

Westside friend



# RMNi

## RECONCILIATION REPORT

### Young Urban Black Males (YUBM) and Solutions

[www.RMNI.org](http://www.RMNI.org)

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*Mobilizing the African American Church for Global Mission*

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While visiting a few islands off of Georgia, as well as briefly reconnoitering Brunswick, GA and Charleston, NC, my wife and I found ourselves several times in “the projects.” These had Spanish overtones, but were immediately recognizable as public housing. The residents were primarily African American. Why? I was involved fulltime in inner city ministry from 1990-1998, and have been in the projects, except when out-of-town, just about each week since then. At “College Hill Court,” where I’ve worked for over 5 years, African Americans compose about 96% of residents.

Some blame the government for providing a living without the need to work, others blame racism and discrimination. Others blame the drug culture and rappers for selling sex, violence and bling bling as the greatest good. Slavery in the US tended to destroy personal initiative, and was intended to create dependency upon the “Massa.” It destroyed marriages by selling off husbands and wives and encouraged “shaking up.” Marriage was not held in honor by slave masters, and not a few committed adultery with female slaves, creating bi-racial children. The criminal justice system comes under criticism for incarcerating a disproportionate number of young black men. YUBM in my acquaintance certainly prefer a private attorney to court-appointed counsel.

The welfare system, particularly the Great Society of President Lyndon Johnson, has been particularly injurious to families on welfare. Welfare payments and incentives increase as women have more children out-of-wedlock. Conversely, rent goes up and free health care and possibly food stamps end when people find jobs--disincentives to marriage and employment. In a 1995-96 study, racial inequalities in welfare payments were documented, but blacks received more welfare per year than did whites of similar circumstances<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, welfare often locks recipients into a path of least resistance and a subsistence lifestyle that has often kept people, not just Blacks, in the welfare gravitational field for generations.

*The New York Times* reports that of high school dropouts ages 22-30, 72% were Black, 34% were White and 19% were Hispanic<sup>2</sup>. These figures include those incarcerated and not seeking work. The Hispanic/Black work ethic was contrasted at the Westside when Hispanics re-roofed College Hill Courts. Some couldn’t speak English. African Americans watched them come through in work teams of about 20 precariously sticking to sharply pitched second-story roofs, with no ropes or restraining devices. Not one African American was visi-

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ble on a crew. Hispanics know what wages and living standards are in their country of origin. They are in America to work and save and send money home. A solid family structure is lacking in the black inner city and there are few enough role models of young or older men going to work each day. A recent Pew Hispanic Center study noted that while blacks admired Hispanic work ethics and family values, almost twice as many Blacks as Whites said that they or a family member had either lost or been denied a job due to a Hispanic.<sup>3</sup> Hispanics aren't nearly as religious as Blacks, but the biblical work ethic—particularly as found in the Book of Proverbs--works all by itself.

Cultural factors seem to affect economics. For example, in a 2006 General Social Survey, African Americans are 47.1% less likely to trust people than people with ancestors from Great Britain<sup>4</sup>. Perhaps they have 47.1% less reason to trust other people than Anglos, but distrust affects income. I've seen it lead to quitting a job more than once. Inner city projects in my experience, are a place of much distrust of neighbors. This despite the findings that religious people are 19.6% more inclined to trust people, with Protestants 9.6% more likely<sup>5</sup>, and despite the findings of at least one study that African Americans are the planet's most religious people. Distrust affects entrepreneurship and investments in the stock market<sup>6</sup>. In contrast to entrepreneurship, Americans of African American ancestry are 21.1% more inclined to prefer economic redistribution performed by the US government than those neutral to it, according to the General Social Survey. Twelve percent of people with ancestors from Mexico, Puerto Rico and the West Indies felt this way<sup>7</sup>. Perhaps this is also a legacy of welfare.



Pastor J. Soi of Kenya and Herm Bel (Board VP and frequent volunteer) at the Westside.

The Gospel is still the best answer to poverty. The prosperity “gospel” promotes selfish greed, attempting to manipulate God for pleasure. But the true Gospel is the answer to poverty. A cross-country study of at least 41 countries found that belief in hell and heaven (Christian conception or otherwise) was significantly correlated with economic growth in the country. Why? “Our conjecture is that stronger religious beliefs stimulate growth because they help sustain specific individual behaviors that enhance productivity.”<sup>8</sup>

According to an analysis of The World Values Survey—representative survey samples from 66 countries from 1981-1997, “On average, Christian religions are more positively associated with attitudes that are conducive to economic growth, while Islam is negatively associated.”<sup>9</sup> These attitudes include those about “cooperation, women, government, legal rules, the market economy and its fairness and thriftiness.”<sup>10</sup> Intersecting inner city culture, my judgment is that these five attitude traits are significantly lacking. Women are perceived to be there to support the man and his needs, and to take care of his children. He is not there to financially support the mother and children, or to provide a father's presence, although he is there to meet (to some extent at least) some of her needs. I've already mentioned the suspicion by which many project residents view others in the project, and the lack of trust generally in the African American community. Government is there to provide subsidies, but is not appreciated for its police presence, except by the law-abiding, of whom there is a substantial number, particularly among older residents. Legal rules are broken by having people live in apartments without permission, by open gambling, driving without licenses and using and sell drugs and alcohol, as well as by buying pirated videos. Regarding the market economy, while many say they are looking for work, the lack of a high school education, distrust, lack of transportation and a lifestyle relatively free of responsibility discourage not a few from entering the workplace. Some are in such a cycle of recidivism that they are pessimistic about ever being able to keep a job. The greatest incentives to work that I've seen are monthly payments to a probation officer for various penalties and staying with the mother of one's children, and thus being motivated to provide for them. Regarding thriftiness, an income is presupposed. Some make signifi-

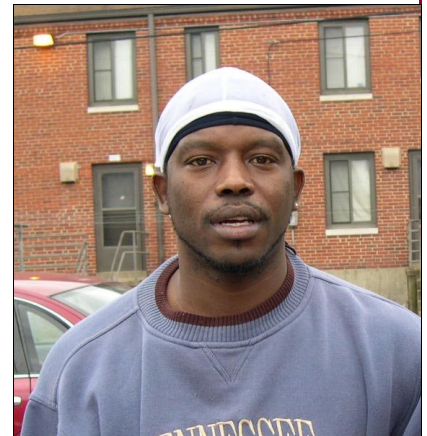
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DeVonte

cant money selling drugs, but scriptures teach that ill-gotten gain does not benefit (Prov. 1:19; 10:2). Few drug dealers retire on their savings.

We could throw a dart to know where to begin--better schools, classes in fathering and family, job acquisition programs, drug prevention and treatment programs, teaching abstinence, tearing down the projects, welfare rules that screen out freeloaders, providing childcare for working mothers, etc. We need to start with God, who alone is able to transform anyone's life from the inside, giving new values, ethics, accountability and purpose to life. We need to start with evangelism and church discipleship. I've seen Mike, in his twenties, draw close to God, stop living with his girlfriend, go to church, and get a job, lose it and get another. Alex just got out of jail. Christians prayed and he is now working for Hilton Hotels. CC, who gives evidence of knowing God, works, quits, then gets another job to support his child. Going to church helps particularly young men to get out of the amazingly insular inner city island. DeVonte is 16 and has grown up without a Dad. He was saved sometime within the past year, influenced heavily by his church. I've known him for about 9 years. He recently called and I could actually understand more than 75% of his vocabulary and asked what had happened. He said that God convicted him about talking clearly, since God had called him to preach and he had to be understood. He is trying not to use ghetto language, except to better communicate with those from the hood. He does not want a girlfriend because he can't get married and one would strongly distract him from God. After being out of school for 2 years, he's now going to the local community college to get his GED and is taking a college course in construction. Other YUBM are still moving two steps forward and two or three steps back. For some there is no hope until they hit bottom—hopefully not in a cell--and look up. Then a Christian needs to be there.



Mike

About two-thirds of folks in the housing projects and on the streets of Chattanooga to whom a NIV New Testament is offered accept them. There is definite spiritual interest. A young man told me about two weeks after receiving one that he'd read it in entirety. The Gospel is the most comprehensive solution to YUBM and inner city dysfunction. Few churches have a presence in the projects. They receive residents for worship and may send in a church bus, or hold a block party once or twice a year with hot dogs, preaching and Bible distribution—all of which are good. But it isn't a presence on the street.

The ghettos need the ongoing presence of Christ in the presence of His people—a presence by which to develop personal relationships and especially trust in Christians. Christians on the ground are the missing link between those hanging out on the one hand, and churches and jobs on the other. They become the interface with the Gospel. Most YUBM I know have no interest in attending church. One recently said that he couldn't stand the preacher hollering at him, while saying very little. Among YUBM are genuine Christians, who do not go to church, or have a job. They will listen if approached in humility, love and truth. Christians must look for the YUBM. Their initial instinct is to scatter if they think a Christian is coming for them, but they will seek one out once trust is established. Christians and churches can provide the Gospel, Bible teaching, job referrals to Christian and other employers, and training in family and work values. Once Christ is found, and He changes the heart and attitudes, economic progress as well as development of the whole person is not long behind. The ghetto and African Americans do not have to be identified together. Christ, through His people, has a better way.

- 1 Howard Gensler, "The Effect of Race and Sex on Welfare Benefits," *The Cato Journal*, 15:2-3.
- 2 Erik Eckholm, "Plight Deepens for Black Men, Studies Warn." *The New York Times*, March 20, 2006.
- 3 Rachel L. Swarns, "Growing Unease for Some Blacks on Immigration," *New York Times*, May 4, 2006.
- 4 Luigi Guiso, Paola Sapienza and Luigi Zingales, "Does Culture Affect Economic Outcomes?," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, January 2006, p. 31. [www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/faculty/sapienza/html/Guiso\\_Sapienza\\_Zingales\\_JEP.pdf](http://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/faculty/sapienza/html/Guiso_Sapienza_Zingales_JEP.pdf) accessed 5/1/06
- 5 Guiso et al., 1/2006, p. 30 (Source: European Values Survey and World Values Survey).
- 6 Guiso, Luigi, Paola Sapienza, Luigi Zingales, "Trusting the Stock Market," 9/19/2005, p. 30 [http://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/faculty/sapienza/html/trusting\\_stock.pdf](http://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/faculty/sapienza/html/trusting_stock.pdf) accessed 5/3/2006.

7 Guiso et al., 1/2006, p. 34 (Source: General Social Survey).  
 8 Robert J. Barro and Rachel M. McCleary, "Religion and Economic Growth Across Cultures," *American Sociological Review*, 2003, Vol. 68, p. 773.  
 9 Luigi Guiso, Paola Sapienze, Luigi Zingales, "People's opium? Religion and economic attitudes," *Journal of Monetary Economics*, 50 (2003), pp. 227, 280. <http://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/faculty/sapienza/htm/religion.pdf> accessed 5/1/06.  
 10 Guiso et al., 2003, p. 227.



Jim is teaching a biblical financial principles series to a young adults SS class.

**Southern Sudan Mission June 2006 & Haiti Mission Sept. (\$2500). Please pray for these.**



Missionaries, from left— Withheld, Jon Crews (Brazil), Aubrey Fritz (Student Venture) and Rev. Glenn Mason, Director, Carver Int'l Missions and speaker at Pastor Poindexter's (inset) second annual Chattanooga missions conference

## Prayer and Praise



- ↑ We thank you for any prayers.
- ↑ Inner-city needs: Salvation for young men, who generally have addiction problems and need jobs. Names are omitted for the sake of privacy.
- ↑ Pastor Gilbert Were needs funds to complete the roof on his church in Kakamega, Kenya.
- ↑ We're grateful for 7 Team members for the Sudan trip. Please pray for the organization of the Haiti trip, and for the best ministry partner in Haiti. Please pray for excellent health and protection, for wisdom and wisdom for our

- ↑ Sudanese coordinator—Patrick.
- ↑ After elders anointed Jim, a painful lump in his foot was healed, as was glucose intolerance.
- ↑ For protection from spiritual attack upon Judi and Jim.
- ↑ Our webmaster became too busy— please pray for the best replacement; for an assistant director and for a research intern.
- ↑ We need continued wisdom to engage

- ↑ Judi's mother, who is living with us, in her use of time.
- ↑ Son Tim and wife Karen (taking care of delinquent girls) have been experiencing fever, sore throats and ears and weakness. Please pray for complete healing and salvation for the girls.