Building assets for African-American men
by Mark Stenglein and Gary L. Cunningham

In 1999, the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners directed staff to conduct an analysis of African-American males between the ages of 18-30. The goals of the project are 1) to develop a baseline of socioeconomic data about this group, and 2) to determine to what degree the County’s current policies are positioned to address the issues this group faces.

In November 2000, a preliminary report was issued by a volunteer 29-member steering committee, composed of representatives from a wide range of constituencies in Hennepin County. The report focuses on a number of systems and interrelated domains of well-being that impact African-American men, including employment, education, health, community/civic engagement and county program involvement.

The findings of the Preliminary Report show that many African-American men in our community are working, going to school, taking care of their children and participating in the social/economic life of Hennepin County. A look across the broad spectrum of indicators in the Twin Cities metropolitan area suggests that African-American men have benefited from the robust economy. However, many remain at the bottom of the economic well.

Key Findings:
- No single initiative, cause, or outcome will have the systemic impact needed to change the socioeconomic circumstances for African-American men. The social and economic situation of many African-American men results from a multitude of interrelated causes.
- The report shows that focusing on employment alone will not address the social and economic issues faced by African-American men in our community.

A paradigm shift is needed: from a model of providing social services and incarceration, to one of building community and individual assets for self-reliance. As one Steering Committee member stated, “The County cannot “social service” African-American men out of their present situation.”

Population, Demographics and Neighborhood Indicators
- Estimates put the population of 18-30 year old African-American men in Hennepin County between 9,572 and 19,248. The 2000 census will provide a more precise estimate.
- African-Americans are concentrated in fifteen Minneapolis neighborhoods with the lowest property values, a disproportionate share of low-income rental housing and higher crime rates.

Employment
- In 1995, there was no significant difference between the labor force participation for African-Americans and whites in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area. However, African-American unemployment was three times that of whites. African-American male private and public employment increased in all occupational categories in Hennepin County from 1990-1997. While there was a higher percentage of African-American men in the labor force, they tend to be concentrated in low skill occupations.

Education
- In 1998-1999, schools in Hennepin County enrolled 111,255 male students, of which 15,039 were African-American. Within Hennepin County, Minneapolis Public Schools had the largest male student population (25,084), as well...

Building assets continued on page 2
The article in this issue on Hennepin County’s African-American Men Project presents a snapshot of the circumstances facing 18-30 year old men of color in this community. Authors Mark Strenglen and Gary Cunningham caution that there is no single “silver bullet” and quote a steering committee member that “the county cannot ‘social service’ African-American men out of their present situation.” A decade ago, in his milestone work The Truly Disadvantaged, Harvard Professor William Julius Wilson wrestled with the needs of those in our core cities and suggested an agenda of general, rather than targeted, educational and job-training programs to help economically disadvantaged core city residents. His rationale was partly political—generally supported programs with a large political base (such as mortgage interest deductions) have fared far better than programs targeted to low-income residents.

His advice may be even more relevant today, when despite an unusually robust economy, there is increasing income inequality. While the details of this trend have been debated endlessly, there is a demonstrably large and widening gap in income between those with minimal and those with advanced skills.

As we move forward in Minnesota, where K-12 and post-secondary education spending amounts to more than $2500 for every man, woman and child in the state, the question remains: What is the optimal mix of general and targeted programs if we want to leave fewer people behind economically—and socially?

Provide early support for children and families. A variety of efforts to support young families at risk have been successfully demonstrated across the country. In her book, Within Our Reach, Lisbeth A. Cunningham, Harvard Professor of families. A variety of efforts to support young families at risk have been successfully demonstrated across the country. In her book, Within Our Reach, Lisbeth A. Cunningham, Harvard Professor families. A variety of efforts to support young families at risk have been successfully demonstrated across the country. In her book, Within Our Reach, Lisbeth A. Cunningham, Harvard Professor families. A variety of efforts to support young families at risk have been successfully demonstrated across the country. In her book, Within Our Reach, Lisbeth A. Cunningham, Harvard Professor families. A variety of efforts to support young families at risk have been successfully demonstrated across the country. In her book, Within Our Reach, Lisbeth A. Cunningham, Harvard Professor.

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Achievement citizen project. This includes health creation, community ownership, and infrastructure investments in resource-starved neighborhoods. Build on existing programs that provide young men, particularly those ages 18-24, with coaching in "soft skills" (e.g., listening, conversing, trust building, teamwork, etc.) that are crucial in getting and maintaining employment. Provide additional resources for training and employment opportunities for African-American men.

Education

A "Young Dads' Group" focused on obtaining high-skilled employment. Their success depends on their ability to obtain housing, conversing, trust building, and earn a living wage. Building capacity of mentoring programs that help young men strengthen their living skills, self-worth, and work ethic.

A Build the capacity of mentoring programs that help young men strengthen their living skills, self-worth, and work ethic. Provide post-secondary scholarships to students who pass the basic skills tests and have a C grade point average or higher. Simplicity Minnesota's expansion law so that an automatic or semi-automatic expungement process is available for people who have committed low-level, non-violent crimes. Expand services of culturally-focused drug treatment programs. A framework must be forged between the public, private, philanthropic, non-profit and faith communities to coordinate a sustained response to the conditions of African-American men. The Hennepin County Board of Commissioners has earmarked $500,000 in its 2001 contingency fund to implement the final recommendations designed to improve outcomes for African-American men. However, this effort will take more than just additional resources or efforts by Hennepin County. All citizens share in the social and economic costs of high incarceration, arrests and unemployment rates, low-level educational achievement, inadequate health care and housing among African-American men. The long-term successes of public policy initiatives aimed at promoting self-reliance are undermined by the situation of many African-American men. At the same time, the urban majority and minority African-American men would help to address the severe labor and skill shortage we now face.

Mark Stenglein is Hennepin County Commissioner and Gary L. Cunningham is Director, Hennepin County Office of Planning and Development.

On Balance

Governor's tax reform plan spurs discussion and controversy, but general consensus is that reform is overdue and Governor needs to lead.

The St. Paul Pioneer Press (Jan. 5) comments that while "Gov. Jesse Ventura is rarely given an opportunity...his plan to overhaul Minnesota's property tax and school finance systems does, indeed, represent 'bold, necessary and responsible reform.' "The plan outlined by the Governor in his State of the State address shows considerable promise."

We should "welcome Gov. Jesse Ventura's getty proposal on restructuring the states tax system." (Red Wing Republican Eagle, Jan. 8) Ventura should be commended for laying out his initiatives in detail. He must now guide his program through the legislative hallsway. Having made clear in his speech that he means business, Ventura has gone a good distance toward forming a new relationship with the Legislature. He needs now to row on his chariot, which is considerable, and suppress his feistiness.

The Benidri Pionner (Jan. 7) is concerned about "getting it all done." His sweeping call for change ought to be heeded, as an outsider to traditional politics. His proposals for tax reform should especially be consid- ered, as they are the most sweeping since the early 1970's saw the creation of the so-called "Minnesota Miracle." "If the governor is serious about what he asks, he'll be hovering about the Capitol the next five months, will ing to meet with any legislator, any time..."

The Rochester Post Bulletin (Jan. 6) says they're "not ready to endorse Ventura's 2001 legislative agenda." But they do "commend Ventura for proposing a balanced budget and ingraining agenda for lawmakers that can serve as a good starting point for discussions. It shows that he apparently intends to take more of an activist and leadership role during this legislative session." "And we urge the governor and lawmakers to get their work done with out the same calling, acidity and deadline...that has been so typical of the last couple of legislative sessions."

Next Steps

The Steering Committee developed a set of preliminary recommendations that are still under discussion. It is anticipated that these preliminary recommendations will be further refined as a part of the final report to be completed in July. Some of the recommendations include:

A Moving beyond programmatic fixes to solutions that build community and individual assets for self-reliance. This includes health creation, community ownership, and infrastructure investments in resource-starved neighborhoods.

A Build on existing programs that provide young men, particularly those ages 18-24, with coaching in "soft skills" (e.g., listening, conversing, trust building, teamwork, etc.) that are crucial in getting and maintaining employment.

A Provide additional resources for training and employment opportunities for African-American men.

A Build the capacity of mentoring programs that help young men strengthen their living skills, self-worth, and work ethic.

A Provide post-secondary scholarships to students who pass the basic skills tests and have a C grade point average or higher.

A Simplify Minnesota's expansion law so that an automatic or semi-automatic expungement process is available for people who have committed low-level, non-violent crimes.

A Expand services of culturally-focused drug treatment programs.

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Minnesota Journal January 30, 2001

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Four As for students of color: achievement, awareness, aspirations, access

by Carlos Mariani-Rosa

As we embark on this new decade, what is the state of students of color in Minnesota? The indicators say much about the current state of students of color. It is important that we look at this information not as a way to put-down students of color and their abilities, for plenty of examples exist of high academic achievement among students of color locally and across the country. Rather, the information should be seen as a challenge to ourselves, the managers of our education systems, to use the practices we know are effective with students of color.

Current Educational Trends

Several years ago, John McGee, then the Minnesota's Private Colleges Council, conducted a research project on high school graduation trends called Foundations for the Future. As a result of the project, Mr. McGee and the Council challenged Minnesota policymakers to prepare for a society increasingly dependent on the academic achievement of students of color. Subsequent studies by the Higher Education Services Office, House Research, the Department of Children, Families and Learning and the TRIO community affirmed Mr. McGee's work and his call to action.

They found:

- The total number of high school graduates is projected to level off in the next 10 years, but students of color will make up a larger percentage of those potential graduates.
- Graph A: Completion Study for the Class of 1999

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
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Students of color drop out of high school at extraordinarily high rates when compared to white students. (See Graph A.)

Student of color enrollment in higher education dropped to a low of 33.5 percent in 1998.

Student of color graduation from college lags behind white students. (See Graph B.)

Additionally, a recent report by the Department of Children, Families and Learning conducted a cohort analysis and found that the cumulative dropout rate for freshmen students of color was extremely high.

These four statistics show a sobering reality. That an ever-increasing percentage of our state's population — students of color — are gradually slipping out of our education system at rates much higher than the state average.

Vision for the future

Ten years from now someone will once again present information about students of color in Minnesota. What do we envision that information will be? Or, better stated, what do we want that information to be? Here's what they should include:

- Higher K-12 completion rates for students of color.
- More total numbers of students of color completing college.
- Higher post-secondary matriculation rates for students of color.
- More total numbers of students of color entering Post-Secondary.

What it will take to get there

Much has been made about the quality of our education system through our focus on achievement. The Profiles of Learning and the state's Basic Skills Tests have driven us to a curriculum, per student definition of student achievement in Minnesota. I would argue that, while important, "student achievement" does not tell the whole story when it comes to measuring our success with students, particularly when the goal is for students to graduate from high school, matriculate into higher education, earn a degree and eventually participate as workers in our state economy.

I propose that we expand our definition of a quality education to include three additional As: Awareness, Aspirations, and Access.

Students should be afforded the following:

- Awareness of higher education and career options, which courses students should take to prepare for college, how to save for college and how to apply for financial aid are important pieces of information that all students, particularly students whose families have not participated in higher education, should learn.
- Aspirations and goals for what a student can achieve academically and professionally should also be emphasized. If we don't inspire students, they will not aspire to attend college and find a career.
- Access to financial aid through progressive financial aid programs and other programs that support student admission into higher education must be expanded if we are going to enroll the growing numbers of students of color who would be the first generation in their families to pursue higher education.

The "four As" of achievement, awareness, aspiration, and access offer a more realistic goal for students of color who would be the first in their families to attend college and find a career.

Four years of the Minnesota Legislature approved a modest investment in programs that prepare young, low-income students to plan for higher education called the 

Students of color, continued from page 7

Students of color, continued from page 6

Intervention for College Attendance Program. By creating its own appropriations for pre-college programs, Minnesota became the first state to complement the federal resources provided for the pre-college intervention programs known as TRIO. Minnesota should be proud of its achievement in this area, but should also expand its financial. In addition, the state should expand the Minnesota State Grant Program so that more students will be able to afford higher education and be able to pursue more options for their higher education.

What if we don't work for increased success among students of color?

First of all, there are things happening in our state that are going in the right direction for students of color. Though very few schools in the state are going to enroll the growing numbers of students of color who would be the first generation in their families to pursue higher education.

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Students of color, continued from page 7
Bright policy bits for dark winter morns.

Medicare payment rates to Minnesota HMOs will increase sharply on March 1, but it may not make any difference in the shrinking availability of Medicare HMO plans here. Based on Congressional action in December, the federal Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) has announced new rates effective in March. For example, the base rate in Hennepin County will increase 12.5 percent, from $467 to $525 per month. In fact, the rate will increase to $525 in all 11 metro area counties. In outstate counties, the minimum monthly rate will increase by 14.5 percent to $475.

HCFA is opening the door so that HMOs that ended their Medicare-Choice plans can re-enter the market in March. Locally, Medica considered reversing its decision to end its plan in December and decided to stick with its original decision. Medica officials said that even with the higher federal payments, the enrollee monthly payment would have to be $108 for the plan to break even. That would increase in succeeding years, and the HMO concluded that it would be unaffordable to most seniors. Instead, it will continue to sell other Medicare plans where the HMO does not assume risk.

What happened to the seniors who were in Medica’s plan last year? According to the company, 4,000 converted to other Medica senior plans, 5,500 converted to competitors’ senior plans and 3,500 had not decided at the end of December. Some of them went to UCare Minnesota, which gained 2,600 members at the end of December up to 21,000. — Allan Baumgarten.

The continuing fight over “graduation standards” is really a fight about the definition of “education” at the high school level. To those who’ve been beating up on Minnesota for its Profile of Learning—ACHIEVE and the Council for Basic Education and now Education Week in its “Quality Counts” survey—education is “mastering a body of knowledge.” Which probably is the traditional view.

Others are not so sure. How much do most of us remember today from the “body of knowledge” we “mastered” going through high school? Maybe knowledge is changing too fast now for whatever kids can “master” to be useful through their lifetimes. Maybe what we learn that’s most valuable is how to learn—recognizing that this does require learning reading and writing and something about numbers.

Maybe it’s Minnesota that’s on the right track with its notion of competencies rather than knowledge, and others that need to rethink.—Ted Kolderie.

Does higher pay for lawmakers translate into better results for citizens? A study by a researcher at the University of Maryland suggests that higher salaries for legislators is not necessarily related to either faster or slower economic growth (although it might have an effect on legislative performance in other policy areas). Interestingly, the study actually found a correlation between higher salaries for governors and lower economic growth. It is not clear whether this slower growth is a perverse effect of higher executive pay or simply a coincidence of recent economic trends, and the author suggests further research into the subject. Legislators in Minnesota, of course, might already have pretty strong ideas about the relationship between the level of outside income and gubernatorial performance.—Dave Chadwick.

Winter can be especially tough on bus riders, who have to endure chilly, unsheltered stops and the delays that inevitably result from icy roads. Knowing exactly when buses will arrive — rather than just when they are scheduled to arrive — can be crucial to surviving winter bus travel. One promising approach is offered by a pilot project at the University of Washington which provides access to real time information on the location of about 1,000 buses in the Seattle metropolitan area. By going to www.mybus.org, bus riders can find out how far their bus is from their stop and when they can expect it to arrive. The Seattle Times reports that about one in six of the hits to the site comes from the campus of the Microsoft Corporation, which is located in an area where traffic is notorious for delaying buses and disrupting published schedules. The service was recently expanded to cell phone users so that individuals can even access bus information while waiting at their stop.—D.C.

It was about 1963 when Kent Youngdahl, then highway administrator for Hennepin County, saw that the state designers had reduced his new “62nd Street Crosstown” to an access ramp where it merged eastbound into Interstate 35W at Humboldt Ave. on the Minneapolis/Richfield border. He tried everything, but nothing could shake the state in its design. It was bound to be trouble—and it was. Now, a generation later, the Department of Transportation has decided to reconstruct that “joint section.” It shows again: Nothing is perfect, and over time people work the problems out.—T.K.

After a joint school district – chamber of commerce study found the public schools in Kent, Washington, were not preparing students well for the world of work, the school district has begun grading every high school student on their “employability.” This includes attitudes and behaviors determined to be essential for success at work, such as punctuality, cooperation and commitment to quality. (Source: EDUCATION DAILY and the National Education Goals Panel.) — Kris Lynden Wilson

“Take Note” contributors include Minnesota Journal and Citizens League staff members and independent healthcare consultant Allan Baumgarten.

The Minnesota Journal
Citizens League
708 S. Third Street, Suite 500
Minneapolis, MN 55415
From in-line to on-line: e-government in Minnesota

St. Paul Mayor Coleman leads off special Mind-Opener luncheons

The explosion of information technology that has reshaped our economy also holds great potential to improve how citizens interact with government. Many governments are already using the Internet to inform citizens, provide access to services, and conduct some financial transactions. Grassroots organizations are devising new ways to use technology to organize and advocate for political change. Political campaigns are increasingly relying on the Internet to directly reach voters and attract support for candidates.

How can we expect technology and government to interact in the years ahead? What steps should governments take to maximize the opportunity that technology holds to improve government services and citizen participation? How should we address issues of the "digital divide" to ensure that all citizens can take advantage of improved government services?

The next series of Mind Opener meetings will hear from three respected leaders in the burgeoning field of e-government. On Thursday, February 22, Saint Paul Mayor Norm Coleman will describe his administration’s efforts to use technology to meet the needs of local citizens. On Thursday, March 1, online strategist Steven Clift will discuss how the Internet can improve democracy and citizen participation. Finally, on Thursday, March 8, Commissioner of Administration David Fisher will offer his perspective on trends in e-government and initiatives at the state level.

All meetings in this series are lunches from 12:00 – 1:30 p.m. at the University Club, 420 Summit Avenue, St. Paul. Watch your mail for additional information on this series.

League priorities for Legislative session

The League Board adopted the organizational priorities for the upcoming session at its January meeting. This session the League will concentrate on a couple of issues, especially relating to "new economy" initiatives, that have a likelihood of success. The chief among those is the Northstar Research Coalition which is designed as a public-private venture to foster front-end investment in research and development. The Coalition has received a great deal of support, especially in the Senate.

The League is also pushing for cabinet level coordinator for workforce development in the state. The League will also keep pressure on for more workforce reforms, especially on the labor shortage.

The League’s current school completion study will be done sometime during the session, but probably won’t have much impact on this session. The League will keep a careful eye of various other discussions including affordable housing, transportation, mental health and tax reform.
Executive Committee posts filled
Cummins, Sporlein, Kershaw added to the leadership

The League Board of Directors added several members to the Executive Committee at its January 18 Board meeting. Buzz Cummins was chosen to serve as this year’s League Treasurer. Cummins served as League president in 1991-92. He was reelected to the Board this year after an absence of several years. In the meantime, he has co-chaired two study committees and this year he is co-chairing the League’s Legislative Affairs Committee. Sean Kershaw and Barb Sporlein were appointed to the two at-large positions on the Executive Committee. Kershaw has served several appointed terms on the League Board of Directors and Sporlein was elected to a three-year term last summer. Both have been very involved in the Active Citizenship School and bring a unique perspective to the League’s leadership group.

Legislative Affairs Committee appointed

The Board also approved a legislative agenda for the current session (see front page) and created a committee to leverage volunteer resources to advance the League’s agenda. The new committee, co-chaired by Buzz Cummins and Pam Neary, will combine tactical, strategic and social networking elements.

The committee began on January 19 and will continue to meet every other Friday morning at 8:00 at the Louisiana Cafe. The group will occasionally invite legislators and executive branch officials for their take on issues. And they will help implement the strategic goals as identified by the Board of Directors (see article on the other side.)

Our apologies

The League’s invitation to members to attend a special Mind-Opener breakfast featuring Mary Jane England arrived very late; indeed, in some cases, several days after the event. Please accept our apologies. We were the victims of a series of unexpected circumstances and delays, some of our own making; others beyond our control. In any event it was inexcusable.

A full transcript of Dr. England’s presentation is on the League’s web site at www.citizensleague.net.

Despite the late notice, about 50 people attended the event. Dr. England, the President of the Washington Business Group on Health (WBGH), a national health policy and research organization whose membership includes the nation’s major employers, spoke about the direct and indirect costs of mental illness in the workplace and the results achieved by several large employers who have implemented the WBGH/NIMH National Worksite Program for improving behavioral health care, while managing costs.

Please check out our web site to read her interesting and informative presentation.

There is no charge for this event, but reservations are encouraged.

Thanks to Hennepin County and the Humphrey Institute for helping underwrite the costs of this Network event.