body. Some African American college women may indeed select their dating partners with little or no consideration for the person's race (if that is truly possible to do in the U.S.), but others would doubtless admit that they would prefer dating African American

men, and that they date others only because of the limited availability of African American men in their environments (Hughes, 2003). Depending on the reactions from their peers on campus, their families, or the surrounding community, these women may perceive interracial dating as preferable to not dating at all, but a stressor nonetheless.

Another issue that adds to the complexity of college dating relationships as they are affected by the low proportion of African American men arises when African American men try to take advantage of their “scarcity” and fail to treat their dating partners with respect. If there is truth to the anecdotal stories of African American women enduring physical or psychological mistreatment, intimidation to engage in sex, and their partners’ open dating of others, then these episodes represent another negative consequence of the numerical imbalance of African American men and women on our campuses.

Relations Between Blacks and Whites

The low numbers of African American men on campus at PWIs has another impact on the environment that affects others beyond the African American community. Many schools profess to a desire for a diverse student body, with the expectation that members of the campus community—student, faculty, and administrators included—would thus have opportunities to interact and learn from each other culturally as well as intellectually. Although there is some debate about whether or not students from different cultures actually interact on PWI campuses—even where there are sufficient numbers of students from different ethnic cultures for this to occur—the fact remains that, in order for any such interactions to transpire, there must be sufficient numbers of students representing the various cultural groups. If we do not recognize that there are cultural differences between African American men and African American women, particularly as to how they interact with whites, we may tend to overlook the detrimental effect the low numbers of African American men on PWI campuses can have on this desired cultural interaction.

Of particular concern is the need to counter the often negative stereotypes that the dominant culture—and the African American culture, too—perpetrate about African American men, which

can only truly be dispelled by experiencing the positive traits of African American men through face-to-face interactions. In the absence of this experience, we form our perceptions and opinions about members of other social groups from the limited information we obtain from other sources (Sigelman & Tuch, 1997). If these sources—the news media, fictionalized entertainment in books or television or films, or stereotypical images passed from person to person—contain false information, then that is what we accept until provided contradictory, corrective data.

The relative absence of African American men on college campuses lessens the opportunities for non-African Americans to engage in face-to-face interactions that provide experiential learning about the true nature of other people. Obviously, if there are no African American students on a particular campus, the other students will not have a chance to learn firsthand about African Americans. However, even on a campus with a respectable number of African Americans, if that population is overwhelmingly female, the negative stereotype of African American men being culturally dominated by African American women can unwittingly be reinforced. An example of this might be the PWI at which many visible, traditional leadership positions—president of the black student union, representatives to student government, committee chairs in the programming board—are filled by African American women, with at best an occasional token African American man in one of these roles, mainly because of the low numbers of these men in the campus population. Both male invisibility *and* female dominance can easily be inferred from such situations if one is not careful to examine the intervening circumstances affecting the African American men on the campus.

One additional reason for wanting to increase the number of African American men on campus and, therefore, the number of encounters they will inevitably have with members of other ethnic/racial cultures is what I refer to as the “anti-invisible man” factor. As Ralph Ellison tried to explain in his 1952 novel *The Invisible Man,* White people who exist in a world with few if any Black people tend to make Black folks invisible on those few occasions when they do encounter them. Thus, the more opportunities one has for interracial encounters, the less likely one is to retain the ability to render other people “invisible.” One result of a skewed imbalance

among men and women in the campus African American population is that White people may perceive African American women as “visible” while still failing to see African American men.

Student peers are not the only ones who need the opportunity for positive interactions with African American college men. Faculty, staff, and administrators can harbor stereotypes of African American men from the general media and from the images they see on campus. However, every one-on-one interaction with an African American male, particularly if the resulting impression is a positive one, helps to break down the negative stereotypes and open individuals’ eyes to the falsehood of such negative stereotypical images. Obviously, the more African American men on the campus, the more these interpersonal contacts will occur and the quicker students, faculty, staff, and administrators from various cultural backgrounds will learn about each other.

Men and Women Are Different

There is an important need for non-Blacks to have these intercultural interactions with both African American women and African American men precisely because they *are* different from each other. In a previous work (Cuyjet, 1997), this author described some of the apparent differences in perceptions and behaviors of African American men and African American women on college campuses. By examining responses to the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) from more that 6,700 African American men and women in the database maintained by the Center for Postsecondary Research and Planning at Indiana University, it was concluded that men and women had substantially different percentages of responses to questions in a range of topical areas (Kuh, Vesper, Connolly, & Pace, 1997). Among the wide variety of topics included were course learning (academics), use of recreational facilities, and grades. For example, almost two-thirds of the African American women in the sample indicated they often or very often took detailed notes in class, whereas fewer than 45 percent of the men did, and twice the percentage of men as women indicated they never took detailed notes in class. More than one third of African American men often or very often played games in the student union or center; less than one in five women

did so. In the CSEQ category on the use of athletic and recreational activities, African American men indicated much greater participation than did African American women in each of the ten items; for most items, the percentages of men's "often" or "very often" responses were two or three times that of the women. When asked to indicate their grades in the institution, nearly a quarter of African American women indicated that they were receiving A, A–, or B+, whereas fewer than one in six African American men made that assertion. On the other hand, almost one in five African American men admitted receiving C, C–, or lower, whereas only 12 percent of women made that admission (Cuyjet, 1997).

In one other phenomenon that seems to be particular to African American men, on some campuses at which there are small but stable numbers of African American men, often a large majority of these individuals are intercollegiate athletes; in many cases they are members of the football or basketball team. Person and LeNoir (1997) reported that "about one out of every nine African American male students at predominantly white four-year institutions is an athlete" (p. 79). Although any means that helps to bring African American men to the college campus should be commended, on those campuses where the majority of the African American male students are athletes, several variables can interfere with the kinds of involvement within the broad campus environment that researchers such as Astin (1993) have shown to have positive effects on the general student body. First (as Kenya Messer will explore in Chapter Eight), African American male athletes already must contend with a number of their own particular issues—one of which is a certain amount of isolation from the general campus environment in order to devote hefty amounts of time to practices, travel, and competition for their sport, not to mention sufficient time to keep up with their studies. A second issue is the reinforcement of persistent stereotypes, such as "Black male equals athlete" or "Black male equals dumb jock" or other racially derogatory images (Hall, 2001). On campuses where the majority of African American male undergraduates *are* athletes, or on campuses where athletes are the most visible of the African American male students, it is difficult to promote the perception of African American males as scholars, as intellectuals, or as campus leaders in nonsports activities. For these reasons, any institution facing the

situation in which its African American male athletes actually are, or even appear to be, the majority of the Black men on campus must redouble its effort to recruit and retain nonathlete African American men, particularly those who can demonstrate strong academic scholarship.

Possible Interventions

Although chapters two through eleven in this book—each exploring a different aspect of college life for African American men—offer some suggestions for efforts that institutions can take to enhance the enrollment and successful matriculation of African American men, nonetheless a few observations about both direct and indirect intervention by the institution and its officers are warranted in this chapter. One general undertaking by campus leaders should be to develop a clear understanding of the numbers and general characteristics of African American men present on the campus. As has been suggested several times already in this chapter, at most institutions the ratio of men and women is more skewed among African Americans than in other demographic populations. If administrators are not accustomed to breaking down their students' ethnic identifications into gender subunits, the number of African American females can leave them unaware of the size of the African American male population and, possibly, of how fragile that number really is.

Identifying Specific Cultural Characteristics

A major part of this effort to recognize fully the African American men on campus must be an attempt to learn about the particular sociocultural characteristics of this student population itself. To be effective in assisting African American men's matriculation, one must have a reasonable understanding of that population. Three aspects of this knowledge should be addressed briefly here. First, although certain general characteristics can be attributed to African American college men, any population of African American men is not a monolithic body with little or no within-group diversity. In a previous work, this author stated that "the characteristics of each of these men consists of three equally important

factors: his common human traits shared with all men and women, his Black male cultural attributes, and his unique individuality" (Cuyjet, 1997, p. 3). It is possible that some of the African American males coming to our institutions now are as likely to be from predominantly white suburban schools as from inner city ones, as likely to be of middle-class backgrounds as of lower socioeconomic means, and as likely to be academically talented as to be academically underprepared. So although we cannot ignore the generalizations that can alert us to some of the problems African American male students may face in adapting to the culture and environment of our campuses and that can prepare us to address those needs, we must not make the mistake of applying these characteristics (and our proposed solutions) universally to each African American man who enrolls. Interventions must include opportunities inclusive of high-achieving African American men as well (Fries-Britt, 1997; Harper, 2003).

Second, to the extent that we can accurately identify African American male culture as "different" from other identifiable groups, an effort to understand those cultural values and behaviors is beneficial. We do often recognize that an understanding of those "Black male cultural attributes" that are different from comparable characteristics of other identifiable groups (White males, for instance) is important to our ability to assist African American men through their matriculation and can be helpful in not labeling these different behaviors and values as deficient or deviant. Lee and Bailey (1999) tell us that because African American men are frequently denied the means of achieving the dominant American culture's manifestations of manhood (such as economic success, head-of-household status, traditional civic involvement), they adopt alternate behaviors to demonstrate manhood attainment—behaviors that are often at odds with those of the dominant culture. Among various authors who have described some of these behaviors, one of the better characterizations of young black manhood is the description of "cool pose" by Majors and Billson (1992). As they explain it,

> Cool pose is a distinctive coping mechanism that serves to counter, at least in part, the dangers that black males encounter on a daily basis. As a performance, cool pose is designed to render the black male visible and to empower him. . . . Cool pose is constructed

> from attitudes and actions that become firmly entrenched in the black male's psyche as he adopts a façade to ward off the anxiety of second-class status. . . . By acting calm, emotionless, fearless, aloof, and tough, the African American male strives to offset an externally imposed "zero" image. Being cool shows both the dominant culture and the black male himself that he is strong and powerful. (p. 5)

In addition to this description of cool pose, Majors and Billson offer explanations of other phenomena in the search for expressions of manhood among many African American adolescents through masculinity rituals that are occasionally destructive. These rituals include "black masking" (also referred to as "impression management")—a suppression of natural feelings and assumption of a mask of affable compliance with the role Whites expect Blacks to play; "shucking"—a manner of talking and physical movements designed to construct a façade to accommodate White expectations; "playing the dozens"—a highly stylized verbal repartee of mock insults and bragging; and what Majors and Billson call the "cool cat life style"—adopting particular clothing, automobiles, and other possessions, and speech patterns, physical behaviors, and other activities that are culturally prescribed as highly acceptable by other "cool" young African American men. Familiarity with these behaviors can provide useful insight into the beliefs and values of some of the young African American men entering our institutions.

The third aspect of understanding the different cultural characteristics of African American men is to recognize the self-esteem issues that become evident as one encounters these students and their daily circumstances. The numerical frailty of the African American male student population has already been mentioned; however, this issue speaks to the psychological frailty of many members of this group. Generally speaking, the image of the African American man as a threatening figure has been so institutionalized in American culture that most African American men perceive themselves as being part of a permanently marginalized population (Schlossberg, 1989), and to some extent they have deeply internalized that perception (Freire, 1993). So they come to the campus community at a psychological disadvantage in that they often perceive themselves as "less than" the others they meet. Thus, some of the energy necessary to succeed academically is often directed at other pursuits, such as achieving "manhood" status among other

African American men on the campus and achieving status with African American females. One example of this status-seeking behavior is the amount of time that African American males typically devote to intramural sports competition on campus. This is a culturally acceptable way to demonstrate prowess, ability, and status both in the African American community and, ironically, to non-African Americans as well. Unfortunately, when the time devoted to sports interferes with academic achievement, the ultimate impact on matriculation can be ruinous. For those African American men who come from a high school background in which academic success was devalued, the problem of devoting adequate time to studies is exacerbated. Ways to promote African American male students' academic success are examined in Chapter Two. Other chapters in this book also address ways to increase their involvement in a variety of extracurricular activities and to enhance the opportunities for leadership roles and the positive traits that develop from such endeavors. I encourage you to explore those topics in their respective chapters.

Exploring Spirituality

One additional characteristic of African American men that has not yet been mentioned here is also explored in greater detail later in this book—the topic of spirituality (see Chapter Six). Although it is a relatively new area of interest among student affairs professionals on campuses that are not religiously affiliated, we are beginning to recognize that to understand more fully the maturation of all college students (including African American men), we must acknowledge the impact of spiritual development on them. In attempting to understand the cultural complexity of African American college men, it is helpful to take note of their spiritual inclinations, their faith development, and their involvement in religious activities and organizations—although these three are definitely not synonymous. A number of researchers have begun exploring the spiritual nature of college students in general (Bryant, Choi, & Yasuno, 2003; Love, 2002; Watt, 2003), and several others have examined spirituality as it pertains to various aspects of African American students' lives, such as identity development (Stewart,

2002) and coping skills (Constantine, Wilton, Gainor, & Lewis, 2002). In an article describing the psychosocial development of African American college students, McEwen, Roper, Bryant, & Langa (1990) identified spirituality as one of nine important factors related to developmental tasks of African American college students that "either have not been addressed adequately in the psychological theories or need to be considered in more complex ways" (p. 430). Adding to these facts about increasing spirituality in the lives of African American college students, the influence of the church in the African American community provides more than enough incentive for us to explore how today's college administrators can use knowledge about African American men's spirituality and faith development to enhance the quality of their matriculation experience.

Affecting Graduation

To conclude this discussion of direct or indirect interventions by the institution and its administrators, the third approach is to establish mechanisms that actually can effectively enhance the successful matriculation and graduation of African American men. These efforts will differ greatly from institution to institution, depending on a number of variables, including the nature of the African American male population and its relation to other student populations, particularly African American females. One key element of this effort is to launch an overt examination of what factors contribute to degree completion for African American men on any particular campus. Studies like the one conducted by Hamilton (2005) at several schools in southern California demonstrate how such assessments can be fruitful. The character of such efforts will also depend on the resources available—on the campus and in the surrounding community—and on the desired outcomes for helping African American men: impacting the social climate, enhancing the academic environment, increasing leadership opportunities, reducing incidences of racism and prejudice, or all of these. It is hoped that the material presented elsewhere in this book, particularly the examples of viable programs in Part Two, will be helpful in achieving this desired outcome.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has begun the discussion of African American men in college by examining some of the demographic data of that group. First, we looked at the numbers and percentages of African American men in the U.S. population and made some comparisons with the male segment of other racial/ethnic groups. We have seen that, not surprisingly, African American men often demonstrate less favorable social conditions when compared to White males. To cite just a few more examples, according to Bureau of Justice statistics in 2001, 16.6 percent of all U.S. adult Black males had been incarcerated at least once, compared to 4.9 percent of White men (Wilson, 2003). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HSS) reports that in 1998, the age-adjusted rate of death from prostate cancer for African American men was 48.7 per 100,000, compared with a rate of 19.6 per 100,000 for White males (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002). HSS also has reported that in 1997–98, the death rate by homicide for young African American men (age 19 years or younger) was 23.8 per 100,000, compared to a rate of 3.8 per 100,000 for the comparable White group (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003).

This chapter has also drawn attention to the disproportion of African American men and women in most colleges. Women represent about 51 percent of the total U.S. population, and although the general ratio of men to women in college is 43.9 percent to 56.1 percent, African Americans have the most skewed ratio of all the racial/ethnic groups—36.7 percent men to 63.3 percent women (*Chronicle of Higher Education,* 2005). This imbalance has a number of identifiable impacts. Perhaps the most apparent is the effect on the socialization of African American men and women on the campus. Dating patterns between African American men and women and between African Americans and partners from other racial/ethnic groups are significantly affected by the ratio of men to women in the campus community (Foston, 2004). Moreover, the social experiences on the campus can impact the attitudes that these students, particularly the women, take with them as they leave the campus and develop social relationships in

their post-college lives—attitudes that may have been permanently altered in response to the reduced availability of potential African American partners (Porter & Bronzaft, 1995).

This chapter has also introduced what may be considered a central premise for the discussion in the subsequent chapters of this book that address the needs of African American college men—the fact that African American men and women are very different in some ways, with discernible differences in perceptions and behaviors (Cuyjet, 1997). Admittedly, some of the characteristics of African American male students are shared with other students—commonalities for the Black community shared with African American women, for example, or typical male behaviors shared with White men—and readers will no doubt observe this as they proceed to explore the material presented by these authors. Yet readers are also encouraged to recognize that African American men and women are different in a number of ways. Although a particular effort to assist all African American students (perhaps even all underrepresented minority students) may have a positive effect across the entire population, student affairs professionals need to be open to the possibility that the same intervention may have a dramatically different impact on each gender group and that, in some cases, entirely different actions are needed.

A number of specific interventions have been proposed here. The first action is to endeavor to learn the cultural characteristics of African American men. Paradoxically, the first lesson in this effort is to recognize that although there are indeed some characteristics that most African American men may share, there are others that are affected by external sociological and psychological factors, such that each man we encounter is ultimately, uniquely individual. Probably the best advice offered in this chapter is to make the conscious effort to examine the African American male students on a particular campus or set of similar campuses to discover which specific factors contribute to degree completion and which detract from it. Ideally, the material presented in this book will provide provocative ideas on how to conduct such an assessment and how to use the results to make a positive impact on this particularly important population of African American men.

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