

Race, Gender and Progress: Are Black American Women the New Model Minority?

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Published online: 29 April 2008
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Abstract Building on the “model minority” concept especially focusing on East and South Asian immigrants in the USA, this paper argues that increasing pertinent data continue to show that African American women are gradually becoming a model minority too, despite experiencing the most severe form of slavery, racism and gender discrimination than any other group or sub-group in the history of the USA. Among the increasing number of examples presented in this paper to support the claim that Black American women are becoming a model minority in the USA are: (1) relatively high college enrollment and degree attainment rates for black women; (2) fewer black females die per every 100,000 of their population than black males, white males and white females; (3) Higher proportion of black women are 100 years and over, compared to black males and whites; (4) Proportionally, fewer black females than black males, white males and white females commit suicide; (5) Proportionally, fewer black females than all males commit crimes; (6) Proportionally, due largely to black females, fewer blacks consume alcohol and illicit drugs than whites, etc.

Keywords Black American women · Model minority · Progress · Gender · Educational success

Introduction/Background

In the history of the USA, no other subgroup has experienced long suffering and humiliation than African American females, from slavery, to the post Civil War era, to the Jim Crow era and after. To learn of the history of Black American women and

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their long suffering and to see them in the beginning of the twenty-first century in the tens of millions and making enormous contributions to their country and the entire world can be argued to be a miracle or divine intervention. Today one can even venture to present the concept of the “black Woman’s Burden” in the USA.

The concept of the “model minority” in the USA is explained as groups that were at one time marginalized, educationally, economically and socially, but eventually rose up despite their many obstacles to become prosperous, admired and even emulated. Although its members are from diverse ethnic and racial groups, the Asian American group in the USA has benefited positively in the media and Academia from the perception of being a model minority group in the country. This is especially for Asians of Japanese, Chinese and Korean descent, and more recently Asians of Indian and Pakistani descent.

The claim that Asian Americans are model minorities in the USA has been written about significantly by many scholars, some of whom also note that such a claim might be a myth (An 2007; Lew 2007; Zhou and Kim 2006; Wong and Halgin 2006; Asher 2007; Chong and Kim 2006:336; Kao and Thompson 2003: 433–434). According to Wong and Halgin (2006) the label “model minority” was introduced by an American scholar in 1966 to praise the success of Japanese Americans, and suggested that other racial or minority groups should emulate them. “Since then...” according to Wong and Halgin, “...the media have touted Asian Americans as the model minority who are viewed as experiencing increasing wealth, upward social mobility, and freedom from crime and mental health problems. They are especially acclaimed for their academic success, often portrayed as geniuses or science/math wizards” (p. 38). According to Zhou and Kim (2006): “Extraordinary Asian American educational achievement has often been credited to a common cultural influence of Confucianism that emphasizes education, family, honor, discipline, and respect for authority” (p. 1). An (2007) notes that: “Asian American students have often been stereotyped as “model minorities” who do well in school, are educationally triumphant, and have no academic difficulties. Their achievement has commonly been attributed to characteristics of “Asian culture,” such as hard work, respect for teachers, and living up to parental expectations...” (p. 228). Economic and social statistics of the USA throughout this paper will show that Asian Americans as a group tend to outperform other groups or subgroups, including whites.

This now brings us to Black American females. An increasing number of evidence tend to indicate that although Black American females still continue to feel the negative effects of the legacy of slavery in the USA, they appear to be making substantial progress in many different ways by the beginning of the twenty-first century. If the central argument of the model minority concept in the USA pertains to groups that once experienced severe economic, social and political isolation and managed to rise up despite those difficulties, then one could expand the model minority concept to include Black American females. No subgroup has suffered severe economic, political and social isolation more than Black American females. During slavery, they suffered as black people and then after the abolition of slavery they were again discriminated against as women, when their male counterparts were allowed to vote and serve in the US Congress and state legislatures, they and white and women from other racial groups were

not allowed to serve. Also, gender discrimination in education and the work place and the glass ceiling prevented them from attaining any significant success in their own country of birth.

By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century in the USA, however, although one can still compile numerous evidence showing Black American females still lagging behind many other subgroups, including their male counterparts and women in other groups, one can now also point to increasing evidence showing them rising in many important sectors of society. In addition, unlike Asian Americans, a significant proportion of whom are not native-born US citizens, the overwhelming majority of Black American females are native-born US citizens. Also, the Black American female population already in the tens of millions is several millions more than the total Asian American population. By the first half of 2008, for example, the evidence show that while a Black American woman has served as a National Security Adviser and Secretary of State of the USA, no Asian American has yet to serve in those two crucial positions. This shows that a clear argument could be made that Black American women are rising and becoming America's model minority in the most original way.

This paper is divided into three parts or sections. The first part presents many examples showing that almost 400 years after they were brought to the USA as slaves and over 140 years after the emancipation of slaves in the country, Black American females still continue to be negatively impacted by the legacy of that peculiar institution. This first part of the paper will provide economic and social indicators showing that Black American females still lag behind other groups and subgroups including their black male counterparts.

The second part of this paper argues that although there are numerous examples showing that Black American women continue to lag behind other groups in many economic and social indicators, there appears to be increasing evidence showing gains or progress being made by them, including in education, politics, and the economy. Many examples will be given to support this claim. It is these gains that caused the author to ask whether Black American women are becoming the new model minority.

Finally, the third part of this paper attempts to explain the factors that are contributing to the author's claim that Black American women are becoming America's new model minority. Among the interrelated factors are religion, avoidance of drugs, avoidance of crime, work ethic, and discipline and diligence, and a gradual transfer of wealth and knowledge from older and wealthy Americans of any race or gender. To get a better understanding of the issues that are examined in this paper, it is important to first present the racial and gender breakdowns of the USA as of 2005.

Racial Breakdown of the USA: 2005

The USA has one of the most complicated racial classifications of its people than most other nations. For example, Arabs and Iranians, like Europeans, are white. A child of white and East Asian parents is white, but a child with that same white parent and a black parent is black (Kaba 2006).

In 2005, the total population of the USA was 296,410,000. The One Race population was 291,831,000 (98.5%), with whites accounting for 237,855,000 (81.5%); blacks, 37,909,000 (13%); American Indian and Alaskan Native (AIAN), 2,863,000 (.98%); Asian, 12,687,000 (4.3%); Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders (NHOP), 517,000 (0.0018%); and those who were Two or More Races, 4,579,000 (1.6%). For the Race Alone or in Combination with one or more other races, there were 241,807,000 (81.6% out of 296,410,000) whites; 39,724,000 blacks (13.4%); 4,454,000 (1.5%) AIAN; 14,377,000 (4.6%) Asians; and 990,000 (0.0033%) NHOPI.

Under the “Not Hispanic or Latino” category, there was 253,723,000 total population in 2005, the One Race total was 249,749,000 (98.4% of the 253,723,000); white, 198,366,000 (78.2%); black, 36,325,000 (14.3%); AIAN, 2,233,000 (0.9%); Asian, 12,421,000 (4.9%); and NHOPI, 812,000 (0.3%).

The Hispanic or Latino population in 2005 was 42,687,000, with One Race accounting for 42,082,000 (98.6); white, 39,489,000 (92.5%); black, 1,585,000 (3.7%); AIAN, 630,000 (1.5%); Asian, 267,000 (0.6%); NHOPI, 112,000 (0.3%); Two or More Races, 605,000 (1.4%). For Race Alone or in Combination with under Hispanic or Latino, there were 40,025,000 (93.8%) whites; 1,866,000 (4.4%) blacks; 851,000 (2%) AIAN; 443,000 (1%) Asian; and 177,000 (0.4%) NHOPI.

For the total male population in 2005, it was 146,000,000 (49.3% out of 296,410,000 total). And the One Race was 143,742,000 (49.3% out of 291,831,000); white 117,814,000 (40.4%); black, 18,079,000 (6.2%); AIAN, 1,435,000 (0.5%); Asian, 6,152,000 (2.1%); NHOPI, 263,000 (0.9%); and Two or More Races, 2,257,000 (0.8%).

For Race Alone or in Combination, there were 119,768,000 (40.4% out of 296,410,000) white males; black males, 18,963,000 (6.1%); AIAN males, 2,205,000 (0.7%); Asian Males, 6,996,000 (7.4%); NHOPI, 498,000 (1.7%); Not-Hispanic or Latino males, 123,934,000 (41.8%); and Hispanic or Latino males, 22,065,000 (7.4%).

The total female population in 2005 was 150,411,000 (50.7% out of 296,410,000). The One Race population was 148,089,000 (50.7% out of 291,831,000); white 120,041,000 (41%); black, 19,830,000 (6.8%); AIAN, 1,429,000 (0.5%); Asian, 6,535,000 (2.5%); NHOPI, 253,000 (0.0009%); and Two or More Races, 2,322,000 (0.008%).

For Race Alone or in Combination, there were 122,039,000 (41.2%) white females; black females, 20,761,000 (7%); AIAN females, 2,249,000 (0.008%); Asian females, 7,380,000 (2.5%); NHOPI females, 492,000 (0.002%); Not-Hispanic or Latino females, 129,789,000 (43.8%); and Hispanic or Latino females, 20,622,000 (6.95%).¹ Let us now begin by examining economic and social statistics showing that Black American females continue to lag behind other groups or subgroups, including their male counterparts in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

¹ “Table 13. Resident Population by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin Status: 2000 to 2005,” 2007. Population. US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html>. (p. 14).

Social and Economic Indicators of Black American Females and other Groups in the USA

Health and Well-being

A substantial percentage of health and other social statistics pertaining to the people of the USA in annual reports continue to show that Black American females are lagging behind most other groups or subgroups including males and females of all racial/ethnic backgrounds. For example, in 2003, the percent of births with low birth weights to mothers in the USA was 7.9%; 6.9% for whites; 13.4% for blacks; and 6.7% for Hispanics.² In 2003, the percent of births with low birth weight for women (all ages) in the USA (excluding California, Pennsylvania and Washington) was 8.2%, but 12.4% for smokers and 7.7% for non-smokers. For non-Hispanic blacks, it was 13.6%, but 20.3% for smokers and 13% for non-smokers. For non-Hispanic whites, it was 7.2%, but 11.2% for smokers and 6.5% for non-smokers. For Hispanics, it was 7%, but 13% for smokers and 6.8% for non-smokers.³ Also in 2003, there were 12.1 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births from deliveries and complications of pregnancy, childbirth, and puerperium in the USA; 8.7 for whites and 30.5 for blacks. In 2003, there were 4.6 neonatal deaths per 1,000 live births in the USA; 3.9 for whites and 9.4 for blacks.⁴ In 2003, there was a total of 235.6 deaths (crude) from Heart Disease per 100,000 in the USA: 235.0 for males and 236.2 for females. For white females it was 185.4; 253.8 for black females; 104.2 for Asian, Pacific Islander females; 145.8 for Hispanic females; and 187.1 for non-Hispanic white females.⁵

A higher proportion of black baby girls under one year old die annually per every 100,000 than baby girls of other racial groups. For example, in 2003, there were 619 deaths per 100,000 of American baby girls under the age of one. For white baby girls, it was 521. For black baby girls, it was 1,132. For Asian or Pacific Islander baby girls, it was 428.⁶

There appears to be higher abortion rates for black females than white females in the USA. In 2002, of females aged 15 to 44 in the USA, there were 1,293,000 abortions. The rate per 1,000 females was 20.8 and the ratio per 1,000 live births was 319. For whites it was 719,000, 14.7 and 225 respectively. For “black and Other” it

² “Table 84. Births to Teens, Unmarried Mothers, and Prenatal Care: 1990 to 2004,” 2007. Vital Statistics. U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States). <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 67).

³ “Table 87. Births—Percent with Low Birth Weight by Age, Race, Hispanic Origin and Smoking Status of Mothers: 2003,” 2007. Vital Statistics. US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 69).

⁴ “Table 106. Infant, Maternal, and Neonatal Mortality Rates by Race: 1980 to 2003,” 2007. Section 2, Vital Statistics. US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States). <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 82).

⁵ “Table 113. Death Rates from Heart Disease by Selected Characteristics; 1970 to 2003,” 2007. Vital Statistics. US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 88).

⁶ “Table 102. Death Rates by Age, Sex, and Race: 1950 to 2004,” 2007. Vital Statistics. US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 79).

was 574,000, 44 and 672 respectively.⁷ As the data showed above, it is difficult to show the actual abortion figures only for Black American females because they are grouped with “other.” However, another account claims that an average of 1,500 abortions are performed on black females each day in the USA and that there are 495 abortions performed on black females for every 1,000 live births.⁸

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is impacting Black Americans more than all other groups in the USA, just as it is impacting Africans in Africa more than people in all of the regions or continents on the planet (Levine et al. 2007; Kaba 2007). In the USA for example, in 2003, there were 4.7 HIV/AIDS deaths of all ages (age adjusted) per 100,000 of the population; 7.1 for males and 2.4 for females. For whites males it was 4.2; 31.3 for black males; 1.1 for Asian, Pacific Islander males; 9.2 for Hispanic males; and 3.4 for non-Hispanic white males. For white females it was 0.9; 12.8 for black females; 2.7 for Hispanic females; and 0.6 for non-Hispanic white females.⁹

Marriages and Households

Compared with other Americans in the USA, fewer proportions of black women are married and they also comprise a very high proportion of single parents living with their children. For example, in 2005, out of 104,800,000 American men 18 years and over, 29.6 million (28.2%) were never married; 63.3 million (60.4%) were married; 2.7 million (2.6%) were widowed; and 9.2 million (8.8%) were divorced. For 112,300,000 American women, 24.3 million (21.6%) were never married; 64 million (56.9%) were married; 11.1 million (9.9%) were widowed; and 12.9 million (11.5%) were divorced. For blacks alone in 2005, there were 25,200,000 18 years and over, with 10.2 million (40.6%) who were never married; 10.3 million (41%) were married; 1.7 million (6.6%) were widowed; and 2.9 million (11.7%) were divorced. For 11.2 million black men, 4.7 million (42%) were never married; 5 million (45.5%) were married; 0.3 million (2.7%) were widowed; and 1.1 million (9.8%) were divorced; For 13.9 million black women, 5.5 million (39.5%) were never married; 5.2 million (37.4%) were married; 1.4 million (10%) were widowed; and 1.8 million (13.3%) were divorced.¹⁰

Compared with other women and men in the USA, a higher percentage of family households are maintained by black women. For example, in 2005, there were

⁷ “Table 96. Abortions—Number, Rate, and Ratio by Race: 1975 to 2002,” 2007. Vital Statistics. US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 74).

⁸ “Vital Signs: Statistics that Measure the State of Racial Inequality,” 2006. *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, Issue Number 51, Spring. Retrieved on December 18, 2007 from: http://www.jbhe.com/vital/51_index.html.

⁹ “Table 117. Death Rates from Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) Disease by Selected Characteristics; 1990 to 2003,” 2007. Vital Statistics. US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 90).

¹⁰ “Table 54. Marital Status of the Population by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1990 to 2005,” 2007. Population. US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 50).

39,646,000 family groups in the USA, with 26,749,000 (67.5%) comprising two-parent family groups; 12,897,000 (32.5%) one-parent family groups; 10,411,000 (26.3%) were maintained by the mother; and 2,487,000 (6.3%) were maintained by the father. For blacks, there were 5,502,000 family groups, with 2,077,000 (37.7%) comprising two-parent family groups; 3,425,000 (62.3%) comprising one-parent family groups. Of the 5,502,2000 family groups, 3,033,000 (55.2%) were maintained by the mother and 392,000 (7.1%) were maintained by the father.¹¹

In 2005, there were 73,523,000 children under 18 years old in the USA, with 67.4% living with both parents; 23.4% living with mother only; 4.7% living with father only and 4.5% living with neither parent. Also, for 10.1% of those living with mother only, the mother is never married. For whites the figures were 56,259,000 children under 18 years old; 73.6% living with both parents; 18.4% living with mother only; 4.7% living with father only; and 3.4% living with neither parent. For 5.8% of those living with mother only, the mother is never married. For blacks it was 11,295,000 under 18 years old; 35.1% living with both parents; 50.1% living with mother only; 4.9% living with father only; and 9.8% living with neither parent. For 32% of those living with mother only, the mother is never married. For Asians it was 2,860,000 under 18 years old; 83.7% living with both parents; 10.2% living with mother only; 3.6% living with father only; and 2.5% living with neither parent. For 2.7% living with mother only, the mother is never married. For Hispanics it was 14,248,000 under 18 years old; 64.7% living with both parents; 25.4% living with mother only; 4.8% living with father only; and 5.1% living with neither parent. For 11.4% living with mother only, the mother is never married. For non-Hispanic whites it was 43,122,000 under 18 years old; 76% living with both parents; 16.4% living with mother only; 4.8% living with father only; and 2.9% living with neither parent. For 4.2% living with mother only, the mother is never married.¹²

In 2005, there was a total of 77,010,000 families in the USA; 58,109,000 (75.5%) with married couples; 4,893,999 (6.4%) male householder, and 14,009,000 (18.2%) female householder. For blacks, it was 8,904,000 families; 4,180,000 (46.9%) with married couple; 734,000 (8.2%) male householder and 3,991,000 (44.8%) female householder.¹³

High School Dropouts

In US high schools, both the Event and Status dropout rates are higher for black female students than their white counterparts. For instance, in 2004, the event

¹¹ “Table 62. Family Groups with Children Under 18 Years Old by Race and Hispanic Origin; 1990 to 2005,” 2007. Population. US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 54).

¹² “Table 64. Children Under 18 Years Old by Presence of Parents: 1990 to 2005,” 2007. Population. US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 55).

¹³ “Table 66. Families by Number of Own Children Under 18 Years Old: 1990 to 2005,” 2007. Population. US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 56).

dropout rate for US high school students was 4.4%; 4.2% for whites (4.9% for males and 3.5% for females); 5.2% for blacks (4.8% for males and 5.7% for females); 8% for Hispanics (11.5% for males and 4.6% for females). In 2004, status dropout rate for US high school students was 12.1%; 11.9% for whites (13.7% for males and 10% for females); 15.1% for blacks (17.9% for males and 12.7% for females); and 28% for Hispanics (33.5% for males and 21.7% for females).¹⁴

Economy

Kaba (2005) points out that due to their rapid increase in higher education attainment, Black American women are positioned to become more economically successful than their male counterparts in the years and decades to come, but at this moment on average, they are not yet as economically successful than black men and members of other racial groups in the USA. It is noted that:

Although black women generally have higher education levels than black men, and a higher likelihood of holding managerial and professional positions, black men earn more than comparable black women, pointing to sex discrimination in remuneration. As a result, lower proportion of black men are in poverty than black women (22.8 compared to 26.7%).¹⁵

In 2004, the median income (in constant dollars) for all males in the USA was \$30,513; white, \$31,335; black, \$22,714; Asian \$32,886; Hispanic \$21,559; white, non-Hispanic, \$33,652. For females in the USA, it was \$17,629; white, \$17,648; black, \$17,383; Asian, \$20,533; Hispanic, \$14,425; white, non-Hispanic \$18,379.¹⁶

In 2003, out of 12,008,000 black male households in the USA, 4,456,000 (37.1%) had incomes of under \$10,000; 565,000 (4.7%) had incomes from \$50,000 to \$59,999; and 144,000 (1.2%) had incomes from \$100,000 to \$149,999. For black females, out of 14,671,000, 6,132,000 (41.8%) had incomes under \$10,000; 405,000 (2.8%) had incomes from \$50,000 to 59,999; and 78,000 (0.0053%) had incomes from \$100,000 to \$149,999.¹⁷

As already noted above proportionally, there are more black females in poverty than their male counterparts or whites. In 2004, 36,997,000 (16,381,000 (44.3%) were males and 20,617,000 (55.7%) were females) were below the poverty level in

¹⁴ “Table 260. High School Dropouts by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1975 to 2004,” 2007. Education. US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 169).

¹⁵ “Discrimination at Work in the Americas,” Fact Sheet. International Labor Office. No Date provided. Retrieved on March 12, 2008 from: http://www.ilo.org/dyn/declaris/DECLARATIONWEB.DOWNLOAD_BLOB?Var_DocumentID=6810 (p. 2).

¹⁶ “Table 682. Median Income of People With Income in Constant (2004) Dollars by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1990 to 2004,” 2007. Income, Expenditures, and Wealth. U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 451).

¹⁷ “Table 686. Money Income of People—Number by Income Level and by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin:2003,” 2007. Income, Expenditures, and Wealth. US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 453).

the USA. Blacks alone comprised 9,000,000 (24.3%) (3,833,000 (42.6%, but 10.4% of total) were males and 5,167,000 (57.4%, but 14% of total) were females).¹⁸

In 2004, there were 3,222,000 (41%) married couple families below the poverty level out of a total of 7,854,000 families in the USA.; white alone, 2,591,000 (48.7%) out of 5,315,000; black alone, 380,000 (18.7%) out of 2,034,000; Asian alone, 147,000 (63.4%) out of 232,000; Hispanic, 939,000 (48%) out of 1,958,000. For male householder no spouse present for the USA was 658,000 (8.4% out of 7,854,000) and female householder no spouse present was 3,973,000 (50.6% out of 7,854,000); For blacks, it was 154,000 (7.6% out of 2,034,000) for males and 1,500,000 (74% out of 2,034,000) for females.¹⁹

A higher proportion of black mothers tend to be in the workforce than women in other groups causing them to spend less time with their children, especially at critically early ages. For instance, in 2003, 77.5% of black mothers with children under 18 years were in the labor force; 70% of white mothers; 67% of Asian mothers; and 61.2% of Hispanic mothers.²⁰

The higher rate of black women, including mothers in the labor force contributes substantially to fewer of them being at home to take care of their children. For example, in Winter 2002, there were 18,454,000 children under 5 years old. Of that total, 3.5% were under the care of their mother; 14.2% under the care of their father; 22.7% under the care of grandparents; 9.3% under the care of siblings/other relatives; 12.7% in day Care Centers; 6.2% in Nursery/pre-school; 5.3% in Head Start/School; 3.7% in Child's Home with a provider; 6.2% in Family Day Care in Provider's home; 4.2% in Other care in Provider's home; 37.2% with no Regular care; and 15.4% in multiple arrangements. For blacks, there were 1,521,000 children under 5 years old in Winter 2002; 1.8% were under mother's care; 18.2%; under the care of their father; 29.2% under the care of Grandparents; 15.9% under the care of siblings/other relatives; 24.3% in Day care centers; 7.4% in Nursery/pre-school; 8.5% in Head Start/School; 2.9% in Child's Home with a provider; 9.3% in Family Day Care in Provider's home; 5.2% in Other care in Provider's home; 6.5.2% with no Regular care; and 16.3% in multiple arrangements.²¹

Negative Impact on Black Women of the Massive Number of Black Males in Prison

Although women in general comprise a very small fraction of individuals in local jails and state and federal prisons in the USA, black women still feel the negative effects of the extremely high number of black males incarcerated. Black women also

¹⁸ "Table 694. Persons Below Poverty Level by Selected Characteristics: 2004," 2007. Income, Expenditures, and Wealth. U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 459).

¹⁹ "Table 697. Families Below Poverty Level by Selected Characteristics: 2004," 2007. Income, Expenditures, and Wealth. US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 461).

²⁰ Anonymous. 2004. "A Visual Essay: Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics in the Civilian Labor Force," *Monthly Labor Review*, 127, (6): 69–76 (p. 72).

²¹ Johnson, Julia Overturf. 2005, October. "Who's Minding the Kids? Child Care Arrangements: Winter 2002," US Census Bureau. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 4).

have relatively higher incarceration rate than their white and Hispanic counterparts. For example, in June 2006, there were 1,384 males per 100,000 males in local jails, State or Federal prisons in the USA; 736 for whites; 4,789 for blacks; and 1,862 for Hispanics. For females it was 134 per 100,000 of the population; 94 for whites; 358 for blacks; and 152 for Hispanics (Sabol et al. 2007: 9).

The above statistics put Black American women in a difficult position because the extremely harsh laws in the country makes it very difficult for ex-felons to get jobs and become breadwinners and most black women also do not feel comfortable living in a family relationship with black male ex-felons due to the harsh negative stigma in society. For example, Currence and Johnson (2003) point out that:

Black children (7%) are nearly 9 times more likely to have a parent in prison than white children (0.8%)....Recent studies also suggest that single mothers are reluctant to marry or live with fathers of their children, if the father has a history of incarceration....Thus, the stigma of incarceration significantly reduces the social status of a young man and signals his undesirability to possible marriage partners. Therefore, incarceration is likely to deter family formation both directly, by making it more difficult for fathers to live with their children, and indirectly, by reducing fathers' employment prospects and earnings capacity" (pp. 25 and 28).

One might tend to assume that since such a large number of Black American males are in prison and an overwhelming proportion of black households with children are headed by single women that a large number of black women will marry or get involved in romantic relations outside of their race. But in a country with tens of millions of black females, that is not yet the case. Although the proportion and actual raw numbers of Black American women involved in interracial marriages have increased significantly in the past quarter century, the numbers are still very small as a percentage of the total population of blacks and people of other racial groups. In 1980, for example, there were 167,000 black/white married couples in the USA, with black husband/white wife comprising 122,000 (73%) and white husband/black wife comprising 45,000 (27%). There were 34,000 marriages with black and Other races. In 2005, there were 422,000 black/white married couples in the USA, with black husband/white wife comprising 288,000 (68.2%) and 134,000 (32%) white husband/black wife. There were 145,000 black/other race married couples in 2005.²²

Homicide Victims

Compared with their white counterparts, black women have higher murder rates. For example, in 2003, there were 17,732 homicide victims in the USA, with black males comprising 7,083 (40%) and black females 1,309 (7.4%); white males 6,337 (35.7%) and white females 2,372 (13.4%). The homicide rate in the USA in 2003 was 6.1 per

²² "Table 57. Household, Families, Subfamilies, and Married Couples: 1980 to 2005," 2007. Population. US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 52).

100,000; 5.4 for white males and 2.0 for white females; 38.9 for black males and 6.6 for black females.²³

Government Assistance

Due primarily to the legacy of both Slavery and gender discrimination in the USA, which continue to put a significant number of Black American women in harsh economic hardship, they continue to represent a higher proportion of women or mothers receiving government assistance. Jackson (1997) points out that: “Single and black mothers are disproportionately represented among the very poor and welfare dependent” (p. 1). In 2001, there were 4,066,000 mothers 15 to 44 years who had a child in the last year with 29.4% participation rate (participating in or covered by one or more programs) in US government assistant programs; 3,274,000 white mothers, with 25.1% participation rate; 2,617,000 non-Hispanic whites mothers, with 21.1% participation rate; 511,000 black mothers, with 55.7% participation rate; 226,000 Asian and Pacific Islanders mothers, with 21.4% participation rate; and 704,000 Hispanic mothers (of any race), with 43% participation rate.²⁴ Let us now turn to examples showing black women making important economic, social and political gains in the USA by the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Progress of Black American Women as the New Model Minority

Higher Education Attainment

Educational attainment, especially the attainment of high school, college or university diploma tends to contribute substantially to native-born or foreign-born Americans’ economic, social and political success in the USA. A significant development pertaining to educational attainment has occurred among black women in the USA. Although they suffered twice in their struggle to gain access to formal high school and college educations, first as blacks when they could be killed if they were found reading a book and then discrimination against them as women, which did not end until the early 1970s, today they have become one of the most successful minority subgroups in the attainment of high school and college diplomas.

By 2004, a higher proportion of black women were not only enrolled in colleges and universities in the USA than their male counterparts, but also white males and females, and Hispanic males and females. For example, in 2004, there were 17,383,000 individuals aged 14 years and above enrolled in colleges and universities

²³ “Table 303. Homicide Victims by Race and Sex: 1980 to 2003,” Law Enforcement, Courts and Prisons. US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 195).

²⁴ Lugaila, Terry A. 2005, September. “Participation of Mothers in Government Assistance Programs: 2001,” Household Economic Studies. U.S. Census Bureau. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office (p. 9).

in the USA. Of that total, males comprised 7,575,000 (43.6%) and females 9,808,000 (56.4%).

Of those 17,383,000 enrolled in colleges and universities, whites comprised 13,381,000 (77%). White males comprised 5,944,000 (34.2% of total US enrollment) and white females comprised 7,438,000 (42.8% of total US enrollment). Blacks comprised 2,301,000 (13.2%). Black males comprised 776,000 (4.5% of total US enrollment) and black females comprised 1,525,000 (8.8% of total US enrollment) Hispanics comprised 1,975,000 (11.4%). Hispanic males comprised 852,000 (4.9% of total US enrollment) and Hispanic females comprised 1,123,000 (6.5% of total US enrollment).²⁵

Within each subgroup, of those aged 3 years and over in the USA, black (or in combination with other races) females had higher college enrollment rates in 2004. For example, in October 2004, black females not only had a higher percentage (8.2% or 1,584,000 out of 19,215,000) of college and university enrollment than black males (5% or 827,000 out of 16,671,000), but also white (or in combination with other races) females (6.6% or 7,600,000 out of 115,722,000), white males (5.4% or 6,068,000 out of 112,262,000), Hispanic females (6.0% or 1,123,000 out of 18,798,000), and Hispanic males (4.3% or 852,000 out of 19,846,000). The only groups with higher rates than black females were Asian (or in combination with other races) males (10.9% or 662,000 out of 6,073,000), and Asian females (9.2% or 598,000 out of 6,491,000).²⁶

In addition, Black Americans in general, but black women in particular have substantially increased their rates in high school and college and university degrees. Table 1 (see Appendix) is 2007 statistics showing the total number of people in the USA with high school diplomas, some college education, associate degrees, bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, professional degrees and doctorate degrees. Table 1 (in Appendix) looks like a pyramid, whereby higher proportions of whites and Asians have bachelor's, master's, professional and doctorate degrees, while relatively higher proportion of blacks having high school diploma, some college degrees and to some extent, Associate degrees. Let us examine the numbers and percentages in Table 1 (in Appendix).

In 2007, there were 222,723,000 people in the USA who were 18 years and over and 194,318,000 people who were 25 years and over. Of the 222,723,000 individuals aged 18 and over, 31.5% had high school diploma; 19% had some college education; 4.3% had associate degrees (occupational); 3.9% had associate degrees (academic); 17.5% had bachelor's degrees; 6.2% had master's degrees; 1.4% had professional degrees; 1.1% had doctorate degrees; and 26.2% had bachelor's degree or higher.

For 26,638,000 black alone or in combination with, the figures were 36.2% (38.4 for males and 34.4% for females); 20.8% (19.6% for males and 21.7% for females);

²⁵ "Table 270. College Enrollment by Sex, Age, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1980 to 2004," 2007. Education. US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States). <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 175).

²⁶ "School Enrollment—Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 2004," 2005, October 3. US Census Bureau. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/school/cps2004.html>.

4.3% (3.7% for males and 4.9% for females); 3.7% (3.4% for males and 3.3% for females); 11.7% (11% for males and 12.2% for females); 3.7% (3.2% for males and 4.1% for females); 0.6% (0.8% for males and 0.6% for females); 0.45% (0.56% for males and 0.36% for females); and 16.5% (15.5% for males and 17.2% for females) respectively.

Of the 194,318,000 individuals in the USA aged 25 and over in 2007, 31.6% had high school diplomas; 16.7% had some college degrees; 4.6% had associate degrees (occupational); 4% had associate degrees (academic); 18.9% had bachelor's degrees; 7% had master's degrees; 1.6% had professional degrees; 1.3% had doctorate degrees; and 28.75 had bachelor's degrees or higher. For 22,404,000 black alone or in combination with, in the USA in 2007, the figures were: 36% (38.2% for males and 34.4% for females); 18.8% (17.6% for males and 19.8% for females); 4.7% (4.2% for males and 5.1% for females); 4% (3.8% for males and 4.2% for females); 13% (12.7% for males and 13.3% for females); 4.3% (3.9% for males and 4.7% for females); 0.8% (0.9% for males and 0.7% for females); 0.68% (0.4% for males and 0.3% for females); and 18.4% (18.2% for males and 19.1% for females) respectively (Table 1, Appendix).

According to Table 1 (in Appendix), this is a great achievement for Black American women when one considers their difficult and painful American experience. For example, only black males had higher high school diploma rates for those both 18 years and over and 25 years and over than black females (36.2% and 38.2% to 34.4% and 34.4% respectively), followed by white alone or in combination with (31.4% and 31.5% for males and 31.4% and 31.8% for females), Hispanics of any race (29.5% and 28.3% for males and 29.1% and 28.4% for females), and Asian alone or in combination with, (20.5% and 20.6% for males and 20.2% and 20% for females; Table 1 (in Appendix). A higher proportion of black females had some college degrees among both those 18 years and over and 25 years and over (21.7% and 19.8% respectively) than all of the other subgroups. Black females and white females had the highest proportions of those both aged 18 years and over and 25 years and over with associate degrees (Occupational) (4.9% and 5.1% for black females and 4.7% and 5% for white females) respectively (Table 1, Appendix).

Black females are second to white females only among those 25 years and over with associate degrees (academic; 4.6% and 4.2% respectively). Black females had higher rates of bachelor's degrees among those 25 years and over (13.3%) than their male counterparts (12.7%) and Hispanic males and females (8.7% and 10.2% respectively). Black females also have a higher proportion of master's degrees in 2007 among those 25 years and over (4.7%) than black males (3.9%) and Hispanic males and females (2.1% and 2.8% respectively). Finally, among those 25 years and over, black females have higher rates in bachelor's degrees or higher (19.1%) than black males (18.2%), and Hispanic males (11.8%) and Hispanic females (13.7%). Black females and Hispanic males had a tie among those 25 years and over with professional degrees (0.7%), higher only more than the rate for Hispanic females (0.4%), but black females and Hispanic males had a statistical tie as those with the lowest proportion of doctorate degrees among all the other groups or subgroups (0.3% to 0.33% respectively). This is the only area where black females are the subgroup with the lowest percentage in Table 1 (in Appendix).

Furthermore, it is useful to note that if one were to extract the foreign-born population from Table 1 (in Appendix), the proportion of native-born black females with academic degrees will increase significantly, relative to the other subgroups, including their male counterparts. Black American women, especially among the native-born, are a big contributor to why as a group females are now catching up or surpassing their male counterparts in college and university enrollments and degree attainment in the USA. For example, the year 2002 became the first time in history when among citizens of the USA who earned doctorates, women comprised the majority (51%) of the total 25,936 doctorates awarded (Hoffer et al. 2003, pp. 113–115), and they have continued to keep that lead since 2002 (Hoffer et al. 2006: 19). Black females contributed substantially to that great achievement. For example, in 2002, of the 39,955 doctorates awarded to individuals in the USA, the 25,936 doctorates for citizens accounted for 64.8%. Of the 24,239 doctorates awarded to whites in 2002, USA citizens comprised 20,720 (85.8%); 1,644 (81.8%) out of 2,009 for blacks; 1,233 (61%) out of 2,020 for Hispanics; 1,364 (17.3%) out of 7,864 for Asians (Hoffer et al. 2003, pp. 113–115). Of the 1,644 doctorates awarded to blacks in 2002, females accounted for 1,038 (63.1%); 10,291 (49.7%) out of 20,720 for white females; 697 (56.5%) out of 1,233 for Hispanic females; and 617 (45.2%) for Asian females (Hoffer et al. 2003: 113–115). It is noted that:

The number of African-American women getting master's degrees increased 149.5% from 1991 to 2001—from 10,700 to 26,697. This increase is larger than that of the number of white men and women receiving M.A.'s in the same period. white men getting M.A.'s in the same period increased 10.1 percent (from 114,419 to 125,993), while white women getting M.A.'s increased 32.5 percent (from 146,813 to 194,487).²⁷

Also, it is reported that the proportion of all whites who earned a bachelor's degree in 1993 who had earned a master's degree by 2003 was 25.4%, but the figure is 25.8% for blacks. This is due largely to the rapid progress of black females in higher education.²⁸

Life Expectancy and Death Rates

Black females have made substantial progress in increasing their average life expectancy and decreasing their overall death rates. In 1970, the average life expectancy of black females in the USA was 68.3 years. In 2003, the life expectancy of the total population in the USA was 77.5 years; 74.8 years for males and 80.1 years for females: for whites, it was 78 years total; 75.3 years for males and 80.5 years for females: For blacks, it was 72.7 years total; 69 years for males and 76.1

²⁷ "Advancing African-American Women in the Workplace: What Managers Need to Know," 2004. Catalyst. 120 Wall Street, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10005–3904. www.catalystwomen.org (p. 2).

²⁸ "Vital Signs: Statistics that Measure the State of Racial Inequality," 2006. *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, Issue Number 51, Summer. Retrieved on December 18, 2007 from: http://www.jbhe.com/vital/52_index.html.

years for females. This shows that black women not only now have a higher life expectancy rate than their male counterparts, but also white males.²⁹

Due largely to black women living longer, a higher percentage of blacks tend to be 85 years or over. Also, when one extracts those who are 100 years or over from those 85 years or over, blacks have a higher percentage than whites. For example, in 2000, there were 3,778,504 whites aged 85 years and over, with men accounting for 1,088,377 (28.8%) and women accounting for 2,690,127 (71.2%). In 2000, there were 313,286 blacks aged 85 years and over, with men accounting for 84,780 (27.1%) and women accounting for 228,509 (72.9%; US Census Bureau 2002).

In 2005, there were 5,096,000 Americans aged 85 years and over; 4,567,000 are white alone; 370,000 are black alone; 233,000 Hispanics or Latinos; and 4,347,000 non-Hispanic whites. In 2005, there were 70,000 Americans 100 years and over (1.4% of the 5,096,000 who are 85 years or older); 58,000 whites alone (1.3% of the 4,567,000 who are 85 years or older); 9,000 blacks alone (2.4% of the 370,000 who are 85 or over); 5,000 Hispanics (2.1% of the 233,000 who are 85 years or older); and 54,000 non-Hispanic whites (1.2% of the 4,347,000 who are 85 years or older).³⁰ This shows that the rate for blacks 85 years and over is doubled that of non-Hispanic whites.

Death Rates

One might expect that a higher proportion of Black Americans would have a higher overall annual death rate as percent of the total US population because of their history, but due largely to black females that is not the case. For example, in 2003, there were 2,448,000 deaths in the USA; 1,202,000 (49%) for males and 1,246,000 (51%) for females: For whites, 2,104,000 (86% of total); 1,026,000 (41.9% of 2,448,000) for males and 1,078,000 (44% of 2,448,000) for females: For blacks, it was 291,000 (11.9% of total); 148,000 (6%) for males and 143,000 (5.8%, but they are 7% of total US population) for females; for Hispanics, 122,000 (5%); 68,000 (2.8%) for males and 54,000 (2.2%) for females.³¹

When examined per every 1,000 or 100,000 deaths within each subgroup, fewer black females die than black males, white males and white females. For example, the death rate per 1,000 of the population in the USA in 2003 was 8.4; 8.4 each for males and females. For whites, it was 8.9; 8.8 for males and 9.0 for females. For blacks, it was 7.6; 8.1 for males and 7.2 for females. For Asian or Pacific Islanders, it was 3.0; 3.3 for males and 2.8 for females. For Hispanics, it was 3.1; 3.3 for males

²⁹ “Table 98. Expectation of Life at Birth, 1970 to 2004, and Projections, 2010 and 2015,” 2007. Section 2, Vital Statistics. US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 75).

³⁰ “Table 15. Resident Population by Race, Hispanic Origin, and Single Years of Age: 2005,” 2007. Population. US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 17).

³¹ “Table 101. Deaths and Death Rates by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1980 to 2004,” 2007. Section 2, Vital Statistics. US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 78).

and 2.8 for females. Finally, for non-Hispanic whites, it was 9.9; 9.8 for males and 10.1 for females.³²

In 2003, there were 840 deaths per 100,000 of American males (of all ages). For females, it was 843 deaths. For white males it was 878. For black males it was 814. For Asian or Pacific Islander males it was 330. For white females it was 902 deaths. For black females it was 718 deaths. Finally, for Asian or Pacific Islander females it was 279.³³

Suicide

If one would have suggested that the higher the level of suffering a particular subgroup experienced in the history of the USA, the higher the level of that group's suicide rate, then that claim would be incorrect for black females. That is because black males, white males, white females, Hispanic males and Asian, Pacific Islander females have higher suicide rates than black females. For example, in 2003, there were 10.8 suicide deaths (crude) per 100,000 of the population in the USA: 18.0 for males and 4.2 for females. For white males it was 19.6; 9.2 for black males; 8.5 for Asian, Pacific Islander males; 9.7 for Hispanic males; and 21.0 for non-Hispanic white males. For white females it was 4.6; 1.9 for black females; 3.1 for Asian, Pacific Islander females; 1.7 for Hispanic females; and 5.0 for non-Hispanic white females.³⁴

Black Women in Managerial Positions in the US Civilian Labor Force

Due to their long history of being in the US labor force coupled with their rapid rate of college or university degrees and diplomas, black females have a visible presence in the nation's work force, including increasing rates in managerial and other professional positions, the top ranking job category in the country. This has placed them in a good position to have relatively high proportion among the elites of the USA (Kaba 2005; Lemelle 2002). According to Kaba (2005): "Throughout history up to the twenty-first century, in almost all societies, males have dominated economic and political systems. However, we are witnessing a reverse of this trend in the USA, where within the African American population black females are becoming the most dominant group instead of black males" (p. 33). Lemelle's (2002) study of almost 141 million people in the USA with high school diploma or more included examining their socioeconomic index (SEI), which according to Lemelle "...is a measure of occupational status based upon the income level and educational attainment associated with each occupation in 1950" (p. 92). Lemelle (2002) presented a figure that "...shows the means plot of the SEI of the six race and gender groups" (p. 92). According to Lemelle, while there is a difference of 2.8

³² "Table 101. Deaths and Death Rates by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1980 to 2004," 2007. Vital Statistics. US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 78).

³³ "Table 102. Death Rates by Age, Sex, and Race: 1950 to 2004," 2007. Vital Statistics. US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 79).

³⁴ "Table 116. Death Rates from Suicide, by Selected Characteristics; 1990 to 2003," 2007. Vital Statistics. US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 90).

points in the means of white males (40.38) and white females (37.62), it was 35.29 for black females and 29.46 for black males, a 5.83 difference (pp. 92–93).

In 2004, there were 134,259,000 employed civilians aged 16 years and above in the US; 105,048,000 (78.2%) were whites alone; 14,127,000 (10.5%) were blacks alone; 855,000 (0.0064%) were AIAN alone; 5,812,000 (4.3%) were Asians alone; 181,000 (0.0013%) were NHOPI alone; 1,735,000 (1.3%) were two or more races; 17,242,000 (12.8%) were Hispanics; and 94,925,000 (70.7%) were non-Hispanic whites. In 2004, there were 45,845,000 employed civilian Americans aged 16 years and over in managerial, professional, and related occupations; 37,581,000 (82%) were whites alone; 3,769,000 (8.2%) were blacks alone; 217,000 (0.0047%) were AIAN alone; 2,661,000 (5.8%) were Asians alone; 41,000 (0.00089%) were NHOPI alone; 531,000 (1.1%) were two or more races; 3,103,000 (6.8%) were Hispanics; and 35,660,000 (77.7%) were non-Hispanic whites.³⁵

A higher percentage of black females than black males are in Managerial and other professional positions in the USA. For example, according to Kaba (2005): “As of March 2000, there were 1,249,000 (17.7%) black males aged 16 years and over in the civilian labor force in managerial and professional specialty, the top occupational category in the nation. For black females, there were 2,062,000 (25.2%) black women aged 16 years and over in the civilian labor force in the managerial and professional specialty in March 2000” (p. 39). In 2003, 26.6% of blacks in the civilian labor force were in the Managerial, Professional and related occupations; 45.2% of Asians; 16.8% of Hispanics and 35.5% of whites.³⁶ In 2004, 30.6% of employed black women were in the Managerial, Professional and related occupations.³⁷

Furthermore, compared to their male counterparts, a higher proportion of black females in the US workforce have 401 (k) or other such “employer-sponsored retirement account” (75% to 63%), a 12 percentage point difference.³⁸

These gains in educational attainment are contributing to black females making some gains over their white female counterparts. For example, the average earning in 2003 of a white woman with a master’s degree in the USA was \$48,388, but the figure was \$49,344 for black women.³⁹ Within their race, although there are more black females in the labor force than their male counterparts, they have at least equaled the number of black (alone) males among those earning \$250,000 or more annually. For example, in 2003, out of 12,008,000 black male households in the US, 16,000 (0.0013%) had incomes of \$250,000 and above. For black females, out of 14,671,000, 16,000 (0.0011%) also had incomes of \$250,000 and above. For 90,980,000 white (alone)

³⁵ “Table 40. Selected Characteristics of Racial Groups and Hispanics/Latino Population: 2004,” 2007. Population. US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (pp. 40–41).

³⁶ Anonymous. 2004. “A Visual Essay: Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics in the Civilian Labor Force,” *Monthly Labor Review*, 127, (6): 69–76 (p. 72).

³⁷ “Women in the Labor Force: A Databook,” 2005, May. US Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics. <http://www.bls.gov/cps/wlf-databook2005.htm> (p. 35).

³⁸ “Vital Signs: Statistics that Measure the State of Racial Inequality,” 2006. *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, Issue Number 51, Spring. Retrieved December 18, 2007 from http://www.jbhe.com/vital/51_index.html.

³⁹ “Vital Signs: Statistics That Measure the State of Racial Inequality,” 2006. *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, Issue No. 50 Winter 2005/2006. http://www.jbhe.com/vital/50_index.html.

males, 832,000 (0.009%) had incomes of \$250,000 or more. For 94,958,000 white (alone) females, 140,000 (0.0014%) had incomes of \$250,000 or above in 2003.⁴⁰

Also, within each racial group, there appears to be more affluent black females than white females. For example, according to JBHE (2006), white females comprise 48% of all affluent White American individuals, but black females comprise 58% of all affluent Black American individuals.⁴¹ Finally, since blacks comprised 13% of the total US population, they tend to have a higher percentage of public school principals. For example, the proportion of all school principals in the USA in 1982 who were black was 12.2%, but by 2004 that figure increased to 16.4%.⁴² The higher participation rate of black females in education is a contributing factor to these gains.

Political Participation

After their long fight against slavery in the USA and winning their freedom in 1865, black women found themselves again being told that as women, they could not participate in politics such running for a seat in the US Congress, while black men were allowed to run for office. Even during the Civil Rights era, black women were not put in front as leaders. Robnett (2007) points out that: "...the civil rights movement, shows how women were prevented from serving as primary formal leaders in race-based organizations, but nonetheless worked as bridge leaders connecting the masses to these organizations" (p. 3).

By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, however, not only are Black American women voting and running in all types of elections from school boards to the US Congress and the Presidency of the USA, but as a group, their votes have now become crucial in Presidential and Congressional elections. The total number of female black elected officials has increased substantially just from the 1970s. According to Bositis (2003), for example, there were 1,469 black elected officials (BEOs) in 1970. As of January 2001, there were 9,101 BEOs in office. The number of female BEOs increased from 160 (10.9%) in 1970 to 3,220 (35.4%) in January 2001 (pp. 5–6). Bositis (2003) adds that there were 687 new black women elected to office between 1990 and 1995, compared with 362 new black men elected during that same period. Between 1995 and 2001, the figures were 583 to 99 respectively (p. 4).

In addition to running for elected office, black women have become a very powerful electoral block in national and state elections in the USA. Indeed, one can now find an instance where in national elections, the black female vote is proportionally equal to or higher than their proportion of the total population in the USA. The total black vote increased from 10% to 12% from the 2000 to the 2004 Presidential elections. During that period, black women increased their votes by 2.2 million, compared with 1.9 million by black men (Bositis 2005: 2). Black American

⁴⁰ "Table 686. Money Income of People—Number by Income Level and by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin:2003," 2007. Income, Expenditures, and Wealth. US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2007/2007edition.html> (p. 453).

⁴¹ "Vital Signs: Statistics that Measure the State of Racial Inequality," 2006. *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, Issue Number 51, Spring. Retrieved on December 18, 2007 from: http://www.jbhe.com/vital/51_index.html.

⁴² "Vital Signs: Statistics That Measure the State of Racial Inequality," 2006. *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, Issue No. 50 Winter 2005/2006. http://www.jbhe.com/vital/50_index.html.

women and men accounted for 11.8% and 7.1% respectively of the total votes cast for the Democratic Presidential candidate in the 2000 election and 13.1% and 9% respectively for the Democratic Presidential candidate in the 2004 election (Bositis 2005: 5–8). Black women accounted for 7% of all votes cast in the 2004 Presidential election, compared with 5% for black men (Bositis 2005: 2).

According to the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC; on its website as of February 23, 2008), 14 (32.6%) of its 43 members of the 110th Congress were women, and Representative Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick is Chairwoman of the CBC. Two (40%) of the five black Democratic Congressional Committee Chairs are Women and 6 (35.3%) of the 17 subcommittee Chairs are black women also.⁴³

Finally, In the 2000 Presidential election, a Black American woman, Donna Brazile, held the powerful position of campaign manager of the Democrat party, and many would argue that she led the party in winning the majority of the popular vote (with more than half a million votes) in that highly contested election. Also, the Black American woman, Dr. Condoleezza Rice, has served as both the US National Security Adviser in the first George W. Bush administration and as Secretary of State in the second George W. Bush administration. No other woman has yet served in both positions.

Factors Contributing to the Consistent Progress of Black American Women

A number of interrelated factors have contributed to the consistent progress of black women in the USA and chief among them is Religion, mostly Christianity, but also Islam, Judaism and other religions. Religion could serve as the independent variable of these factors, with the other dependent variables including avoidance of drugs, committing very few crimes as a proportion of their total population, diligence and discipline, all connecting back to Religion. Another important factor is the transfer of wealth and knowledge from older and wealthy Americans of all ethnic, racial and gender backgrounds to younger Americans through school and college scholarships, after school programs and other such non-profit programs. Let us examine each of these interrelated factors.

Religion

According to Mattis et al. (2001), religion plays a central role in the lives of Black Americans and that about 84% of Black American men and women said that they are fairly or very religious. Mattis et al. add that:

...substantial empirical as well as historical evidence indicates that religion is a particularly significant factor in the lives of African American women. Indeed, relative to their male counterparts, and to men and women of other ethnic groups, African American women are more likely to be formal church members, report greater overall religious commitment, evidence a higher degree of involvement in church life, and indicate that they are religious....Although the pulpits of African American churches historically have been the domain of men, African American

⁴³ Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). Retrieved on February 23, 2008 at: http://www.house.gov/kilpatrick/cbc/member_details.htm.

women serve as the church's most active and consistent source of human capital. The public ministries that form the backbone of the black church, and that have established the church as the central moral, economic, political and social force in the African American community, have been developed and sustained largely by women (2001: 90).

Religion appears to be contributing to Black American women's influence in US politics. For example, in an article on the socioeconomic status of older Black Americans, Taylor and Lockery (1995) note that: "Church attendance, however, remained an important predictor of voting behavior in the presence of controls for education and income" (p. 4). According to Brown (2000): "Research indicates that racial identity and consciousness among African Americans is attenuated in black churches where political messages (e.g. awareness of social issues, information on public officials are heard..." (p. 19). Robnett (2007) points out that: "Studies show that African American women are equally likely...or more likely than are black men to be actively engaged in politics.....Church participation and civic organization participation provide skill and resources that facilitate political participation" (p. 2; also see Berman and Wittig 2004:23; Mattis 1997: 1).

Tobacco, Drug and Alcohol Use

Women in general and Black American women in particular tend to consume less tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs compared with their male counterparts and members of other racial groups. This is a very important point especially for young people because those who stay away from drugs and alcohol are likely to concentrate more on their studies. Taylor et al. (2006) point out that: "...the misuse of alcohol by college students is associated with a wide variety of negative effects such as date rape, violent behavior, poor academic performance, vandalism, injury, high-risk sexual behavior...and even death" (pp. 36–37). Ernst et al. (2008) point out that: "...there is evidence that smoking is associated with a whole constellation of unhealthy lifestyle choices, including sedentary lifestyle, poor dietary choices, illicit drug use, and excessive alcohol use....Alcohol abuse is also associated with multiple adverse health outcomes, including chronic diseases, injuries, and poor mental health" (p. 2).

In their study of over 16,000 high school seniors from 227 public high schools in the USA, Wallace, Jr. et al. (2007) point out that:

For more than three decades scholars have debated about if, when, and under what circumstances religiosity deters delinquency...to examine various unresolved issues in the ongoing debate, with a specific focus on the relationships between individual- and contextual-level (i.e., school) religiosity and adolescent's use of tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana. The results indicate first, that the higher adolescents' level of religiosity, the less likely they are to be current tobacco users, to engage in binge drinking, or to have used marijuana in the past year; second, that as the level of religiosity in a school increases, adolescents' frequency of cigarette use, binge drinking, and marijuana use decreases; third, that the religiosity of the school influences students' substance use, over and above their individual religiosity, but that this relationship exists only for marijuana... (p. 308).

Ernst et al. (2008) also present a similar claim to explain why compared with whites, fewer black college students in the USA consume less alcohol or tobacco:

Another potential source of differences in these behaviors is the well known greater prevalence of spirituality and religious worship in the African American community, perhaps especially in families whose children eventually achieve college admission. Spirituality has long been positively associated with effective coping and has often been incorporated in treatment programs designed for African American consumers...(p. 7).

Moreover, many scholarly publications tend to show that blacks consume less drugs than their white counterparts in the USA, but most of these studies do not breakdown their results by gender within racial groups. Abbey et al. (2006) point out in their study that youth in the USA use drugs at relatively high rate and that in a 2003 national household survey "...12.9% of 12-year-olds had used alcohol, 7.8% had used cigarettes, and 1.4% had used marijuana....These rates climb steadily so that by age 18, 76.5% had used alcohol, 60% had used cigarettes, and 45.8% had used marijuana" (pp. 305–306). According to Dzokoto et al. (2007), a study that surveyed more than 9,000 students from 33 US college campuses: "...found that lifetime prevalence of alcohol use was 82.5%. "Males on average drank more than females, with bimodal ranges of 5–8 and 9 or more drinks (27.5% in each case). 69.2% of females reported keeping track of number of drinks consumed, compared to 54.4% of males, and 81.7 females and 69.1% of males reported using a designated driver" (p. 515). Taylor et al. (2006) point out that:

Some national surveys suggest 44% of college students engage in heavy episodic drinking at least occasionally....College men consistently have been found to drink more than college females....Measures of national trends among college students show more than twice as many males than females report drinking 10 or more drinks per week....Further, men tend to binge drink and to report more alcohol-related problems than females as well... (pp. 36–37).

Ernst et al. (2008) conducted a study of 571 college students under the age of 30 years in the USA about their use of alcohol and tobacco, with 390 of them being females, 281 males and 202 were African Americans and 369 were White Americans. According to the findings of Ernst et al. (2008):

Alcohol use was reported by 69% of African American compared to 78% of white college students...42% and 56% of African American female and male college students who reported using alcohol at all also reported having engaged in binge drinking during the past month and year, respectively, compared to 60% and 79% of whites. When binge drinking was assessed in the total samples of drinkers and nondrinkers, the findings were 34% and 47% of African Americans binge drinking in the past month and year and, for whites, 45% and 63%, respectively. These ethnic differences were also statistically reliable....Only 2% and 9% of African American female and male college students (5% combined) reported smoking cigarettes, respectively, compared to 32% of white females and 25% of white males (28% combined; pp. 4–5).

According to Taylor et al. (2006): “Non-white ethnicity has been identified as a risk of alcoholism in the general population....In fact, across four national surveys of college students, the data consistently show white students reporting the highest prevalence of heavy drinking, followed by Hispanic and black students, respectively...” (p. 37). Reddy et al. (2007) note that in 2002–2003, of US high school students aged 14–17 years, 35.8% of blacks and 43.2% of whites had used alcohol in the past month; 14.6% and 23.7% had used Cigarette in the past month; 22.7% and 20.8% had used Marijuana in the past month; 5.9% and 12.4% had lifetime illicit Drug use (p. 1861; also see Perreira and Cortes 2006). According to O’Malley et al. (2006), from 2000 to 2002, of 12th graders, 38.5% of whites, 27.7% of blacks, and 35.2% of Hispanics had used Marijuana in the past 12 months; 6.5%, 1.4% and 3.7% respectively had used LSD; 8.7%, 1.9% and 7.8% respectively had used Ecstasy; 54.4%, 28.8% and 47.9% respectively had used alcohol in the past 30 days; and 22.8%, 8.1% and 7.6% respectively smoked cigarette daily (p. 416).

Discipline and Diligence

It takes serious discipline and diligence for youth in particular to resist peer pressure to consume alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs, especially on college or university campuses, where students are on their own and away from their families. This author makes the argument that the high level of self control or self discipline by blacks, especially black females in resisting alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs is influenced by their religious upbringing. In attempting to explain why fewer blacks than whites, especially black females in their study consume less tobacco and alcohol, Ernst et al. (2008) claim that the: “...avoidance of cigarette smoking and moderate or no use of alcohol can be legitimately interpreted as evidence of self-regulatory skill and, together, would provide strong validation of any psychometric measure of self-regulation with which these behaviors would be correlated” (pp. 2–5).

Crime

Despite their difficult history in the USA, black women have showed amazing restraint in committing very few or no crimes. This is due largely to their deep religious beliefs and obedience God and to authority. This is very important especially since they comprise 21 million. For example, in June 2006, there were 2,042,100 males in local jails, State or Federal prisons; non-Hispanic whites males, 718,100 (35.2%); 836,800 (41%) black males; and 426,900 Hispanic males (21%). In June 2006, there were 203,100 females in local jails, State or Federal prisons; non-Hispanic white females, 95,300; black females 68,800; and Hispanic Females 32,400 (1.6%; Sabol et al. 2007: 9). This is a very low number for a subgroup of tens of millions with a history which could have caused them to commit more crime.

Transfer of Wealth from Older and Wealthy Americans to Younger Americans

There is an annual transfer of wealth from mostly older and wealthy Americans to younger Americans and young black females in particular tend to benefit substantially from this transfer. Let me explain how this works. The USA is the richest country in

the world. However, although the federal and state and local governments in the USA do not tax as high as other rich countries such as Canada, France or Germany, their taxes are still relatively high. The federal government in particular does allow tax payers to donate a percentage of their earnings to not-for profit organizations such as charities, religious organizations, schools, colleges and universities, foundations, etc. and that money could be deducted from their taxes. Also, when wealthy individuals die, their assets are also taxed by the federal government. As a result, this could contribute to rich and older individuals in the USA finding ways to spend their money in a manner that they wish while they are alive or else the government will spend it for them, which most wealthy people would not want to even imagine.

This brings us to young people, especially women and minorities in the USA. Since women and minorities have experienced discrimination and lack of opportunities throughout the nation's history, most philanthropists tend to establish charities and foundations to assist them in many different ways. Other philanthropists even go further to established charities and foundations to help Black Americans. Today, there are foundations such as the United Negro College Fund and other such foundations or charities established by prominent Americans and entities that have funds set aside to help women, minorities and young people in general.

Most of these organizations have very strict requirements that applicants must abide by and it takes a lot of discipline to go through the entire application process. Unlike their male counterparts, females in general and black females in particular tend to be ready and disciplined to go through the application process and they benefit substantially from it. As a result, this factor also ends up contributing to the success of Black American women.

Conclusion

This paper has presented massive data starting with the claim that there is a large body of academic literature which points to Asian Americans as model minorities because a very high proportion of them were at one time very poor and at the margins of society, but managed to pull themselves up. Some of the literature even suggested that non-Asians could emulate the good behavior of Asian Americans so that they too could become just as successful. It is then argued that the model minority concept could now be extended to include Black American women, because even more than Asian Americans, they have been the subgroup to have suffered the most in the history of not only the USA, but the entire Western Hemisphere or the New World. However, by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, Black American women are among the most productive members of the American society.

The paper did go on to present numerous examples showing that black females are still lagging behind most other groups, including their male counterparts on many social and economic indicators, but that numerous examples also show that they are performing better or have higher participation rates on important economic, political and social variables or indicators than non-black females in the USA. Finally, the paper argued that a number of interrelated factors are contributors to the emerging success of Black American women and that chief among those factors is Religion or their high level of reliance in God.

Appendix

Table 1 Educational attainment of the population 18 years and over and 25 years and over by sex, race and Hispanic origin: 2007

	Total	High Sch. graduate	Percentage	Some college (No degree)	Percentage	Asso.Degree (Occupational)	Percentage	Asso. Degree (Academic)	Percentage	Bachelor's degree	Percentage	Master's degree	Percentage	Prof. degree	Percentage	Doctoral degree	Percentage	Bachelor's or higher	Percentage
All races	222,723,000	70,108,000	31.5	42,349,000	19	9,597,000	4.3	8,641,000	3.9	38,924,000	17.5	13,756,000	6.2	3,113,000	1.4	2,496,000	1.1	58,289,026	26.2
18 years and over	194,318,000	61,490,000	31.6	32,473,000	16.7	8,909,000	4.6	7,862,000	4	36,658,000	18.9	13,607,000	7	3,090,000	1.6	2,487,000	1.3	55,842,029	28.7
25 years and over	107,843,000	34,199,000	31.7	19,802,000	18.4	4,235,000	3.9	3,611,000	3.3	18,423,000	17.1	6,472,000	6	2,033,000	1.9	1,678,000	1.6	28,606,027	26.5
Male	93,421,000	29,604,000	31.7	15,063,000	16.1	3,917,000	4.2	3,239,000	3.5	17,487,000	18.7	6,416,000	6.9	2,015,000	2.2	1,678,000	1.8	21,180,030	22.7
Female	114,880,000	35,909,000	31.2	22,548,000	19.6	5,362,000	4.7	5,029,000	4.4	20,501,000	17.8	7,283,000	6.3	1,079,000	0.9	817,000	0.7	29,680,026	25.8
18 years and over	100,897,000	31,887,000	31.6	17,410,000	17.2	4,991,000	4.9	4,623,000	4.6	19,171,000	19	7,191,000	7.1	1,075,000	1.1	808,000	0.8	28,245,028	28
25 years and over	107,843,000	34,199,000	31.7	19,802,000	18.4	4,235,000	3.9	3,611,000	3.3	18,423,000	17.1	6,472,000	6	2,033,000	1.9	1,678,000	1.6	28,606,027	26.5
Asian Alone or in combination	10,738,000	2,190,000	20.4	1,499,000	13.9	309,000	2.9	376,000	3.5	3,165,000	29.4	1,258,000	11.7	273,000	2.5	376,000	3.5	5,072,047	47
18 years and over	9,383,000	1,905,000	20.3	915,000	9.7	271,000	2.9	334,000	3.6	2,948,000	31.4	1,232,000	13.1	266,000	2.8	376,000	4	4,822,051	51
25 years and over	5,117,000	1,049,000	20.5	723,000	14.1	140,000	2.7	143,000	2.8	1,441,000	28.2	665,000	13	157,000	3	247,000	4.8	2,510,049	49
Male	4,429,000	914,000	20.6	438,000	9.9	120,000	2.7	119,000	2.7	1,348,000	30.4	647,000	14.6	152,000	3.4	247,000	5.6	2,394,054	54
Female	5,641,000	1,141,000	20.2	776,000	13.8	169,000	3	233,000	4.1	1,724,000	30.6	592,000	10.5	116,000	2.1	129,000	2.3	2,561,046	45
18 years and over	4,954,000	991,000	20	477,000	9.6	152,000	3.1	215,000	4.3	1,600,000	32.3	585,000	11.8	114,000	2.3	129,000	2.6	2,428,049	49
25 years and over	26,638,000	9,635,000	36.2	5,529,000	20.8	1,141,000	4.3	990,000	3.7	3,114,000	11.7	982,000	3.7	174,000	0.6	120,000	0.45	4,390,016	16.5
Black alone or in combination	22,404,000	8,079,000	36	4,223,000	18.8	1,059,000	4.7	904,000	4	2,920,000	13	974,000	4.3	174,000	0.8	120,000	0.5	4,188,019	18.4
18 years and over	11,972,000	4,593,000	38.4	2,345,000	19.6	439,000	3.7	413,000	3.4	1,317,000	11	385,000	3.2	92,000	0.8	67,000	0.56	1,861,016	15.5
25 years and over	9,908,000	3,784,000	38.2	1,749,000	17.6	416,000	4.2	378,000	3.8	1,256,000	12.7	384,000	3.9	92,000	0.9	67,000	0.68	1,799,018	18.2

Female	14,667,000	5,042,000	34.4	3,185,000	21.7	702,000	4.9	576,000	3.3	1,797,000	12.2	597,000	4.1	82,000	0.6	53,000	0.36	2,529,017	17.2
18 years and over	12,497,000	4,295,000	34.4	2,474,000	19.8	644,000	5.1	526,000	4.2	1,664,000	13.3	591,000	4.7	82,000	0.7	53,000	0.4	2,390,019	19.1
25 years and over	29,637,000	8,695,000	29.3	4,426,000	14.9	810,000	2.7	915,000	3.1	2,473,000	8.2	598,000	2	145,000	0.5	76,000	0.26	3,292,011	11.1
Hispanic (of any race)	24,551,000	6,962,000	28.4	3,197,000	13	711,000	2.9	814,000	3.3	2,317,000	9.4	592,000	2.4	143,000	0.6	76,000	0.3	3,128,013	12.7
Male	15,309,000	4,518,000	29.5	2,226,000	14.5	319,000	2	397,000	2.6	1,179,000	7.7	261,000	1.7	94,000	0.6	42,000	0.27	1,576,010	10.3
18 years and over	12,609,000	3,573,000	28.3	1,625,000	12.9	292,000	2.3	360,000	2.8	1,098,000	8.7	260,000	2.1	92,000	0.7	42,000	0.33	1,492,012	11.8
25 years and over	14,328,000	4,177,000	29.1	2,200,000	15.3	491,000	3.4	517,000	3.6	1,294,000	9	337,000	2.3	50,000	0.3	34,000	0.24	1,715,012	12
Female	11,942,000	3,388,000	28.4	1,572,000	13.2	419,000	3.5	454,000	3.8	1,219,000	10.2	332,000	2.8	50,000	0.4	34,000	0.35	1,635,014	13.7
18 years and over	183,932,000	57,791,000	31.4	35,047,000	19	8,065,000	4.4	7,232,000	3.9	35,623,000	17.7	11,504,000	6.2	2,655,000	1.4	1,995	1.1	46,784,021	25.4
25 years and over	161,222,000	51,046,000	31.6	27,067,000	16.8	7,493,000	4.6	6,881,000	4.1	30,750,000	19.1	11,390,000	7.1	2,639,000	1.6	1,986,000	1.2	46,765,029	29
Male	90,065,000	28,325,000	31.4	16,614,000	18.4	3,631,000	4	3,048,000	3.4	15,657,000	17.4	5,409,000	6	1,778,000	2	1,367,000	1.5	24,211,027	26.9
18 years and over	78,463,000	24,693,000	31.5	12,762,000	16.3	3,356,000	4.3	2,732,000	3.5	14,871,000	18.9	5,375,000	6.8	1,764,000	2.2	1,367,000	1.7	23,377,030	29.8
25 years and over	93,867,000	29,467,000	31.4	18,433,000	19.6	4,433,000	4.7	4,184,000	4.5	16,966,000	18.1	6,095,000	6.5	876,000	0.9	629,000	0.67	24,566,026	26.2
Female	82,759,000	26,352,000	31.8	14,305,000	17.3	4,137,000	5	3,849,000	4.6	15,879,000	19.2	6,015,000	7.3	875,000	1.1	619,000	0.75	23,388,028	28.3
18 years and over																			
25 years and over																			

Source: Compiled and computed from March 1, 2008 to March 26, 2008 from: "Educational Attainment in the United States: 2007," 2008, January 10. US Census Bureau. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office. <http://www.census.gov/population/www.socdemo/education/cps2007.html>

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