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Reviewed, CEJ, Brochure
Jf*

Professor George Gerbner
Temple University
Department of BTMN, Room 6, D
Annenberg Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19122

Dear Professor Gerbner:

I am writing in response to the Sun magazine's interview with you. In this interview you discussed your organization, Cultural Indicators Project. I am most interested in finding out about Cultural Indicators and how I can contribute to it.

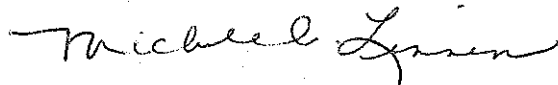
As a Superior Court of the District of Colombia social worker who works in the child abuse unit, I am most interested in working with other individuals who are appalled not only by the violence in American culture but the tolerance level of it by the collective society. Additionally, I meet monthly with other people who, in their professional work, also deal in the subject of violence. Your project may be of interest to them and therefore at our next working group on children and trauma, I will share your interview with them.

Any material that you have can be forwarded to the above address. My telephone number is 202.244.3761. Because I am an emerging freelance writer and photojournalist, I would be most interested in collaborating with others to write OP-ED and other related articles that will contribute to conscious-raising and educating about the spiritual, psychological, cultural, and social cost created by violence and aggression.

Enclosed is a copy of my paper that I presented in Bangkok in November, 1997, at the International Federation of Social Workers. If you are ever in Washington, D.C., I would like to extend an invitation for coffee and discussion.

Thank you for your assistance, and a healthy and joyful new year.

Warmest regards,



Michele A. Linnen, MSW, LGSW

enclosure

Inner-City African American Men:
Mirroring 21st-Century Monopoly Capitalism--
A Warning to Other Nations?

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District of Columbia Government
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Inner-City African American Men:
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A Warning to Other Nations?

ABSTRACT

Racism or lack of will have been considered by many policymakers, social service professionals, and mainstream society as explanation for antisocial behavior among many inner-city, African American men. Whereas racism and self-determination are certainly important factors to consider, such an approach toward understanding this population is limited in scope. A more complete understanding of the problem may be attained by considering core values, beliefs, and myths sacred to U.S. culture including, laissez-faire capitalism, individualism, and violence. An understanding of inner-city, American life is needed not only by mainstream America but also by citizens and governments of other nations affected by economic globalization. Inner-city African American men can be seen as "the canary in the coal mine" in the world of globalization and therefore, can instruct those concerned about the impact of postmodern capitalism on individuals, families, and societies. Social work practitioners, policymakers, and human rights advocates can study one of America's most vulnerable populations for a view into a 21-century under unchecked consumer capitalism.

Background

Over the past several years, Americans have become more concerned about social breakdown, as is evident in public debate on crime and increased youth violence. Across the United States, local news broadcasts in metropolitan and rural areas alike have too often become mere crime reports. Those depicted on nightly newscasts as engaging in antisocial and criminal behavior will have an enormous influence on how, as a society, we define the crime problem, whose problem it is, and why the problem exists.

Throughout Puritan and Anglo-American history, "the other" (Cushman, 1995) has been a dominant theme in shaping attitudes and beliefs. The other has included North American Indians, African Americans, Irish, Catholics, Mexicans, Jews, Quakers, Asians, and Communists. Nightly news broadcasts, the medium most used by Americans for information, in their crime coverage contribute to perpetuating the "otherness" of African Americans, especially inner-city African American men. Violence and other antisocial behavior is not an African American problem; it is an American one. For those in mainstream America (i.e., white America) who believe that media depiction of inner-city African American men is the antithesis of America's core values and beliefs (Derber, 1996; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Lipset, 1996), this paper challenges such simplistic sentiments.

This paper considers characteristics noted by de Tocqueville and other observers of American culture (Bullah, 1986; R. Frank, 1994; Mestrovic, 1993; Newbrough, 1992) and how, in addition to racism and economic inequality, inner-city African American men are adversely affected by core American values that nurture and encourage antisocial behavior. As a consequence of expanding democratization (individual and group rights), technology (mass communication), and market capitalism (consumerism), family, civic, and spiritual life are increasingly threatened and have less influence in moderating human traits of greed, aggression, and ego.

Today, in the de Tocqueville tradition, inner-city, African American men can also serve as a mirror into American values, beliefs, and myths. And with a better appreciation of these values and beliefs, nations can benefit from recognizing their influence on America's model of capitalism, aggressively marketed globally and increasingly embraced abroad as a panacea to social ills, especially unemployment. The connection between America's economic model and core values and beliefs behind the model are explored.

de Tocqueville's American Individualism

America's protection of individual rights and private property date back to the founding of Anglo-American society. Since the signing of the Constitution, individual and property rights were expanded to economically less privileged men, women, and individuals of African descent. Exaggerated aggression and violence has been used throughout U.S. history to guard these values (H.D. Graham and Gurr, 1979).

Initially, de Tocqueville found America's individualism admirable, but over time he considered it cause for alarm. He believed that it was different from the "ego" of Europe's aristocratic societies yet warned that with "the growth of democratic individualism," a price was paid (Bellah, 1995). For de Tocqueville (1835/1969), under democratic individualism,

There are more and more people who, though neither rich nor powerful enough to have much hold over others, have gained or kept enough wealth and enough understanding to look after their own needs. Such folk owe no man anything and hardly expect anything from anybody. They form the habit of thinking of themselves in isolation and imagine that their whole destiny is in their hands...and never imagining that they could ever need another's help again, they have no inhibition about showing that they care for nobody but themselves. (p. 508)

Sandel (1997) reminded us that the current debate about the privatization of the nation's Social Security system should not come as a surprise to those well-versed in their U.S. history. Sandel suggested that Roosevelt in his creation of the Social Security Act of 1935 and other social programs, was not promoting a sense of communal obligation but was concerned with aiding the individual's pursuit of needs and desires.

Two decades later, President Johnson echoed President Roosevelt's sentiments in his nomination address by stating, "Americans tonight are freer to live as they want to live, to pursue their ambitions, to meet their desires...than at any time in all of our glorious history" (Sandler, 1997, p.27). These so-called progressive leaders felt obliged to assure many Americans and politicians that such social programs would not threaten individual freedom through the taxing of individual wealth, a sentiment expressed by President Johnson's opponent, Barry Goldwater: "How can a man be truly free...if the fruits of his labor are not his to dispose of, but are treated, instead, as a part of a common pool of public wealth?" (Sandler, 1997, p. 27).

American individualism (Bellah, 1985; Cushman, 1995; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Lipset, 1996; Miller, Bersoff & Harwood, 1990) then, creates a disturbing paradox. Whereas democratic individualism allows for the development of individual talents, it also promotes a belief that the development, or nondevelopment, of the individual occurs in a vacuum, without societal involvement. And whether one flourishes or fails therefore the society can neither claim credit for individual victories nor be held accountable in times of individual failure.

America's sacred belief in individual rights over the rights of society and the pursuit of happiness through the obtainment of personal property have escalated since de Tocqueville (1835/1969) wrote Democracy in America, and especially since post World War II. Modern technology further encourages the myth of individual autonomy, and sophisticated marketing reinforces the American dream of individual freedom through material wealth to the "haves" and "have nots" alike. To those who have not achieved the rewards of material freedom, increased feelings of inadequacy, alienation, and too often desperation frequently occur (Anderson, 1994; Hirschberg, 1996; Klein, 1996; Walinsky, 1995; Wilson, 1996). To the haves, an "it's not enough" mentality encourages a perpetual pursuit of more (Algren, 1996; Edmundson 1997; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Minor, 1993; Spayd, 1996), or what Spayd (1996) referred to as "the drudgery of conspicuous consumption" (p. C2).

American Individualism

Studies on individualism (Dean, 1994; Felton & Shinn, 1992; Guisinger & Blatt, 1994; Hartman 1995; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Miller, Bersoff, & Harwood, 1990; Parr, Bradley, & Bingi, 1992; Schneiderman, 1979) inquire into concepts related to individualism and the impact of individualism on individuals, families, and society. Cross-cultural comparisons between individualistic America and communal-oriented societies was considered by D.J. Frank, et al. (1995), Markus and Kitayama (1991), Miller, et al. (1990), Parr, et al. (1992), and Schneiderman (1979). Dean (1994) and Glick (1977) examined the role of social work and concepts of individualism. Whereas each study approaches the inquiry from different reference points, common conclusions can be reached, including the following: Those societies modeled on a more collective orientation, demonstrated higher levels of individual social responsibility. For example, Miller et al. (1990) concluded that there is a link between individual moral reasoning and social responsibility and how this impacts Americans: "The tendency for the personal-moral category to be applied exclusively by Americans appears to reflect America's ambivalent attitudes toward social responsibilities. Although maintaining that it is highly desirable to fulfill social

responsibilities, Americans...also tend to experience such responsibilities as in conflict with individual freedom of choice" (p. 45).

Markus and Kitayama's (1991) study on the concept of self echoes a parallel to Miller et al.'s (1990) study. Markus and Kitayama compared Asian cultures to Western culture and specifically American society. Two idioms highlighted the author's study of cultural values and the concept of self: "In America, 'the squeaky wheel gets the grease' [and in] Japan, 'the nail that stands out gets pounded' (Markus and Kitayama, 1991, p. 224). The authors stated that America's individualism does not value and therefore does not nurture "overt connectedness" but rather encourages "attending to the self" (p. 224) and "with an independent construal of the self, others are less centrally implicated in one's current self-definition identity [and] is in contrast to Asian cultures "where one belongs with respect to others and assumes a receptive stance toward these others" (p. 246).

Glick (1977), Guisinger and Blatt (1994), Kasser and Ryan (1996), and Schneiderman (1979) suggested that rewarding individualism and devaluing family and other social institutions may offer individual freedom, but it increases social isolation and diminishes social institutions' influence over the individual. Glick (1977) stated that "this increasingly transitory quest for intimacy free of social bonds is destroying family life and fosters narcissism" (p. 580). Guisinger and Blatt (1994) recommended a model more balanced in power between the individual and society that avoids "excesses of narcissistic self-absorption on the one hand and mass compliance on the other" (p. 110). Clearly, trends in contemporary American life do not indicate a leaning in this direction.

American Violence and African American Men

The increase in violence in inner-city culture is part of a continuum of violence in the American experience. However, contrary to conventional thinking that violence is the problem, three American values—rugged individualism, the glorification of competition, and a high value based on personal wealth—may be seen as contributing factors to American violence (Courtwright, 1996; Cushman, 1995; Derber, 1996; Graham & Gurr, 1979; Guisinger & Blatt, 1994; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Miedzian, 1991; Rose, 1994). These American characteristics, with subthemes including narcissism, antiauthoritism, and hypermasculinity overlap and reinforce one another (Cushman, 1995; Derber, 1996; Emmons, 1987; S. Graham & Hudley, 1994; H.D. Graham & Gurr 1979; Lawler, Armstead & Patton, 1991; Lipset, 1996; Mestrovic, 1993; Ryckman,

Thornton, & Butler, 1994; Ucko, 1994).

The "endangered African American male" population has received significant consideration when issues related to violence and crime are discussed (Adelman, 1996; Eisler & Blalock, 1991; A.C. Harris, 1994; I. Harris, Torres & Allender, 1994; S.M. Harris, 1995; Hunter & Davis, 1992; Klein, 1996; Pierce & Singleton, 1995; Roberts, 1994; Ward, 1995; Watts, 1993; Ucko, 1994). Pierce and Singleton (1995), in their study to understand and treat African American violent behavior, stated:

Media attention keeps violent behavior in everyone's thoughts and presents an image throughout the world of the United States as a violent society...[and] when violence is portrayed more often than not a young African American male is portrayed, committing a violent crime against a White victim because of course, the perpetrator is naturally violent.(p. 444)

Rose (1994) referred to the repetition of inner-city black men portrayal in the media as the "demonization" of the African American male population. She commented:

[The] white American public, many of whom only tangentially know any young black men personally, has been inundated with images of young black men who appear fully invested in a life of violent crime, who have participated in drug-related gang shoot-outs and other actions of violence for "no apparent reason." This last representation is crucial to the fear that current crime reporting encourages and is crucial as well to the work of demonizing. Such people are violent for no apparent reason; they are not like us. (p. 153)

Anderson (1994), in his expose on inner-city culture in The Atlantic Monthly argued, "of all the problems besetting the poor inner-city black community, none is more pressing than that of interpersonal violence and aggression" (p. 81). Blake and Darling (1994) added that it is not only interpersonal violence but intrapersonal as well. Their study highlights the fact that African American men die younger than their white male counterparts as a consequence of suicide and drug abuse (p. 403). In his extensive study on violence and the social world of African American men, Oliver (1994) stated that "no segment of the black community is immune to personal and social devastation associated with black-on-black violence" (p. 1).

Special scrutiny is not surprising not only when considering America's historical institutionalized racism but also because African Americans constitute only 12% of the U.S. population. This

population disproportionately represents a higher percentage of crime involvement, as both perpetrators and victims of crime, what the media and activists refer to as black-on-black crime (S.M. Harris, 1995; Oliver, 1994; Van Soest & Bryant, 1995; Ward, 1995). Moreover, according to the American Psychological Association's (1993) Summary Report, Violence & Youth: Psychology's Response, "since 1978, homicide has been the leading cause of death for African-American males between the ages of 15 and 24. Their homicide rates are five to eight times as high as for white males the same age" (p. 45).

Several empirical and exploratory studies confirm what the casual observation tells us, that the male population of any society is more vulnerable to engaging in aggressive, violent behavior (Courtwright, 1996; Gilligan, 1996; S. Graham & Hudley, 1994; S.M. Harris, 1995; Miedzian, 1991; Oliver, 1994; Watts, 1993). Miedzian (1991) argued that male aggression is biologically based. She stated, "it may turn out that an important part of the biological base of male violence boils down to a lower threshold for frustration, greater irritability and impulsiveness, and a tendency to rough-and-tumble" (p. 48). Miedzian (1991) argued that cultural attitudes about violence will greatly affect the degree and level of violence exhibited by a society's male population. The aforementioned authors also agree that American society's high tolerance for violence contributes to its having one of the highest crime and murder rates in the world.

The report on youth and violence by the American Psychological Association (1993) echoes Miedzian's (1991) study:

Violence is woven into the cultural fabric of American society....Though most Americans abhor it in their communities, homes, and schools, [the] country has the highest rate of interpersonal violence of any industrialized country. Our folk heroes and [film] images...often glorify interpersonal violence on an individual level....Although few Americans would claim to enjoy or encourage violence, many, at the very minimum, passively condone aggression and violence. (pp. 22-23)

According to Van Soest and Bryant (1995), mainstream Americans are in denial with regard to the pathological level of violence in their society:

Violence is more deeply embedded in U.S. culture than this society wants to believe; it is the foundation of many revered ideals and institutions. Although there is growing anxiety about crime and urban unrest, other forms of violence go unchallenged and are even considered legitimate and acceptable. (p. 549)

Van Soest and Bryant (1995, p.550) contend that as a consequence of the narrow definition of violence to which most American's subscribe, many violent attitudes and behaviors go unacknowledged, especially those forms of violence that are institutionalized. More often than not violence is presented to the American public as only the sort of violence perpetuated by inner-city, African American youths, reinforcing the stereotype that it is their epidemic, not an American epidemic (p. 550).

In their study, Van Soest & Bryant (1995) highlighted the importance of becoming educated on the "multilevel nature of violence" in the general [American] culture starting at the individual level, which includes acts harmful to people or property. The second level is the institutional level which includes "harmful actions by institutions against individuals such as prisons, mental institutions, welfare bureaucracies, government bodies, schools, the military" (p. 551) and other entities that use punitive measures to obtain their ends. The last level they identified as "structural-cultural":

The base of the triangle is a firmly embedded foundation containing the normative and ideological roots of violence that undergird and give rise to the institutional and individual levels. The structure of social reality, conventional values, and everyday social relations form a collective way of thinking, which in the United States is white supremacy and patriarchy, that becomes part of both individual and societal psyches. (p.551)

Whereas Miedzian (1991) and Van Soest and Bryant (1995) have taken a feminist perspective, challenging America's patriarchal system, which condones and nurtures dominance and violence, other studies have expanded on the Euro-American patriarchy explanation for America's violence by considering Afrocentric/Euro-American differences.

Non-white groups have been underevaluated in human behavior research (Blake & Darling, 1994; I. Harris et al., 1994). However, over the past three decades as a consequence of the civil rights movements in the 1960s and 1970s and a more recent growing interest in Afrocentrism, a body of knowledge on nonwhite ethnicities has come forth. Studies concerning African American men have included explorations into gender and social roles (I. Harris et al., 1994), culture and violence (Banks & Juni, 1991; S. Graham & Hudley, 1994; Pierce & Singleton, 1995; Ucko, 1994), strengths perspective and model community projects (Jagers & Mock, 1995; Roberts, 1994; Watts, 1993; Williams and Wright, 1992; Hurd, Moore, & Rogers, 1995; Wade, 1994; Ward, 1995), and counseling (S.M. Harris, 1995). Although these studies have approached African American men from different perspectives, common subthemes

about aggression, manhood, and differences in African and European cultural have been addressed.

I. Harris et al. (1994) explored dominant norms of American masculinity and their influence on African American men to determine whether there existed any significant differences between how African American and Euro-American men perceived masculinity. Some of the social messages presented in the questionnaire that convey culturally acceptable attributes for masculinity included "adventurer," "breadwinner," "money," "tough guy," and "stoic[ism]." The results of I. Harris et al.'s study (1994) countered their hypothesis that African American men would have different views of masculinity. In fact, the results indicated that views between the two populations were very similar and that only among older African American men was there deviation from dominant American norms for masculinity (p. 715).

America is unique among former British colonies to have so violently severed ties with the homeland in the name of individualistic and economic autonomy, and slavery served an important role in reaching that end (Graham & Gurr, 1979). Private property ownership included not only land, but women and slaves. Laws were created to protect white men's property. According to Ucko (1994), after the Emancipation Proclamation was written many African American men in time adopted many of the attitudes about individual ownership. Often, adaptation was at the expense of African American women. Ucko's study indicates that the African American women lost much of their matrilineal power and influence as a direct consequence of African American men's internalizing the dominant male value system, including sexual domination. Given the lower economic power of African American men, exaggerated dominance as compensation may explain the higher level of domestic violence in African American families (Ucko, 1994, p.200).

Kasser & Ryan (1996) and Pierce and Singleton (1995) also support the explanation of exaggerated aggression and violence on the part of many disenfranchised, African American men. Pierce and Singleton (1995) poignantly stated: "African-American youths are acutely aware of...[the] contradictions in American society and have learned that they must improvise if they are to achieve their share of the American dream" (p. 447).

Afrocentric Approach to Violence: A Solution?

Community programs that attempt to challenge dominant gender roles among disenfranchised African American young men attempt to increase Afrocentric values, healthy manhood development, and community and family networks (Hurd, et al., 1995; Jagers & Mock, 1995; Ward, 1995; Watts, 1993; Williams & Wright, 1992). The goal

of these programs is to promote for African American men self-esteem, specifically the Afrocentric communal sense of self as opposed to the mainstream value of social support for individualistic pursuits and violence prevention. However good the intentions, program success is questionable, as suggested by Watts (1993) and Williams and Wright (1992). Watts (1993) concluded:

In Afrocentric programs, culture is explicit and all-encompassing. Yet, as valuable as cultural development is, an inordinate emphasis on *psychic* cultural development may not necessarily promote *social* change and development. The question, from a social science perspective, is the relationship between cultural socialization and desired outcomes in school, home, community, and mental health. If there is a strong positive relationship, a central role for culture in intervention may be in order. As yet, we have few data on this grand hypothesis (pp. 355-356).

Not only is there little data that support positive outcomes of such programs and initiatives, but growing crime and violence in inner-city culture support Watts's position.

Williams and Wright (1992, p.33) expressed a similar concern about the potential lack of social change by applying the Afrocentric approach to aiding African American families. They advised social workers who work with the African American community to help clients in structuring the kinds of activities "that will bear fruit" by helping them to identify social problems affecting a number of people on the local, state, or national levels.

Williams and Wright (1992) further argued about the importance of addressing macro issues and the need to support national efforts to promote positive social changes that create and sustain viable African American communities. However, the authors appear to come close to perpetuating the typical fragmented, ethnic-group-oriented approach to collective social ills by recommending that African American communities follow the lead of other previously disenfranchised groups that, "as other groups have impressively advanced their own self interests...African Americans need to exercise this right within the context of their own agenda" (p. 34).

Promoting Afrocentric philosophies as a means to reducing antisocial behavior among inner-city African American men in a vacuum discourages the potential for *collective* responsibility and radical challenging of mainstream America's relationship with socially sanctioned crime, violence and obsession with personal material gain that fuels them. In light of the historical atrocities perpetuated against African Americans throughout Euro-

American history, such a narrow approach will offer at best only, temporary solutions. And with the daily bombardment through media and advertising centering on material wealth as the primary definition a person's worth (Algren, 1996; Derber, 1996; Glick, 1977; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Spayd, 1996), an ethnic group approach to reducing crime and violence that often serves as a means to that end can be compared to a "David and Goliath" scenario.

Market Economics in America's Inner-City

Recent press coverage (Britt, 1997; Hirschberg, 1996; King, 1997) highlight the competitive world of consumer marketing to the young and poor and, how few in contemporary American society are immune from its grasp. According to Kasser and Ryan (1996), "young adults from disadvantaged socioeconomic circumstances were especially likely to emphasize the attainment of wealth among their values" (p.285).

King (1997) confronted "smiling, well-groomed, businesslike exploiters who come across as the embodiment of propriety and good taste, but leave a trail of deterioration in their wake as harmful as the distress created by coarse, undisciplined small time hustlers" (p. A23) who market a new gin for the inner-city African American man. According to King (1997), "the goal [of the test market] is openly spelled out in the plan: "Capture share of the gin category in urban, inner-city markets where gin accounts for more than 1/4 of all spirits consume" (p. A23). King concluded his article by asking, "Do the producers of that kind of booze have the unmitigated gall to sit in their pristine corporate offices promoting bottled instant gratification, only to repair at day's end to their nice comfortable communities where they gather around the dinner table to deplore family instability and immorality in the inner-city?" (p.A23).

In her newspaper column, Britt (1997) wrote about a reader's complaint about the pressure she feels from society's brash consumer culture and how she became absorbed by it on a recent trip to a local mall to buy gym shoes for her teenager, shortly after Nike launched a campaign to promote a new shoe. Unfortunately, what started out as a simple trip to a suburban mall, ended with the mother arguing with another customer over who would purchase the last size 11 Nike shoe, Jumpman Pro. Britt (1997) recalled the line, "Show me the money!" from the film, "Jerry Maguire" and concluded: "Everyone wants to be shown the money, or at least to show off what it can buy. Our creeping, creepy obsession with having the right stuff snuck up so silently, no one remembers when we fell into its clutches, though that's where we are" (p. B6).

Another example of the inner-city African American men caught

up in the consumer marketers' world is the "godfather of gangsta rap," Surge Knight. In a recent interview with Knight, Hirschberg (1996) noted that Knight "has embraced the intoxicating toughness of...maleness, the monied glamour, the us-against-them sense of power" (p. 26). American values--including private property; the affirmation of social acceptance through materialism; and the autonomous male identity needing neither the "domesticating" society nor women--(Ames, 1992; Konigsberg, 1995)--can be heard throughout Knight's internalization of mainstream America values: man against "taming society, and the too often violent language of modern American life." Knight continued,

Beat me out of my money and I'll kick your drawers up your behind. Treat me fair and I'll treat you fair. I stand up for my rights....You can walk around and kiss everyone's behind and then you worry, or you be a man and you stand up. You make sure your people are successful and people gonna talk about you. (p. 26-29)

And how is Knight's success defined? Kasser and Ryan (1996, pp.280-281) concluded that Extrinsic goals, as stated by Knight, such as "financial success (money); social recognition (fame); and an appealing appearance (image)" are typical representation of having achieved the American dream. Such achievement is often at the expense of intrinsic goals including, "affiliation (relatedness), community feeling (helpfulness), physical fitness (health), and self-acceptance (growth).

Market Economics: Beyond Inner-City America

Recent news coverage on rap music and the industry's star musicians (Hirschberg, 1996) support Derber's (1996) argument that the competitive goal of achieving more material wealth and public recognition has permeated all sectors of our society, not just the inner city. Derber (1996) refers to this accelerated pursuit for more as the "wilding of America." According to Derber (1996), wilding falls under three types: economic ("uninhibited pursuit of money...at the expense of others"); political ("abuse of political power to benefit one's self or group"); and social ("personal or family acts of violence") (Derber, 1996, p.8). Derber (1996) clarifies that not all self-interested acts fall under wilding behavior. Rather,

Wilding is individualism run amok, and the wilding epidemic is the face of America's individualistic culture in an advanced state of disrepair. Individualistic culture promotes the freedom of the individual and in its healthy form nurtures human development and individual rights. In its degraded form, it becomes a license for unrestrained and

sociopathic self-interest" (pp. 8-9).

By considering a scenario in a crime-ridden community and a competitive business culture, Derber (1996) highlighted the expanding influence of wilding,

One dangerous criminal on a block can make a community wild, inducing aggression, violence, and a fortress mentality among peaceable neighbors. A particularly competitive salesperson or account executive can transform an entire office into a jungle, because those who do not follow suit and sharpen their own swords may be left sundered in the dust. The new ethos rewards the wilder and penalizes those clinging to civil behavior. (p. 10)

Corporate and inner-city America met recently at the negotiating table when Time Warner created a partnership with Death Row and, according to Hirschberg (1996), the chair of Warner Music Group responded to public concerns about his company's contributing to social deterioration of the black community and the violent, antifemale messages that many of the rap music conveys, by stating, "I don't think [my decision to sign on with the agreement] is hypocritical. In a volatile atmosphere we made a decision. Owning the publishing was about Time Warner making money, not about what we put in front of our children" (p. 30).

Minor (1993) "identified the social position of youth, the private market relations, and poverty and inequality as three forces that influence juvenile delinquency" (p. 59). He argued "that all three forces evolved together as part of the transformation of the political economy from laissez-faire to monopoly or late capitalism [and]...have acted collectively to weaken informal mechanisms of social control" (Minor, 1993, p. 60). Consequently, across social institutions, interpersonal relations [have grown] increasingly oriented to individualistic commodity consumption" (pp.66-67).

According to Minor (1993), the increase in juvenile delinquency can be attributed to the increase influence of the market economy. For example, Minor poignantly noted that, "when interaction between youths and parents becomes more oriented toward objectives of self-gain and commodity consumption than toward intimacy and collective family welfare, the family's ability to exert informal control diminishes" (Minor, 1996, p.67). This will most immediately impact the economically disadvantaged where the chasm is greatest between their economically impoverished daily life and the material good life marketed by the consumer culture through aggressive advertising (Derber, 1996; Klein, 1996; Minor 1993). Frequently, the chasm is filled by crime and violence by inner-city African American men to obtain the

American dream and social acceptance.

Conclusion: Lessons from American Culture & Values

Whereas inner-city African American men may be the population that is most associated with antisocial behavior, this paper argues that individualistic wilding in contemporary America life knows no socioeconomic or racial boundary. (Adelman, 1996; Derber, 1996; Edmundson, 1997; Kaminer, 1994; Klein, 1996; Lefkowitz, 1997; Walinsky, 1995). Columnists King (1997) and Britt (1997) have informed concerned citizens and community social advocates about the aggressive pushing of material culture on American youth. For any community or parent to shield children from the promotion of self-oriented, instant gratification, and the "inalienable right" to the pursuit of material happiness, is a burden to the most conscientious community or adult. For inner-city families with additional social burdens such as racism and poverty, mainstream America's demands are both inhumane and hypocritical. The pressure to conform to social norms of individualism, competitiveness, and self-worth based primarily on material gain is contributing to individual and civic breakdown across the American landscape (Algren, 1996; Courtwright, 1996; Cushman, 1995; Derber, 1996; Edmundson, 1997; Fawcett & Thomas, 1982; Lefkowitz, 1997; Minor, 1993).

The "pursuit of happiness" is becoming a costly goal not only for disenfranchised African American men but increasingly for mainstream America as consumer capitalism dominates contemporary American life (Minor, 1993). What makes such forces especially dangerous for American society is: the absence of a "communal obligation" philosophy (Sandel, 1997); the alienation of American life due to its rootless history and mobile lifestyle (Algren, 1996; R. Frank, 1994); the exaggerated value of personal wealth to achieve social credibility (Algren, 1996; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Klein, 1996; Kurth, 1997), and the Protestant work ethic that sacrifices the development and nurturing of intimate relationships (Cushman, 1995; Derber, 1996; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Additionally, a society whose citizens have a fragile, historical sense of connectedness and only human-made institutions and laws as the binding heritage will be even more vulnerable to external forces for self-definition and worth (Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

This paper suggests that what at face value appears to be antisocial behavior and unAmerican values expressed by many inner-city African American men are merely exaggerated internalization and application of American values, beliefs and myths. Mainstream society, impatient with violence used by too many inner-city African American men to obtain material possession, continues to deny that their behavior merely reflects

the internalization of these sacred values.

The increase in antisocial attitudes and aggressive behavior, such as aggressive driving and increase in drug use and crime committed among economically well-off individuals in America (Adelman, 1996; Derber, 1996; Klein, 1996; Kaminer, 1994; Lefkowitz, 1997), indicates that more than economic deprivation or racism, as many academics and advocates for the poor believe, is at the root of contemporary American social ills (Wilson, 1996). As long as crime and violence is defined as the problem and not the symptom collective American values that nurture and reward the use of antisocial behavior as a means to attaining and maintaining the American dream will go unchallenged and thereby contribute to the continuation of America's most self-destructive myths.

And as the debate on the impact of a market economy on the individuals, families, and communities continues, America's own experience with a market economy can offer insight to its strengths and weaknesses and how it may impact ordinary people. With this in mind it would pay to consider the observation by another "student" of American, Robert Frank. In his introductory remarks in, *The Photographing of America*: (1994) the celebrated photographer wrote, "What I have in mind, then, is observation and record of what one naturalized American finds to see in the United States that signifies the kind of civilization born here and spreading else" (p. 18).

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