The 1997 Princeton Lectures on Youth, Church, and Culture
"At-Risk Youth, At-Risk Church: What Jesus Christ and American Teenagers are Saying to the Mainline Church"

Introduction

Webster's has two meanings for the term "mainline." The one teenagers know is the practice of injecting narcotics directly into the bloodstream to get a quick high. The second definition means the principle route a train takes to reach its destination.

Pick your metaphor. The term "mainline church" was coined when trains, like churches, were a principal means of getting somewhere people wanted to go. Today, teenagers' understanding of "mainline" paints an ominous portrait of who we are as a church: once-able bodies who, after years of steady injections of American culture into our veins, have a dulled sense of who, what, and where we are.

We have reared a generation of teenagers to "just say no" to such behavior, and they're saying "no" to mainline Christianity in favor of visions of vitality elsewhere, many that endanger teenagers. According to a 1991 study released by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, one in four teenagers is "at risk." The church must work with others to create communities of health and hope for young people.

Young people are also making another point. Their exodus from our pews and programs is a form of "tough love" to our denominations, telling us to shape up, to be who we say we are, and to let Jesus be who we say He is - the Savior, even of the mainline church.

In our "I'm dysfunctional, you're dysfunctional" world, it is easy to settle for therapy when resurrection is at stake. Maybe being "at risk" as a church isn't bad if it calls us back to the authenticity young people expect, and the Gospel requires. Maybe mainline churches and teenagers have something in common: a need to be saved.

These assumptions unite the lectures in this volume. The lectures in these pages provide an outline of "what Jesus Christ and American teenagers are saying to the mainline church" from the perspectives of systematic theology, practical theology, sociology, education, and American religious history (and futurism).

These lectures point to a theological foundation for ministry with young people that views youth as part of the mission of Christ and not as objects to be "won" for the propagation of the church. We approach this direction with humility and hope. The future of the church, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer noted when he himself was only twenty-seven years old, depends not on

youth, but on Jesus Christ. Still, we are confident that young people are prophets in our midst, and that by attending to the "risk" that accompanies adolescence in 1997, we will be better prepared to take the risk that accompanies Christian faith in any era.

Godspeed,
Kenda Creasy Dean
Director, Institute for Youth Ministry
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WHAT JESUS CHRIST AND AFRICAN AMERICAN TEENAGERS ARE TELLING THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH

Albert G. Miller

It seems fairly clear to me that Jesus Christ and teenagers are telling the mainline churches the same thing: "Wake up!" In this lecture, I will speak out of my own tradition: the African American religious experience. This tradition has relevance to the larger American church because the African American community tends to experience major transitions within the culture before the larger society, which catches up later. Conversely, if something impacts the white community, then it generally has a great impact on the Black community, an observation that is reflected in the saying, "If the white community sneezes, the Black community has pneumonia!"

One of the best examples of the wake-up call to the African American church took place on May 14, 1992, at a wake service held in a small Black Baptist church in Mattapan, Massachusetts. The report of the incident in the *Boston Globe* conveys the flavor:

> A funeral service for a twenty-year-old Dorchester man shot to

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death at a party Saturday night ended abruptly in pandemonium last night when a group of youths entered the church and chased down one of the mourners, stabbing him nine times. A panic ensued inside Morning Star Baptist Church as more than 300 people who had gathered for the service ran for cover. Shots reportedly were fired both inside and outside the church.

Hundreds of friends and relatives had gathered at the church at 1257 Blue Hill Avenue, Mattapan, last night to say goodbye to Robert Odom. Odom was shot in the head Saturday as he danced at a party in a second-floor apartment on Westville Terrace, Dorchester. Witnesses at the party said Odom was the victim of a drive-by shooting by youths angry about not being allowed into the party.

About 8 p.m. last night, during the service for Odom, witnesses said a group of twelve to fourteen youths wearing black hoods entered the sanctuary and took seats in chairs that had been placed in the middle aisle to handle the overflow crowd. For a while, nothing happened. Later into the service, someone from the group yelled, "That's him," pointing to a young man seated in a front pew. The man took off running, and the group followed him, witnesses said. The group chased the mourner through the church and pounced on him before he got outside, witnesses said. The man managed to free himself and ran outside, but the group caught him again just outside the church and stabbed him. The victim received nine stab wounds, including one to the head. He was taken to Boston City Hospital, where he was being treated in the emergency room late last night....

Ministers and those in attendance called the violence a sacrilege and disgrace and called for the community to come together for change. "It was a desecration of a religious service," said the Rev. Borders. "This has to be the turning point for this community." The Rev. Eugene Rivers of the Azusa Christian Community Church in North Dorchester said he was concerned with the situation of a generation of Black males who are plagued by violence. **"If the church does not get into the street to recapture an entire generation of young Black males, the street will come violently into the church,"** Rivers said. He said the church leaders have been debating the problems of the inner cities and what role the church

should play. **"The church's failure to respond to the plight of the Black male in the underclass is responsible for this tragedy that took place tonight,"** Rivers said. **"The Black church has avoided this, and now it has been brought home with brutal clarity** [emphasis mine]."[1]

This 1992 incident makes it "brutally clear" that both Black youth and the Black church are at extreme risk. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, in their seminal study of the Black church titled *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, indicated that "among certain sectors of the Black community, **fissures** in the previous dominance of the Black church have developed, and important challenges and problems are emerging, especially among young people [emphasis mine]."[2] Given the above tragedy, Lincoln and Mamiya are mild in their appraisal of the relationship between certain segments of Black youth and many Black churches. Rather than fissures or small cracks, a more accurate description is the biblical metaphor "breach." The chasm between Black youth and the Black church is as wide as the Grand Canyon.

I am reminded of the Hebrew Bible passage, popularized by President Clinton in the past several months, that refers to a similar divide between God and his people. Isaiah 58:5-7 and 12 states,

> Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it for bowing one's head like a reed, And for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed? Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the Lord?

> Is this not the fast which I choose, To loosen the bonds of wickedness, To undo the bands of the yoke, And to let the oppressed go free, And break every yoke?

> Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry, And bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the naked, to cover him; And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

> And those from among you will rebuild the ancient ruins; You will raise up the age-old foundations; And you will be called the repairer of the breach, The restorer of the streets in which to dwell.[3]

These verses are part of a larger pericope in which the prophet Isaiah challenged Israel's understanding of ritual observances. Isaiah verified their complaint that God had not paid any attention to their fasts. Isaiah stated that the reason for God's non-responsiveness was that their ritual practices or worship experiences were "insincere and it [was] unaccompanied by any concern for the needy."[4] Once Israel was willing to step out of its safety zone and reach out to the poor of the community, God was willing to respond to their cry. Isaiah 58:7 stat-

ed the true meaning of the fast. When Israel no longer hid from its own relatives and repented for its sin of neglecting the poor, then Israel would become the rebuilder and healer of communities. Israel would become the repairer of the physical community and the healer of the broken relationship between Yahweh and Yahweh's people. The question for the church in the African American community is what is the nature of this modern breach?

Historically, the African American church has been the one institution in the Black community that provided both the spiritual and the social network for support of families and individuals. Many churches were family-based. Networks of families made up the church and provided an extended family system. From the pre-Civil War slavery experience to the development of more secularly oriented early-twentieth-century institutions, such as the NAACP and the Urban League, to the modern industrial age, the church provided the spiritual and moral adhesive to hold together the Black community. But with the demise of the American modern industrial age, the end of the Civil Rights movement, and the rise of a more permanent Black underclass, a more secular generation has emerged that does not put its faith in the church. This generation, a significant number of whom are poor young people, did not benefit from the gains of the Civil Rights movement. They developed a sense of despair that may be unequaled in the Black community's history.

William Julius Wilson explicated these changes in his 1987 ground-breaking work, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*. By the end of the Civil Rights movement in the early 1970s, a complex nexus of several social and economic factors emerged that radically altered the character of many urban economies and reshaped the look of many communities. Foremost was the disappearance of jobs from many major American cities, especially in the north, with the shift of the industrial and manufacturing base to the southwestern United States and to other countries. These industries had provided stable jobs for a significant number of minimally educated Black people. For example, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Detroit, which by 1982 accounted for one-fourth of the nation's urban poor, "lost more than a million jobs in manufacturing, wholesale, and retail enterprises between 1967 and 1976 alone."[5] By 1987, these cities lost more than half of their manufacturing jobs.[6] "By 1988, one in four Black children lived below **half** the poverty level [emphasis mine]."[7] As industries relocated, Wilson argued, middle and working class Blacks made an exodus from urban communities to the suburbs as various Civil Rights organizations obliterated housing and educational barriers. This Black middle and working class mass departure left increasingly large numbers of poor people to fend for themselves in neighborhoods that continued to loose more city support services.[8] Thus poor Blacks became "increasingly isolated socially from mainstream patterns and norms of behavior."[9] Wilson argued that these shifts in social and economic factors led to the increase in female-headed families, out-of-wedlock births, and teenage pregnancy, poverty, and social dependency.

As we approach the end of the twentieth century, we now find a generation of poorly educated young people who lack the technological skills necessary to compete in the twenty-first century. The Rev. Eugene Rivers sadly declares:

> But, remarkably, the tragedy we face is still worse. Unlike
> many of our ancestors, who came out of slavery and entered
> this century with strong backs, discipline, a thirst for literacy,
> deep religious faith, and hope in the face of monumental
> adversity, we have produced "a generation who [do] not know
> the ways of the Lord"... ill-equipped to secure gainful employ-
> ment even as productive slaves.[10]

Given the viciousness and callousness of the Mattapan church incident, John Dilulio Jr., a criminal justice expert at Princeton University, labeled such hard core criminal youth as "super-predators." Dilulio painted a frightening picture of the escalation of youth violence in his 1995 article "The Coming of the Super-Predators."[11] He argued that the trend is getting worse, not better. More and more youths, particularly Black males, are moving in this violent direction. "All of the research indicates that Americans are sitting atop a demographic crime bomb. And all of those who are closest to the problem hear the bomb ticking."[12] Many in the African American community are afraid to interact with these young people. Like the Isaiah passage indicated, Black adults and particularly church-goers have hidden themselves from their own flesh.

At the heart of these challenges is a sense of hopelessness, despair, and nihilism, especially among this segment of poor and disenfranchised Black youth. Their culture, the hip-hop generation, has had a significant impact on their Black middle class counterparts and on the larger American youth culture as well.

This sense of hopelessness found among some Black youth at the end of the twentieth century is a stark contrast to the state of the African American commu-nity at the end of the nineteenth century as it came out of slavery. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Black community, recently liberated from legal slav-ery, was a community of hope despite Ku Klux Klan activism, lynchings, Jim Crow laws, segregation, and the Red Summer of 1919 in which white race riots had dev-astated several American cities. Surrounded by legal terror, Blacks built schools of higher learning, educated themselves, built business and social institutions, and maintained churches that were the backbones of the communities. The spir-it of the Black community was expressed in the second verse of the song "Lift Every Voice and Sing," written in 1900 by James Weldon and J. Rosemond Johnson:[13]

> Stony the road we trod, bitter the chastening rod, felt in the
> days when hope unborn had died; yet with a steady beat have
> not our weary feet come to the place for which our fathers
> sighed.

> We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,
> We have come treading our path through the blood of the
> slaughtered! Out of the gloomy past til now we stand at last,
> Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.[14]

Wilson suggested that the twentieth-century "increase in... forms of social dislocations in the inner city (including joblessness and violent crime) offers a difficult challenge to policy makers."[15] These social determinants offer even greater policy and theological challenges to the Black church.

Ultimately, Rivers, Dilulio, and others argue that the breach is a spiritual one. At best, many young people feel that the church is completely irrelevant to their concerns. At worst, as reported by an informant in a March 17, 1997, *Newsweek* article, "The hip-hop community sees its relationship with the church as a war. If you condemn them, you lose them. And you lose the people who listen to them."[16] Yet this crisis is profoundly spiritual. As early as twenty years ago, one of African America's foremost public intellectuals, Lerone Bennett Jr., described this grave situation among Black youth. Bennett wrote:

> For the first time in our history, the inner fortresses of the
> Black spirit are giving away. For the first time in our history, we
> are threatened on the level of the spirit, on the level of our
> most precious possession, on the level of the soul.... The
> signs of crisis are everywhere. The homicide rate in the Black
> community has reached such an astronomical rate that young
> Black males are rapidly becoming an endangered species.
> And this alarming development is only an extreme manifesta-
> tion of the anger, frustrations, and purposelessness of hun-
> dreds of thousands of Black youths who have given up hope
> and see no reason for accepting the discipline required for
> achievement and excellence.... [We] are losing a whole gener-
> ation of people. And this fact...constitutes the gravest chal-
> lenge we have faced in this country since the end of slavery.[17]

Dilulio argues that this crisis is one of "moral poverty." He believes that, in the extreme cases, "moral poverty is the poverty of growing up surrounded by deviant, delinquent, and criminal adults in abusive, violence-ridden, fatherless, Godless, and jobless settings."[18] I believe that the biblical prophet Isaiah would equate these young people today with the poor and oppressed of his era. These are the marginalized who see no hope.

Many Black churches seem to be paralyzed and unable to make a difference. Without making a blanket statement about all Black churches, it is evident that far too few are actively engaged in ameliorating these conditions. Increasingly young people are leaving the church that they see as irrelevant. Several generations appear to have left the church over the past several decades and created a secular generation of significance. I have no empirical evidence to back this up,

but by simple observation of most Black churches, it seems to be clear that there is a dearth of youth. This scarcity of youth is more so now than in previous generations. According to Lincoln and Mamiya, only about half of their pastors indicated that they had recruited and kept teenagers (ages thirteen to sixteen) and young adults (ages seventeen to thirty-five) in their churches. The researchers further suggested that young adults tended to be the most missing age group in churches from their observations. The question is why.

Lincoln and Mamiya posed this question to more than 2,100 Black ministers in their survey. A sampling of the responses indicated that 21.5 percent of the ministers felt that "youth were not given [a] chance by adults to participate in a meaningful way in church programs;" 25 percent felt that youth were "bored and/or [do] not have a relevant program for them." On the other hand, their study found that less than 3 percent of the 2,100 Black pastors interviewed felt that young people were leaving the church because they lacked intellectual challenge from the clergy and church adults, they grew out of their faith and beliefs, or they were critical of the hypocrisy of the church or minister.[19]

I am convinced from my interaction with young Black men and women that many leave the church, in part, because they feel the church preaches, exhibits, and lives a Gospel that is not relevant to their concerns in the world. They are looking for a Gospel that is willing to speak the truth to those in power, to challenge the racist and exploitative situations in which many young people find themselves, and to affirm their cultural values. Many are being influenced by, if not attracted to, other religious movements such as Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam because they feel that Farrakhan and the Nation understand their plight and are willing to speak the truth to those in power.

Lincoln and Mamiya indicate that the various programs provided by Black churches for young people were "traditional programs such as youth choirs, youth groups, evangelistic programs, Bible study, recreational activities, and social events." These programs had varying success attracting youth into the church; none of these programs addressed "the ambivalence in racial identity found to be widespread among many Black children; the high levels of unemployment among Black teenagers; the large numbers of young Black men in prisons; and the high rates of teenage pregnancy and female-headed households."[20] Yet, Lincoln and Mimaya correctly caution, based on the data, that "it would be a mistake to imply that therefore nothing is being done by Black churches."[21] Still, the question remains: Have we, as the church, done enough, given the expanse of the breach we face? The nature of crime and violence among our youth has reached a critical level; the Center for Disease Control and Prevention has elevated youth violence as a major public health issue.[22]

The Black church has a significant role to play in saving young people from moving into the super-predator status. Lincoln and Mamiya also indicate that some progressive pastors and churches have devised creative programs, beyond the traditionally church-based ones, to begin dealing with these crucial youth

issues.[23]

Some will ask why some youth grow up to become successful members of society while others who come from the same socio-economic background end up on the path toward the super-predator status. Researchers have called these successful youth who were at-risk survivors "resilient youth."[24] Some public policy experts suggest that the empirical data indicates a high corollary between significant church involvement and/or the personal involvement of caring adults, and crime reduction.[25] Social science research documents that where there is more child neglect and maltreatment, there will also be more youth crime and delinquency. Conversely, the research also validates what we as ministers to youth have always known — that where there are more caring, non-parental adults, there will be more "resilient youth."[26]

In its recent report, *Preventing Crime, Saving Children: Monitoring, Mentoring, and Ministering*, the Council on Crime in America added its weight to the call for caring, spiritually minded individuals and institutions to be involved with at-risk youth. Their report suggests that the best intervention for youth crime prevention is a combination of efforts of monitoring, mentoring, and ministering. By "monitoring," they mean the development of community-based programs of adult supervision of "juveniles who have been in trouble with the law — both formal or official monitoring by probation officers, and informal or voluntary monitoring by responsible, neighborhood-level adults."[27] The council further argues for the support of mentoring programs, such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America, in which responsible, non-parental adults will invest themselves deeply in the lives of at-risk youth, "helping them with their personal problems, offering them a sympathetic ear, and lending them a guiding hand."[28]

For the most severely at-risk youth, the council contends that monitoring and mentoring alone are not enough, in part due to the time-limited impact of these programs based on the duration of the programs themselves and the limited intensity for seriously troubled youth. Here the council introduces the third component to prevent crime and to save youth — "ministering." By "ministering" they mean "mobilizing and empowering caring adults to assume responsibility for the well-being of the worst-off children of their own neighborhoods." The council is intentional in the use of the spiritual language. In spite of the success or the failure of black churches to reach youth, churches are consistently the only "community-rooted institutions still standing."[29]

> It falls to churches to "anchor real, sustainable, and effective
> community-level efforts aimed at getting responsible, with-it
> adults to minister to the needs of our own poorly parented,
> abused, neglected, arrested, homeless, illiterate, uncivil, drug-
> addicted, disorderly, and dangerous children." It falls to
> churches to "give even would-be juvenile super-predators a
> chance to become whole, productive members of society by
> living in a community where adults whom they know, for real,

discipline and love them even if the world hates them, and even if they hate themselves." Ministering programs are "full faith and service" programs in which non-parental adults come together to "live a total commitment to the neighborhood's severely at-risk children all day, every day."[30]

Black churches must be called to task about their past and present neglect of youth, their future responsibility to save youth, and their responsibility to work with other monitoring and mentoring efforts in the community. This brings us back the Isaiah 58 passage. If we as the church are to save our youth, we must be willing to take the prescription outlined in Isaiah 58.

First, we must be willing to admit that our acts of worship have fallen on God's deaf ears and that God is not pleased with our inability to be involved with our own youth, even the untouchable ones who represent the poor and the down-trodden. We have placed worship over service. We have given a deaf ear to the needs and concerns of our youth, who are crying out to us in their rap music and hip-hop culture. We have neglected them and indicated that we do not want them in our churches. We as the church have indicated that we are afraid of them and their culture. In part, our fear is justified. This super-predator segment of our youth is dangerous. Yet no one else can save them but us. We cannot rely upon the efforts of others to be responsible for our children. And they are *our* children.

Second, we must be willing to repent before God in sackcloth and ashes. We must be willing to make public declarations of our guilt and neglect of our young and be willing to stand the test of their ridicule and critique.

Third, the church must be willing to move out of its comfort zone and to take bold action if we want to save our youth. We must not hide ourselves from our own flesh. We must take an example from Falaka and David Fattah, the founders of The House of Umoja (Unity), a community-based residential program for teen gangsters and other displaced adolescents in Philadelphia. In the early '70s, the Fattahs found out that one of their six sons was heavily involved in a local gang. Rather than risk the loss of their son and turn their backs on him in fear, the Fattahs took the radical step of opening up their family to the gangs and inviting them into their home. Most of the fifteen gang members were homeless. In response, the gang chose to give up their weapons and violence, further their education, and participate in various community projects. By the '80s, the Fattahs' bold action led to the development of an urban Boy's Town with the ren-ovation of twenty-one abandoned homes. Since that time they have served thousands of displaced youth in Philadelphia. Falaka Fattah stated that "Our the-ory was that if the problem was the breakdown of families, then the solution was to rebuild one for them."[31] What will the church have to do radically differently to reach its youth?

Let me end by pointing to an example of the kinds of success that can take place when Black churches turn and embrace their youth, even the super-preda-tors. In the aftermath of the Morning Star Baptist Church incident in Mattapan in

May 1992, a small group of ministers came together and committed themselves to being involved in outreach to youth on the streets of their various communities in the Boston area. They committed to being a presence in the streets and to building relationships with the gangs and drug dealers. Out of these relationships, the ministers developed relevant programs to support street-oriented youth. The ministers created a loose coalition of more than thirty churches that worked closely with other community agencies, probation officers, and police. The result was the creation of the 10-Point Coalition working together to reach at-risk youth. The initial churches included a diversity of Black churches: New Covenant Christian Center, Dorchester Temple Baptist Church, Lord's Family African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Union Baptist Church, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Mt. Olive Temple Church of Christ, and the Azusa Christian Community. They organized neighborhood crime watches. Church volunteers worked as advocates for Latino and Black juvenile offenders in the courts and worked closely with probation officers and police. They developed "Christian Brotherhood" programs as alternatives to gang activities and established programs of Latino and African American history in churches. The churches established rape crisis drop-in centers and centers for battered women. They developed various community-based economic development programs for youth. They also nurtured working relationships with local community-based health centers to provide pastoral counseling to families.[32]

As a result of the cooperating work that the 10-Point Coalition, the police, and other community organizations[33] have done in Boston, not one youth seventeen or under has been killed by gunfire since July 10, 1995. The Boston homicide rate of fifty-nine deaths is at its lowest in thirty years.[34]

The Black church and the American church can have a major impact on youth. We, as the church, can repair the ancient ruins and become the repairers of the breach. However, we must be willing to risk being taken out of our comfort zone and complacency to repent and to openly embrace young people, even the super-predators, for they are God's children, too. We must be willing to build coalitions of churches, recognizing that no one church can do it all. When we do this, we will see the fruits of repentance and labor. As the prophet Isaiah proclaims:

> Then your light will break out like the dawn, And your recovery
> will speedily spring forth; And your righteousness will go
> before you; The glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

> Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; You will cry, and
> He will say, "Here I am." If you remove the yoke from your
> midst, The pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness.

> And if you give yourself to the hungry, And satisfy the desire of
> the afflicted, Then your light will rise in darkness, And your

gloom [will become] like midday.

And the Lord will continually guide you, And satisfy your desire in scorched places, And give strength to your bones; And you will be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.

And those from among you will rebuild the ancient ruins; You will raise up the age-old foundations; And you will be called the repairer of the breach, The restorer of the streets in which to dwell. (Isaiah 58: 8-12, NASV). ❖

NOTES

1. Boston Globe, Friday, May 15, 1992.

2. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, The Black Church in the African American Experience (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), pp. 309-310.

3. All biblical quotations are from the New American Standard Version.

4. G.C.D. Howley, F.F. Bruce, and H.L. Ellison, eds, The New Layman's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), p. 811.

5. William Julius Wilson, The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 101.

6. John Leland and Allison Samuels, "The New Generation Gap," Newsweek (March 17, 1997), p. 56.

7. Ibid., p. 56.

8. See chapter two in Wilson, The Truly Disadvantaged, pp. 20-62.

9. Ibid., p. 8.

10. Eugene Rivers, "On the Responsibility of the Intellectual in the Age of Crack," Boston Review (September/October, 1992).

11. See John J. Dilulio Jr., "The Coming of the Super-Predators," The Weekly Standard (November 27, 1995), pp. 23-28. See also John J. Dilulio Jr., "My Black Crime Problem, and Ours," City Journal (Spring 1996), pp. 14-28.

12. Dilulio, p. 23.

13. "Lift Every Voice and Sing" was originally written by James Weldon Johnson to celebrate the ninety-first anniversary of the birth of President Abraham Lincoln. It has since become known as the black national anthem. For a discussion of the song and its authors, see Jane Tolbert-Rouchaleau, James Weldon Johnson, (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988).

14. James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson, "Lift Every Voice and Sing," (New York: Edward B. Marks Music Co., 1900).

15. Wilson, p. 29.

16. Leland and Samuels, "The New Generation Gap," p. 54.

17. Lerone Bennett Jr., "The Crisis of the Black Spirit," Ebony (October 1977), p. 142. For a more recent discussion of the despair within African American youth, see the best-selling work by Cornel West, Race Matters (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

18. Dilulio, p. 25.

19. Lincoln and Mamiya, The Black Church, p. 327.

20. Ibid., p. 332.

21. Ibid., p. 333.

22. This spring, I participated in a consultation sponsored by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta that focused on concern for youth violence as a major public health issue.

23. Lincoln and Mamiya, The Black Church, p. 333.

24. Carolyn Smith et al., "Resilient Youth: Identifying Factors That Prevent High-Risk Youth from Engaging in Delinquency and Drug Use," Current Perspectives on Aging and the Life Cycle, 1995, p. 221; quoted in Preventing Crime, Saving Children: Monitoring, Mentoring, and Ministering, Second Report of The Council on Crime in America, by Griffin B. Bell and William J. Bennett, co-chairs (New York: Center for Civic Innovation at the Manhattan Institute, February 1997), p. 4.

25. Richard B. Freeman, "Who Escapes? The Relation of Churchgoing and Other Background Factors to the Socioeconomic Performance of Black Male Youths from Inner-City Tracts," in The Black Youth Employment Crisis, eds. Richard B. Freeman and Harry J. Holzer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 353-376.

26. See Preventing Crime, Saving Children: Monitoring, Mentoring, and Ministering.

27. Ibid., p. 7.

28. Ibid., p. 8.

29. Ibid., p. 10.

30. Ibid.

31. Reported in Ken Auletta, The Underclass (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), p. 304.

32. See "10-Point Plan to Mobilize the Churches," in Sojourners (February-March 1994), p. 13. For a look at one of the central organizers of the 10-Point Plan, see Herbert H. Toler Jr., "Rivers of Babylon: A Harvard Man Brings the Gospel to the Crack House," in Policy Review (Fall 1994), pp. 68-71.

33. Derrick Z. Jackson, "Another Reason Crime Has Fallen: Black Leadership," Boston Globe, February 28, 1997.

34. Charity Vogel, "Reno Offers Congratulations to Boston for Its Success in Reducing Youth Crime," Boston Globe, July 11, 1997.