GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY: AFRICAN AMERICAN INNER CITY TEENS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

This study evolved over my increasing concern that the efforts and needs of poor, inner city African American citizens are not being represented equitably and appropriately in on-going civic engagement and social capital research work and program activities.

Standard research misses inner city African American civic life, I realized, because there exists a lack of depth in understanding how the various dimensions of marginalized community life (both positive and negative) among this population impacts participation in organized civic activities. I became determined to address this gap in institutional knowledge after spending thirteen years of my career in community engagement observing the ways professional organizations and individuals who sought to increase civic engagement capacity among this population were simultaneously disparaging of these citizens for not having the "resources" to engage in civic life at the same level and pace of more mainstream Americans.

Giving Back to the Community: African American Inner City Teens and Civic Engagement was an exercise in ethnographic research. Intentionally different from the more common quantitative studies conducted on civic engagement, this qualitative data gathering project was intended to focus solely on the patterns of civic engagement habits of low income inner city African American youth to better assess the likely causes of civic engagement trends. My research, however, resulted in the uncovering of a much broader story about African American inner city community traditions, networks, and norms. In the end, the research attempts to define this community's version of "civic engagement", and its relationship to mainstream civic institutions and civic life.

Throughout this project, my goal has been to begin to resolve the issues of the cultural disparities I have seen and had to work with by building a mechanism for improved communications across professional and marginalized community cultures regarding American civic life. That is why I chose to base my study on the phrase "giving back to the community".

As a Black American in my community life as well as in my life as a civic engagement professional, I have frequently heard African Americans in particular liberally use the phrase "giving back to the community" to express efforts at strengthening and sustaining civic life in Black communities. In my experience, people have always assumed an understanding of what "giving back to the community" meant through the context of their conversations. I had only ever heard the phrase spoken and its meaning only intimated. From the contexts of my conversations over the years, there could be no doubt that the phrase intimated for African Americans the work of being involved and invested in the development of fellow citizens and community environments for the purposes of contributing to and reaping the benefits of the collective functions of society. As I progressed in my career, it grew apparent to me that there were definite parallels between the idea of "giving back to the community" and the ideas behind "civic engagement". The similarities however, had not been recognized and documented. I felt that through the opportunity presented by CIRCLE, the time was ripe to begin to establish the cultural diversity of the relationship between these two notions of civic involvement for the enhancement of actual practice and participation in the field.

I conducted my study from April, 2003 to September, 2004. The entire project was intended to serve as a baseline case study for consideration by the national civic engagement activist community. My target population was Philadelphia African American teens ages 15 to 19 years old living in the most inner city neighborhoods of North Philadelphia and West Philadelphia. I identified 6 professional Philadelphia "at-risk" youth-serving civic engagement organizations in which I interviewed a total of 11 organizational representatives. Organizational interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes and were tape recorded. I formally interviewed two full time community-based activists who worked directly with my target population, also for between 60 and 90 minutes each. One conversation was tape recorded. Informally, I interviewed approximately 40-50 randomly selected African American adults from

the Philadelphia community for varying amounts of time over lunch, in between their community engagements, during community engagement activity time, in the middle of work days, by phone and in person. I kept notes on these conversations; no interviews were tape recorded. I conducted one focus group with eight 15-17 year old girls at a municipal recreation center after-school program for 90 minutes. This focus group was tape recorded. Finally, I conducted approximately 75 randomly selected interviews with Philadelphia inner city neighborhood youth on city sidewalks, on basketball courts, at after-school programs, and at a college fair. These interviews were not tape recorded, but notes were kept. Along with my interviews, I frequented community gathering places and conducted field observations in area McDonald's restaurants, African American outdoor shopping malls in West Philadelphia, shopping corridors throughout North Philadelphia, neighborhood churches, recreation centers, banquet halls, and various rallies regarding youth violence and electoral politics. In addition to my interviews and site visits, I surveyed numerous newspaper and magazine articles, television programs, radio broadcasts and internet websites as well as conducted academic literature reviews and investigated passages of religious texts. With the further consultations and intellectual guidance of noted university sociology professor and urban ethnographer, Elijah Anderson, following is my report of what I have found.

FINDINGS

PART I -- "GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY" — AN OVERVIEW

Overall I found that "giving back to the community" is a distinctly adult turn of phrase exchanged verbally throughout African American community networks and associations as a way to relay a set of cultural habits, traditions and expectations for the building and maintenance of African American community life. The phrase is rooted in African American traditions of faith and spirituality and is connected to an historically African American perspective regarding progress and success as a race.

I arrived at this final conclusion after scouring the literature of such classic African American thinkers as Frederick Douglass and WEB DuBois and more contemporary thinkers as James Baldwin, and finding broad references to the notion of the African American community's most capable members contributing to the development of the community's less capable citizens for the sake of buoying the social and economic status of the race. The most explicit references I found to "giving back to the community", however, were in my searches of contemporary newspaper and magazine articles (and even television programs) about the philanthropic endeavors of accomplished African American business people, social and political activists, entertainers and athletes. These reference items were replete with the phrase "giving back to the community" as the key articulated attribution of these successful African Americans' reasons for community engagement.

As an example, Mr. Salome Thomas-El is the principal of the Reynolds Elementary School in North Philadelphia where he grew up and is the author of I Choose To Stay: A Black Teacher Refuses to Desert the Inner City, 2003, Kensington Publishing Corp., NY., NY. According to his profile in Black Enterprise Magazine where I first encountered Mr. Thomas-El's story, "(Mr. Thomas-El) has rejected six-figure offers to teach in suburban school districts because of his commitment to educating children in the inner city". "There are many benefits to giving back," Thomas-El says in his profile, "If nothing else, it's a way to sustain generations of people coming after us". His website, www.ichoosetostay.com offers ideas others can use to make a difference in the life of an inner city child.

I conducted an internet search on the phrase in November, 2003. My search returned 1,562,095 entries for the phrase "giving back to the community". But a scan of the top one hundred of these listings revealed a predominant tendency towards websites highlighting corporate giving and formal organizational fundraising activities,

and less towards the more intimate social capital building activities occurring among community residents I was expecting to learn more about. Specifically, the internet sites pertained to: golf tournaments to help community charities, holiday drives for sick and underprivileged children, hurricane victim fund raising, retirees volunteering time, organizations giving to other organizations, real estate development, retail chain activities in local communities, non-profit activities and private companies participating in "needs of the community" campaigns. In short, the sites were really descriptions of organizations that were professionally acting in communities in exchange for past or future patronage. What is more, with the exception of two, the majority racial group I found associated with these websites was White American. Moreover, none of the websites incorporated any level of explanation about the organization's meaning, roots, or history of the phrase "giving back to the community" as justification for their using it to describe their program goals.

Only two African American websites turned up in my search on "giving back to the community"; they were Big Dog Riders and Giving Back to The 'Hood. Big Dog Riders (www.agoodblackman.com) is a motorcycle enthusiasts group that volunteers monthly in efforts to help "our community" as they state. The group's site says that they have sponsored a "Bike Ride" to raise money for Asbury United Methodist Church in Bishopville, South Carolina and have established the Big Dog Riders Scholarship Fund – designed to "help a (one) deserving high school senior offset college costs". The group offers a link for site visitors to "Checkout our scrapbook to see some other exciting volunteer activities we are doing for our community". The other site I discovered was www.sport.nola.com/sport.goth_inc. The group, Giving Back To The 'Hood, is dedicated to strengthening communities by mentoring urban youth to increase their capacity to improve their lives through healthy alternatives to "risky behaviors". This group's website states that their focus is to "stimulate the mind, body and spirit of today's youth to ensure that young boys and girls 'give back' to their community rather than

'take from' their community. Since being founded in 1995, the site goes on to say, "Giving Back To The 'Hood has provided educational, recreational, tutoring, and mentoring programs to over 1,200 youth and adolescents throughout the city of New Orleans and surrounding areas". The group states that there is no charge to the participants for any of their programs.

I surmised that the likely reasons for only two African American website references on "giving back to the community" are 1) the widely documented gap in computer use among the general African American community, 2) the potentially prohibitive costs of building and maintaining a website for a grassroots community-level group, and 3) authentic "giving back to the community" is an oral tradition.

"GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY" IS AN ACTION, NOT JUST AN IDEA

After months interviewing Philadelphia urban community youth, adults, urban youth-serving community activists and civic engagement professionals, the main questions that emerged in my mind were: 1)how far back do the origins of the idea of 'giving back to the community' reach?; and 2) how did the phrase become such a strong symbol of community engagement for African Americans?"

Perhaps the most immediate finding among my initial responses to these questions is that the idea of "giving back to the community" is apparently more of an action than an abstract concept. To reach a true understanding of the phrase, I had to approach it as something that, simply put, is done. "Giving back to the community" is a description of actions that have already been taken (largely) by an individual to positively impact others in the community in which they live or lived at one time in the past. In my field work I found no sense of a cohesive conception of the phrase for objective study. Instead my attempts at building a definition of the phrase had to rest on a collection of subjective interpretations of people's personal uses of the phrase.

For example, each person I talked to expressly paraphrased "giving back to the community" differently when asked to offer their thoughts on

the phrase's meaning. These paraphrases usually reflected an action taken rather than a meaning deduced or a pre-conceived notion held or at some time documented. People did not respond to my queries by saying things like, "giving back to the community is what a person does when they want to make a difference…", for example; rather, they said, "she's gotten a lot, but she knows how to give back". This is markedly different from the heavily conceptual culture of the civic engagement community. There exists no conscious collective notion of "giving back to the community". Previous to this report "giving back to the community" has never been consciously dialogued about in order to achieve a consensus on its applications and research value in the way that the idea of "civic engagement" has been – even though the phrase has permeated mainstream American culture. Yet, my research has found that the two terms are related and, in some cases, are interchangeable, but need to be approached in different ways.

AN ORAL TRADITION
The people who customarily use "giving back to the community" in casual, everyday conversation (African Americans) have not collectively discussed how the phrase translates from thought, or feeling, into action. One reason for this lack of community dialogue on the subject seems to be that the motivations behind the acts of "giving back to the community" are more individual than collective; whereas the general motives for "civic engagement" tend to be more collective than individual.

I did not encounter any group of research subjects who presented me with a consensus about the phrase's commonly accepted meaning, whereas I encountered scores of references of commonly acceptable types of civic engagement activity. Perhaps it is the African American community members' profound lack of a sense of "trust" in one another and in mainstream institutions that is the root cause for such autonomous behavior around "giving back to the community". That, coupled with the African American community's marked disinvestment in its own unique capacities for maintaining community strength among its

members (i.e. through Black Church activities, through extended family traditions, and through the development of minority experiences and opportunities that "parallel" mainstream organizations which often offer inadequate services to low income African Americans) that has prohibited the documentation and examination of such a profoundly culturally emblematic phrase.

Admittedly, further investigations are needed, but whatever the core reasons for such a sense of incoherence about the widely uttered phrase, it is clear at this stage of the research that the process of "giving back to the community" is an African American individual's quiet, personal assertion of a sense of self-empowerment that gradually emerges through a life-long process of experience, reflection and self-discovery. "Giving back to the community" is an oral tradition that is learned, but not explicitly taught; and religious faith seems to be a constant guide – a person feels called by God to act.

ROOTED IN FAITH
Perhaps the second most impressive finding of my work is the realization that "giving back to the community" is tied to a sense of faith more so than to a sense of civic (or man-made) obligation. Subjects frequently used spiritual metaphors to describe their urge to act in their community. According to my findings, "giving back to the community" is about having an immutable sense of "stewardship" that can be found in the religious teachings of the New Testament scriptures that have invariably come to surround the people of the inner cities whether they are active in a church or not. People told me that they act on their sense of stewardship individually in the community, at their own pace and at their own level of capacity, on issues of greatest relevance to them.

A panel discussion I attended in November, 2002 begins to provide a framework for developing an informed point of view on how faith in the African American community can translate into civic action post-Civil Rights era. Reverend Marcus Harvey, a Baptist Minister and Congressional Fellow with the Federal Faith-based Health Initiative in Pittsburgh,

PA passionately spoke to attendees of a community health program about the active role they themselves must play in directing The Church's actions. The panel topic was "How can we be more pro-active in taking care of our health?". It was sponsored by Healthquest Magazine, a wellness magazine for African Americans, through the 17th annual October Gallery Philadelphia International Art Expo. The problem the panel sought to address was the lack of self-care rampant in African American communities across the nation. Whether the neglect was physical, psychological, dietary, sexual, or environmental, African Americans lag behind most other ethnic and racial groups in living a healthful lifestyle. The Reverend's contribution to this conversation was to raise people's awareness about the power they held within themselves to set the agenda that their local churches were acting on as the community's needs evolved. The comments may have seemed a little disjointed, but I found relevance in them to "giving back to the community" when he said, for example, that, "the church is the community". The Reverend recommended a number of steps he believed should be taken to bring The Church's leadership goals more in line, in his opinion, with the issues of today's inner cities, such as: keeping the church (building) open 7 days a week; community members should go back to their Pastors and tell them that, "We want something done in our church", rather than waiting for the Pastor to invoke an agenda. The Reverend said that in The Black Church, "we don't discuss the positive things (such as), men with 2 jobs, grandmothers raising 2 generations, African American professionals in the workforce". Community members, he said, should work to "concentrate on and reinforce the positive things going on in the community". He identified what he felt was a "common thread of spirituality" in the African American community – one that is not being promoted beyond the scriptures. He urged people to make a conscious effort to reflect their spiritual base and spiritual understanding in their daily existence/actions, saying that, "We have to apply what we know spiritually to how we live in each moment…look at what we endorse, what we purchase, the way we behave; our heroes our entertainers and athletes, and the way we (the African American community) buy into the media's

portrayal of ourselves". The Reverend closed his remarks by pointing out to people that, "Everyone is being called to follow God, not to follow a preacher". I noted that a woman responded that she had come to find out "how to bring that calling out of me" in order to serve as a faithful steward (about health issues) in her community.

SOME KEY WORDS

I have found that there is a list of keywords, principles, actions and historical references that can be used to begin to forge the foundations of a cohesive definition of "giving back to the community". To date, "giving back to the community" means:

1) acts of self-preservation
2) a sense of agency
3) leadership and involvement in issues
4) preserving the legacy of African Americans gone before
5) preserving the rights to work at a "good" job and live a decent life
6) it is the sense of the community acting for itself versus being acted upon by others
7) it is actions independent of mainstream institutions/ wider social systems
8) it is a parallel experience that supplements the mainstream experience
9) a sense of civic obligation to the Black race
10) "job contacts"
11) a commitment to take collective action for the Black race
12) "favors"
13) "each one teach one"
14) "do unto others as you would have them do unto you"
15) "if you have it is your obligation to give to others because that is beset upon us by our ancestors' struggles"
16) the process of race identity that builds strength of character and makes it possible to participate in collective action
17) "mentoring"
18) it is not about advocacy as a group, it is about action as a group
19) "I came from where they came from"
20) generosity of spirit
21) "its not an agenda, it's our history"

22) "If I can help somebody, then my living shall not be in vain" – Negro Spiritual

23) providing a free venue for a local high school's junior prom

24) "an example of better values than just hanging out"

25) "make sure your situation is solidified, first, yes. But go back and help those that God has used to make possible who you are."

26) "you must help your own when you have a resource they need...a code of reciprocity" (from: No Shame in My Game: The Working Poor in the Inner City, Newman, Katherine S., 1999, Random House, Inc., N.Y. & The Russell Sage Foundation, N.Y. -- pg. 83)

27) "some people take an activist role in an effort to become role models for people in their community who have fallen by the wayside. Rather than leave these acquaintances in the dust, they try to exert some positive influence over them by showing that there is another, more socially acceptable way of living" (from: No Shame in My Game: The Working Poor in the Inner City, Newman, Katherine S., 1999, Random House, Inc., N.Y. & The Russell Sage Foundation, N.Y -- pg 113)

There is no doubt that many of the items among this list bear the distinctive ring of a greater sense of "other worldly" morality about them – such as "Make sure your situation is solidified, first, yes, but go back and help those that God has used to make possible who you are,"and, "If I can help somebody, then my living shall not be in vain". Alexis Moore, daughter of the renowned Philadelphia Civil Rights Era lawyer, Cecil B. Moore, spoke succinctly to me in an interview when she said, "You've got to give back to the community. Once that door has been opened for you and you walk through, you've got to hold it open for others to walk through. If you have something (there's) no reason to close the door on those who need it or on others. If you get in you owe, you pay, and what you pay is the fight to keep 'rights'". These remarks do not reflect a sense of responsibility to a single person or to a group of people in particular, or to the conventions of this society, but to an "occasion" – to a sense that one has been blessed/ endowed/ set apart from the

masses in order to exhibit her or his "special" talents and let others reap the rewards of that.

In working to probe these findings, I sought to tap the Philadelphia African American religious community for answers about the role of The Black Church in civic engagement among inner city African American youth (since The Black Church has served as the most stable constant of African American civic life). In preparing to approach this segment of the community, I latched onto a passage in the New Testament of the Bible – Luke 12:48 which reads, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked". I actually first recognized this passage as a paraphrase in an issue of Black Enterprise Magazine. An organization had used it to advertise an upcoming awards ceremony at a local business school.   The paraphrase read: To whom much is given, much is expected. The paraphrase resonated with my search to define "giving back to the community" early on in the project, so I pursued it's origins as a way to likely gain traction for building my definition.

A preliminary search on the internet about the passage's potential meaning led me to www.bible.gospelcom.net.   This site provided me with a comprehensive interpretation of the passage as context for my interviews with clergy. It was primarily because of the insight provided by this website that I have concluded that this particular New Testament passage was a highly relevant piece of data for gaining a deeper understanding of field subjects' assertions about their sense of "civic responsibility".

BEING A "STEWARD"

According to the website, a "steward" in ancient culture was a slave who was left in charge of domestic affairs whenever the Master was away. The Master's return date and time was usually unpredictable. This meant that the steward had to vigilantly keep the oil lamps burning to light the way for the master of the house for whatever time he should return, make certain that the other servants remained properly fed and dressed (their

appearance bespoke the Master's reputation), and maintain the household animals and livestock along with the grounds and surrounding property as well. The head steward was also responsible for managing the finances of the household as though the Master, himself were there. A steward's job was not to exercise power, but to <u>serve</u>. So the steward remained a peer in the master's absence rather than became an overseer. He did not artificially elevate his status as a result of his responsibilities. He remained humble in his stewardship. When the Master returns, the steward is called upon and held accountable for his stewardship – did he serve his Master and his peers well? If the answer is found to be "yes" he receives more blessings, if the answer is "no" he is severely punished. In discussing this parable with a few of my contacts in the religious community, it became evident that this parable serves as a metaphor for man's responsibility to his fellow man during Jesus' absence. When Jesus, the Savior returns (as Christians believe), then the good stewards will travel with him to his Father's house – the blessing; and the bad stewards will be cast among the fires of hell – punishment for advantages squandered.

The steward in the parable remains a peer while exhibiting his special talents as the Master's proxy. He has a "station" in life – like African Americans have had throughout history – that he cannot necessarily "advance" out of. He was chosen to lead because he originally outshone the other of the Master's servants. So living and working within his "station" (with the Master's blessings) the steward shines, and he demonstrates to his Master that he can multiply his blessings to the benefit of those around him – who are in the same "station", but who may not have the same talents and capacities. The rewards for African Americans who have "outshone" their peers throughout history have ranged from breaking through barriers of racism in business ventures to make financial gains, attaining fame and fortune despite certain preferred standards of beauty, and acquiring leadership responsibilities – like the steward. For many African Americans who have experienced impeded progress at the hands of fellow men, expressing faith in God's desire to

lift one out of a state of oppression is a justifiable approach to explaining how one has risen above the rest. The work of The Black Church in communities now and during the Civil Rights Movement is a testament to that. So the sense of being that steward on earth – believing that one is "shining" because the "Master" has allowed it (through the gift of contact with certain people or through lessons learned from circumstances, for example) – is manifest through a conscious effort to act in selfless ways and to not act above one's station because of mere earthly advantages, acknowledging that through the workings of God the influence of others shape who one is.

It is a common belief in The Black Church and among much of the African American community that the talents that one has are God-given, not man-made, and that the individual should always be grateful to God for his blessings. The steward's (read: the African American individual's) task according to religious teachings is to multiply these God-given blessings to the benefit of those around him who are in the same station, but who may not have the same talents. The good steward lives in community with his peers. In gratitude to his Master's blessings he selflessly exhibits his talents for and to his peers while the Master is away, so that through his actions and example, he "gives back" – a point which segue ways logically into what I consider to be my third most remarkable finding of this study.

"GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY" IS ABOUT PROMOTING PERSONAL & GROUP SUCCESS

As it is for the "steward" in the parable, "giving back to the community" for African American citizens is linked to a particular perspective on personal and group success. It is a tradition for social advancement that is passed on among African American networks through quiet example, not public pronouncements, for fear of overt discrimination crushing considerable progress. To illustrate, a Philadelphia local newspaper quoted an African American athlete who made captain of his football team as expressing his motivations for his rare achievement as, "I knew if I didn't succeed it would be a long time before someone got the chance (again). People would say, 'I told you so'." The athlete felt that his example

of working hard, remaining disciplined, maintaining a clean social profile and a good academic record served as a form of "giving back" that helped to promote potential further advancement in society by Blacks. His civic act was to remain a positive role model.

There can be no arguing how history demonstrates society's ability to see and judge African Americans as a race and not as a group of individuals. Historically, when one African American was seen to have done wrong, then many, many innocent African Americans suffered the consequences. So, it became for African Americans a continual fear that the negative actions of one African American threatened to represent the collective. Harlem Renaissance author Richard Wright frequently referenced this cultural norm in his writings – most notably, for example, in <u>Native Son</u>. Conversely, if one African American person was successful, it was hoped by African Americans that the race would be considered capable of success. The goal of previous generations of African American activists was to set the stage for the consideration of future generations of African Americans as successful. The activists of the Civil Rights Era worked in much this way to establish the successful reputation of The Black Church, of African American students, of ordinary men and women who exhibited bravery in the fight for civil rights as once and for all worthy of treatment equal to that received by Whites in society. In this more secular way, "giving back to the community" is also the tradition of repaying previous generations with the continuous and unquestioned practice of setting the example of successful citizenship. As one interviewee said, "(its about setting) an example of better values than just hanging out".

BUT "GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY" IS AN ADULT'S DOMAIN

Much of the oral tradition of "giving back to the community" is passed on through <u>example</u>, something which can only be relayed as a result of prior experience. Part of the story of a low-income African American adult man (as told by the director of an education outreach program in the city), for example, relays the depth of the process of self-reflection undertaken by members of this population. This man said, "I came from where they came from…" in response to the question as to why the man believed he could possibly positively effect the behaviors of his neighborhood's "at-risk" youth on his own. The man, who was a blue collar laborer, was expressing his arrival at a personal point of self-discovery about how he came to realize the ways in which his experiences were relevant and useful to the larger community and its "at-risk" youth.

The goal of this citizen was to help the youth in his neighborhood; however, my research has found that such a goal is not one that youth in the community are expected to have. This is what I found to be the fourth most striking finding of my work. There is a generation gap in the work of "giving back to the community".

Many of the African American adults from the Civil Rights era are using their current advantages in society to talk about African American youth's need to be involved in the community, and they talk at these youth in speeches and public presentations, but they do not talk with the youth about what it takes to address the weighty social problems of the inner city.

Social and political information is not shared between generations of African Americans through direct conversation, but instead through indirect observation of action and through various forms of storytelling that occur at the adults' discretion. Culturally speaking, in African American communities, it is not considered the youth's "place" to make decisions about what is best for the larger community through "discussions" with adults because the youth are not considered experienced enough to engage in such deliberative conversations. None of the adults I talked to mentioned youth in their discussions about "giving back" except as the receivers of the actions. The relationship between youth and adults in African American culture is more hierarchical, socially conservative and traditionalist than it is in White mainstream culture (the locus from which typical civic engagement programs operate). The main civic responsibility of the youth in these African American communities, it appears, is to be a

good student and to grow up a productive member of society. The process of self-reflection and self-discovery that seems to occur in an individual that causes one to recognize their civic capacity to "give back" apparently incorporates a history of personally attained civic and social experiences – trials and triumphs – resulting in a level of accumulated wisdom that generally only adults possess.

I have found that the adults in my researched African American communities use the phrase "giving back to the community" to initiate their own actions, but never actually invoke the phrase to directly describe their actions as they are engaging in them. The tradition of enacting "giving back to the community" is subconsciously absorbed over time and finally put into practice in the latter part of life. When the phrase is articulated, as I mentioned before, it is to describe the past actions taken by a publicly recognized philanthropic individual. "Giving back to the community" is not a phrase that is used as a hands-on, real-time tool to teach about the merits of civic responsibility such as the phrases "civic engagement" and "service learning" are. "Giving back to the community" is not the proxy phrase for community engagement actions, the phrase is community engagement itself in action, thereby making it difficult for average adults to freeze "teachable moments" in time and methodically point out to youth when and for what reasons certain actions (which are technically deemed civic in nature) are taking place.

It is interesting that the youth themselves in these communities do not feel especially empowered to "give back to the community". In a focus group I conducted at a West Philadelphia Municipal Recreation Center after-school program for girls, the responses of the eight youth (whose ages ranged from 15 to 17 years old) gravitated most towards their discussing the immediate problems of their neighborhoods in the middle of which they felt caught. These teens explained that they did not feel empowered to make community change because they felt strongly that the problems in their communities were bigger than they, as young people, could handle. As of the writing of this report,

for example, the youth homicide rate in Philadelphia stood at 27 for 2004, with several of these fatalities occurring at or near the city's public schools. The youth in the focus group stated that they wanted the adults in their lives to take responsibility for them – latently fulfilling their roles as parents, civic leaders, and protectors. This follows the patterns of the traditional cultural relationship hierarchies that I discovered in my conversations with the adults. As I heard the youth express it, solving the problems of the community was the job of the "grown-ups".

In my conversations with youth (estimated at approximately 75 in number) on the sidewalks of Philadelphia, on basketball courts, at after-school programs and at a college fair, it became clear that even though these average urban teens have heard the phrase "giving back to the community" used in their environments, and have even uttered the phrase themselves on occasion, they have no clear comprehension of how the use of the phrase translates into a way of affecting community change. There were teens who attempted to engage with me on the subject when I probed them for a definition or examples on the phrase's meaning, but they struggled to articulate any notion of what the phrase meant to them. Mostly, I was just met with little blank stares – indicating no conceptual connection to the otherwise widely articulated phrase.

Even though the youth have heard the phrase used and have used the phrase themselves, many of them are unsure about what they are to "give back to the community" because they have not yet been shown clearly what they are receiving from the community – things such as mentor relationships, church-funded scholarships, or vigilant neighborhood watch activities, for example. The youth still have a life-long way to go in fully understanding the idea of "giving back to the community" for themselves, and the adults of the African American community have not come to the point of recognizing their historical storehouse of knowledge for passing on to the youth for posterity. Because the work of "giving back to the community" occurs largely individually, internally and impulsively by adults, the youth are currently in a poor position to learn about acting

on it in depth. This despite the fact that "giving back to the community" is occurring around them continuously.

PART II — "THE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT COMMUNITY"— BY CONTRAST

Youth-serving professional groups do not talk about "giving back to the community" at all with their target populations, but rather only about "civic engagement". I interviewed a total of 11 organizational representatives from six organizations located in and/or serving the most inner city sections of Philadelphia's Northern and Western neighborhoods – my target populations' locations. The organizations were City Year, Say Yes to Education, The Empowerment Group, the University Community Collaborative of Philadelphia, The Greater Philadelphia High School Partnership and Civic House.

A brief overview of these 6 organizations provides some insights into why they were included in this study:

City Year is a program of AmeriCorps that works to demonstrate, improve and promote the idea of national service as a way to strengthen democracy. City Year program participants are charged with being role models in their communities and they engage in such activities as mentoring and tutoring students in urban schools, community clean-ups and graffiti removal, and working with Habitat for Humanity through a host of coordinated activities that include: Leadership Academy, Leadership Development, and a Civic Curricula. The participants receive a stipend for their service and a grant for schooling after their year of service.

Say Yes to Education is a student support program which aims to help "at-risk" youth build productive lives by preparing them for college or advanced vocational training. Modeled after the "I Have A Dream" program in New York, Say Yes to Education was begun in 1987. The program's activities approach the youth's academic development by considering the impacts of the negative social factors in the youth's life – unstable home life,

abuse, poverty, lack of positive role models, lack of adult supervision, crime, etc. and providing long-term emotional counseling along with skills training experiences. Based at The University of Pennsylvania in the city's West Philadelphia neighborhood, the program employs the abilities of both formally trained mentors and counselors as well as the abilities of ordinary, but interested community residents they encounter during their time in the youth's environments.

The University Community Collaborative of Philadelphia was founded in 1997 and is based at Temple University in North Philadelphia. The organization works in partnership with community-based and other non-profit organizations on issues of community development and youth civic engagement. The Collaborative believes that universities can and should play a critical role in urban revitalization through a strategic application of their human capital resources. The Collaborative recruits university faculty members, and graduate and undergraduate students to work on an array of initiatives. Through research, training and technical assistance and direct service activities, the group's underlying goal is to increase individuals' and community groups' capacities to articulate their goals and to access the resources of governmental, economic, and social systems to achieve those goals. The Collaborative's youth civic engagement work includes curriculum-based, experiential instruction. The youth can receive academic credit for their involvement in the programs which train them to develop skills for navigating their environments more effectively than if they were left to do so on their own (such as visiting a college or university setting), develop their individual and collective voices in order to participate in larger social conversations, build self esteem, develop critical thinking and communications skills, encourage problem solving, and develop a sense of civic and community awareness. Targeting youth aged 14-21 years old, the Collaborative works with charter schools, beacon schools, youth centers and public housing authorities.

The Empowerment Group, based in North

Philadelphia, was started by a group of Swarthmore College students. The organization's main goal is to provide entrepreneurship training to the city's low income population. The group cites "giving ownership" as one of their main values. They believe that giving ownership is a way of empowering people – training people to do things for themselves; that giving ownership applies beyond business; that a community flourishes because of a sense of ownership. Once a sense of ownership is built, people gain confidence about being able to surmount problems they encounter in their neighborhoods through creativity and ingenuity.. Although the organization focuses primarily on the adult population in North Philadelphia, they do provide programs and activities for youth aged 15-16 years old. Their Entrepreneurial Education programs, for example, engage youth in a real hands-on entrepreneurial activity so they can garner ideas about ways they can shape their futures.

The Greater Philadelphia High School Partnership is an outgrowth of The Center for Greater Philadelphia at the University of Pennsylvania in West Philadelphia. According to the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Greater Philadelphia, in 2020, 45% of the nation's youth under 18 will be non-white. The Greater Philadelphia High School Partnership's goal is to partner students of different backgrounds (both racially and geographically) on service learning projects in order to address the projected racial demographics changes. Schools and their students participate in either a project-based service learning track or a curriculum-based service learning track.

Civic House, also based at the University of Pennsylvania in West Philadelphia, promotes collaboration between the University and the wider West Philadelphia community in order to promote social change. Through Civic House, Penn students, faculty, and staff participate in community service projects so as to enlarge their understanding of social issues impacting the community – responding to community needs as identified by community organizations. Civic House works to support the academic mission of the university by "enriching the intellectual, moral, and academic growth of undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff". The group supports and evaluates the impact of student-led volunteer organizations, university-managed student service programs, academically-based community service projects, summer internships and graduate opportunities.

Demographically, 82% of my 11 organizational representative interviewees were White working to educate and empower their explicitly targeted majority African American community populations. The same percentage (82%) of these organizational interviewees held the title of "Director" at some level – for example, from "Executive Director", to "Associate Director", to "Education or Education Programs Director" to "Youth Corps Director". Eighteen percent (2 out of the 11) held the title of "Coordinator". Despite their job titles all interviewees claimed to work hands-on, on-the-ground with their target populations. Fifty-five percent of the interviewees were female, and 45% were male.

Through my 60-90 minute face-to-face interviews (which were tape recorded) I culled specific examples of what this representative sample of professionals believed "civic engagement" means to them based on their daily experiences with it. I focused my attention on how and why the organization ran it's programs the way that it did, and what form(s) "civic engagement" took for staff. Specifically, I asked "what did 'civic engagement' mean to them and how did they put the theories of civic engagement into practice?". I wanted to know why these organizations were working so ambitiously with Philadelphia's African American inner city at-risk population, and what they hoped to accomplish with this population, what they felt they had accomplished with these youth. Finally, I wanted to know what concrete connections, if any, could be made between "giving back to the community" and "civic engagement" for use in strengthening academic outreach to these community populations and increasing sustained personal investment in community life. Following is the basis of my organizational interview guide. Appropriate adjustments were made to suit the focus of each of the particular organizations:

1. Describe your responsibilities as the (Executive Director, Program Manager, Program Director, etc.) of this program. What are your qualifications?
2. Describe how your program works – how do you manage your teens? Do students get one-on-one time? What are the staff called/ referred to?
3. What have you learned during your tenure?
4. What is your definition of "at-risk"?
5. What are your program's operating assumptions? – about the youth population?— their environment? – their peer relationships? – their families – their religious affiliations?
6. To what extent are these youth's home environments incorporated in your program activities?
7. What is the typical profile of these youth?
8. What do the families think of this program?
9. What is your ("graduation"/ "success") rate?
10. How do you feel your program impacts their civic life?
11. Any final thoughts or comments?

The results of these interviews were very rich conversations about the interviewees' personal and professional reflections on their work, the youth they strive to serve, and the role of the greater Philadelphia community's systems and institutions in their efforts.

Concurrent with the scheduled interviews, I also conducted civic engagement literature reviews from such seminal sources as the Kettering Foundation's collections of newsletter entries, and professional literature excerpts on civic engagement; publications by Robert Putnam; and various workbooks, research reports and columns put out by accomplished Kettering Foundation Associates and other scholars on the subject. Similar to what I had done with my "giving back to the community" data, I synthesized all my "civic engagement" professionals' data to create a composite catalogue of key words and principles that defines "civic engagement" as it is practiced by on-the-ground activists/professionals. Largely, "civic engagement" means:
1) volunteering
2) participating in community service

3) demonstrations of concern about issues
4) organizing around issues in communities to promote change
5) engaging in dialogues to increase citizen participation in governmental decisions and actions
6) educating oneself about important issues and situations both locally and nationally
7) working in community to create neighborhoods that are clean, safe, economically viable and decent places to raise children
8) building grassroots participation in all levels of government
9) voting
10) "community service"
11) "social justice"
12) "service learning projects"
13) "anti-poverty work"
14) "greening/cleaning a city lot/community gardens"
15) "mentoring"
16) "something to put on a resume or vitae"
17) "community activism"
18) "ESL tutoring"
19) "working with special needs kids"
20) "painting a mural"
21) "media literacy"
22) "for poor students, civic engagement is not formalized"
23) "civic engagement as issues-based"

These items are likely not a revelation to the reader. But what makes this list compelling are the items' individual locations within a comprehensive comparative survey of national organizations that was conducted by The Campus Compact in 1999 called Mapping Civic Engagement in Higher Education: National Initiatives, funded by the Surdna Foundation.

"CIVIC ENGAGEMENT" HAS BEEN BROKEN DOWN INTO FOUR BASIC TYPES OF ACTIVITIES

According to this extensive report (to which one of my interviewees contributed), through its research and practical applications, the civic engagement community has broken down the term "civic engagement" to mean four basic types of activities. These activities have been long considered throughout the civic engagement community as the legitimate

characterizations of civic engagement work (I am not counting civic journalism here because it is a particular type of professional citizenship). The four legitimately recognized types of civic engagement activities are: Diversity, University-Community Partnerships, Service Learning, and what is referred to as A Return to a More Democratic Government.

The Diversity approach to promoting civic engagement is considered by its practitioners to be a form of democracy that has "not yet been achieved". Ira Harkavy, Director of the Center for Community Partnerships at The University of Pennsylvania, is cited as stating that the key principle of Diversity programs as a means for improving citizen behavior is, "If students, faculty and others understand their own and others' identities better, they can build bridges across differences and thus the democracy will function more effectively". ESL tutoring, anti-poverty work, working with special needs kids, social justice, and mentoring are the types of activities that fall under this approach with the majority of the activities based in urban communities.

University-Community Partnerships are identified as grassroots, community organizing, community development, or a "practical" approach to civic engagement. The Partnerships engage local university personnel and resources in community building. It is intended to build the average citizens' capacities to act through contact with institutionally-sponsored programs and activities. Demonstrations of concern about issues, engaging in dialogues to increase citizen participation in governmental decisions and actions, and working in community to create neighborhoods that are clean, safe, economically viable and decent places to raise children are examples of University-Community Partnerships as civic engagement organizations.

Service Learning activities are defined as activities that educate students (mainly high school students) in civic skill-building that will enable them to engage in their democratic society. Students are expected to learn critical thinking skills through their "real world" experiences. The activities are intended to foster leadership and involvement in social and political issues. Ideally, students learn a sense of civic obligation and commitment to take action on the community's problems. Social justice work, community service, volunteering, community activism, painting a mural, and media literacy are specific examples of civic engagement under this approach heading.

The idea of A Return to a More Democratic Government is defined as being about increased involvement between citizens and their government through activities such as public forums, a greater infusion of the public's work in scholarship and university activities, public problem-solving vs. private complaining and a return of authority from unaccountable "entities" to the Public and to community and civic associations. Examples of specific civic engagement activities under this heading consist of organizing around issues to promote change, engaging in dialogues to increase citizen participation in governmental decisions and actions, educating oneself about important issues and situations both locally and nationally, and voting.

PATTERNS IN THE ORGANIZATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Through creating a sort of Venn Diagram of the organizational interview responses, explications of "civic engagement" in the professional literature, and the national survey report on the typical "civic engagement" activities practiced by formal organizations, I observed the following overall patterns about the civic engagement organizations' operations in general:

1) The organizations are all in some way linked to a university or college and, with the exception of City Year, they are all primarily grant funded as opposed to federally or state funded. The youth these organizations worked with were all students which left me wondering about the level of service to the non-academically oriented youth of the inner city.

2) The programs mainly focus on what activities will best "pad a resume", as one interviewee put it. The programs, schools and students tended to only recognize standard, institutionally sponsored

activities as "civic engagement" because of the administrative and accountability needs of the organizations (evaluations, grant writing, report writing, etc., for example), and the need to provide students with tangible tools for advancement through the system/institutions. In other words, in my interviews, no mention was made about accounting for actions taken by youth in their communities independent of institutional oversight (where youth perhaps reported shoveling a neighbor's sidewalk after a snow fall or attending a neighborhood watch-organized "stop the violence" vigil).

3) There are striking disparities between what the majority African American targeted populations said they wanted and needed in their daily community lives, and what the majority white organizational representatives stated they believed the "at-risk" community needed and wanted.

4) The organizations shared much of the same funding pools, causing overlaps in programming content development, goals and outcomes.

These basic organizational operations patterns notwithstanding, it is important to recognize that there does exist debate within the civic engagement professional community about what constitutes civic engagement in practice. Upon close scrutiny, it is clear that the core approach of each of the organizations I studied did fall under one of the four types of civic engagement documented by the Campus Compact report. But even with these sweeping institutional theoretical perspectives in common, my organizational interviewees voiced strong apprehensions about the uniformity of practitioners' enacting "civic engagement" in the field.

DIVERSITY OF OPINION EXISTS ABOUT "CIVIC ENGAGEMENT" IN PRACTICE

According to my Philadelphia organizational interviewees, the purity of the theory behind civic engagement work seems to grow diluted the further away from the academic source civic engagement program activity implementation gets. One organizational director, for example, whose work he described as falling under the heading of "Service

Learning" admitted that, "a lot of teachers who promote service learning don't see the connection with civic engagement. They see it as "charity work", not as character development"; whereas my interviewee saw civic engagement as "character development".

As well, interviewees discussed observing very apparent cultural differences between African American students and White students and between inner city youth and suburban youth in terms of their participation in civic engagement program activities. In working with both suburban and urban students, one program director revealed, for example, that "the city kids think that clean-up projects and murals are a waste of time". It seems that because the service learning efforts by these programs are taking place in the urban students' environments, they see first-hand how the clean-up sites repeatedly become trash-strewn after all their organized efforts. (The youth in my focus group had commented on street cleanups led by neighborhood block captains that no longer take place for fear of random shootings or because of repeated disappointments in attempting to keep the neighborhood streets clean). Another organizational interviewee revealed that she observed many of her African American inner city civic engagement program participants as "place(ing) more faith in government" than their "white, suburban" counterparts. These students, she said, "see their parents call the municipality in cases of snow removal, Stop Sign repair and replacement; to contact their City Councilperson's office, City Hall, or Mayor's Office". This, even though the idea of "having more faith in government" is not one of the actions mentioned in the previously highlighted compilation of commonly accepted definitions of civic engagement. None of the organizational representatives that I interviewed offered this particular act of citizenship (having faith in government) as a goal to be attained through their programs. Neither did any of the organizations' mission statements or official descriptions of the organizations' various program goals and objectives. Yet, upon reflection in the interviews, it was cited as a dismissible, but observed phenomenon.

Similarly, interviewees spoke about how they observed African American, inner city students "thriving in their mentoring roles with younger children", while White suburban students were observed as thriving in "project planning and organizing roles". The African American students were cited as not being accomplished at such planning, organizing and follow-through activities. Questions remain as to why this particular observation exists. Perhaps it is the type of project (such as "clean-ups") that the urban students object to participating in fully (as was mentioned by an interviewee earlier) as opposed to participating in a more human capital enrichment project such as "mentoring" – an activity likely more frequently observed of a neighborhood adult who is "giving back to the community". Typical service projects may seem cosmetic to these "at-risk" youth and they may engage in a "silent protest" when asked to participate. My conversations with Dr. Elijah Anderson, University of Pennsylvania Professor of Sociology and noted Urban Ethnographer, wended around his observations that African American youth are generally less willing to work for free (such as through internships and volunteerism) than their White counterparts.

Based on this combination of data, I believe that when an African American youth expresses a minimal desire in organizing and following through on a civic engagement project designed to "pick up trash", for example, as was reported to me in one organizational interview, the youth is likely expressing his realization that the problem is rooted more deeply in his community. And when he expresses a greater desire in tutoring a younger child, I believe that the youth may be expressing his support for a longer-term solution (from his perspective) to the same deeply-rooted community problem. In the future, this particular pattern of behavior may need to be considered and evaluated as a possible reason for noted disparities in levels of participation by inner city African American youth as was explicitly cited by my "civic engagement" programs professionals.

PART III – ADD A FIFTH TYPE OF "CIVIC ENGAGEMENT"

Given the diversity of perspectives on and practices by civic engagement "at-risk" youth-serving professionals, and the stated observed diversity of approaches to civic engagement activities by African American urban youth and White suburban youth cited by these professionals, I believe that the academic community should begin to explore adding a fifth type of commonly accepted form of civic engagement to the Campus Compact study – one that reflects the realities of these "at-risk" youth and the experiences of the civic engagement professionals who seek to serve them, and that responds directly to the issues, concerns and problems of working in a sustainable way with such a deeply marginalized population.

Along with "Diversity", "University-Community Partnerships", Service Learning" and "A Return to a More Democratic Government"; "Giving Back to the Community" should be inducted as a fifth formally recognized form of civic engagement that runs through urban community development, social capital building, community capacity building, and "at-risk" youth civic engagement work. In order to plausibly add "giving back to the community" to the list of "legitimate" definitions of civic engagement, it would be wise to first recognize and acknowledge where the connections and overlaps of the practice of "giving back to the community" lie among the characteristics of the other four types.

After considerable study, when compared to Campus Compact's four types of civic engagement, it appears that "giving back to the community" bears the closest resemblance to "service learning" in character and practice (with the exception of already discussed gaps in cultural relevance for the youth being served).

The Campus Compact report states that in service learning "students are expected to learn critical thinking skills through their 'real world' experiences. The activities are intended to foster leadership and involvement in social and political issues. Ideally, students learn a sense of civic obligation and

commitment to take action on the community's problems." My findings on "giving back to the community" reflect the same basic set of civic values and practices as is described about service learning, but with the added dimensions of marginalized minority community life – with real life experiences being the main driving force behind African American's emerging urge to act in their community. Through the identified processes of self-reflection and self-discovery, "giving back to the community" also involves vital critical thinking skills and an intense investment in developing human capital for the greater good. "Giving back to the community" activities, such as those illustrated by the New Testament parable about "stewardship", foster leadership and a commitment to a good community life. My community interviewees talked about their sense of moral obligation as their cause for making a personal commitment to take action to impact other's lives and social problems in common.

This distinctly African American perspective on civic involvement is real – a direct by-product of slavery, emancipation and Civil Rights Movement history. Out of all of the four types of civic engagement headings documented, "service learning" is the most directly impacting and "real world" form of civic engagement for the African American youth who live out this history. The apparent problem with "service learning" for inner city youth, however, is the kinds of activities the youth are recruited to participate in. As the organizational interviewees indicated, these youth are scarcely finding program activities as seriously relevant to their lives.

Cultural relevance must be injected into the textbook definition of "service learning" as a way to build on the theories of civic engagement and create a space to place the diversity of opinions on civic engagement practice that are being experienced in the field.

But the civic engagement professionals' community should be cautious not to merely subsume "giving back to the community" into "service learning". "Giving back to the community" already exists – it needs to be further studied and the findings then

used more aggressively in appropriate instances with appropriate populations. Civic engagement professionals need to learn about and incorporate more of the youth's reality into sponsored program activities so that they can be better equipped to connect with the examples of "giving back to the community" that the youth are actually experiencing under the radar screen of the static theory about them. As well, the African American activist community would also gain a clearly defined single point of reference in civic engagement academic literature for locating their own distinct, on-going, non-mainstream community engagement efforts. Ultimately, various groups involved in inner city "at-risk" communities could effectively work <u>together</u> to resolve social problems.

Ideally, "at-risk" youth-serving professionals would consider their target population as not just "students", but more broadly as "neighborhood youth" – moving beyond recruiting through schools and expanding outreach into community group networks. With the help of reliable, active community adults, youth-serving professionals can provide civic engagement and social capital building skills through viable, culturally relevant programs already in place. The organizations can use their structure to promote civic engagement as it is practiced – organically – in the communities they serve.

To aid in professionals' efforts at expanding their civic engagement efforts to include "giving back to the community" work, I have examined some of the social factors that play a significant role in inner city community life.

PART IV – A CONTEXT OF SOCIAL FACTORS TO CONSIDER

It is evident from my kaleidoscope of findings that a multitude of social factors impact how African American, inner city "at-risk" teens (and others) participate in community life. I have observed several clearly impacting social factors for observed levels of civic engagement from this study to be: whether the "at-risk" youth can truly be tapped for participation, what is really meant by "the environment", how does

adolescent peer pressure come into play regarding community involvement for these youth, how do educational experiences shape an inner city African American youth's perceptions of civic involvement, what is the condition of "social trust" among this population, how does the work of The (urban) Black Church factor into African American civic life in this new millennium, and how do these youth feel about voting? Professionals' considerations of these contextual factors would facilitate any attempts at making adjustments in programming.

"DECENT" OR "STREET"?: RECOGNIZING THE YOUTH'S REALITY

A major challenge to my research arose when trying to determine whether the youth I was talking to was either "decent" or "street" before I could recruit the youth and compare their level of and reasons for community involvement.

According to Anderson, life for many inner city African American teens <u>does</u> differ from their suburban and rural peers in that their day to day activities incorporates a complex layer of challenges to conform to a code for navigating a frequently desperate and violent inner city life.

For over twenty years, Dr. Anderson has been developing a burgeoning library of his observations of the plight of African Americans in contemporary inner city life by continuing in the vein of urban ethnography pioneer, WEB DuBois, and providing a microscopic view of daily life for Blacks in the inner city neighborhoods of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Dr. Anderson has published such seminal works as <u>A Place on the Corner</u> (1978), <u>Streetwise: Race, Class, and Change in an Urban Community</u> (1990), and <u>Code of the Street: Decency, Violence and the Moral Life of the Inner City</u> (1999). Robert Putnam cites several passages from Anderson's 1990 book, <u>Streetwise: Race, Class, and Change in an Urban Community</u> in <u>Bowling Alone</u> to illustrate his points about the condition of inner city social capital for African Americans:

> (The departure of the middle class…)has diminished an extremely important source of moral and social leadership within the Black

community…(The male) 'old head' was a man of stable means who was strongly committed to family life, to church…to passing on his philosophy, developed through his own rewarding experiences with work, to young boys he found worthy…(At the same time,… the community 'mothers' who once occupied porch stoops and served as the neighborhood's eyes and ears, have become) overwhelmed by a virtual proliferation of 'street kids' – children almost totally without adult supervision…As family caretakers and role models disappear or decline in influence, and as unemployment and poverty become more persistent, the community, particularly its children, becomes vulnerable to a variety of social ills, including crime, drugs, family disorganization, and unemployment.

 I would also add disengagement, disinvestment and disenfranchisement from civic life to thislist.

In <u>Code of the Street: Decency, Violence and the Moral Life of the Inner City</u>. 1999. New York/ London: W.W. Norton & Company, Anderson advances his own findings about the inner city social capital whereby "decent" and "street" families counterbalance one another under a cloud of overwhelming negative influences – influences that are identified as, "the lack of jobs that pay a living wage, the stigma of race, the fallout from rampant drug use and trafficking, and the resulting alienation and lack of hope for the future". It is an added pressure for a teen to be able to maneuver him/herself in a street-oriented environment at the same time as the youth is juggling the development of his or her individual identity and the broader social need to fit in with peers. Given such a sub-culture of alienation and survival for this group in America, it is necessary to wonder about the nature of the relationship of these youth to the idea of community involvement activities. Dr. Anderson's work casts a laser light on the dilemmas for these urban families and details

how, even though, as he tells us, the majority of inner city families try to inexact a "decent-family model", the code of the street ensnares the families' young children and forces them to grow up adopting the behaviors of both "decent" and "street" sub-cultures – a phenomenon that Dr. Anderson calls "code-switching" – as a means for surviving their daily struggles. The risk of code-switching (similar to the risks for all teens) is that as the young person grows up, she or he comes to realize that they must choose an orientation – "The kind of home he comes from," states Dr. Anderson, "influences, but does not determine the way he will ultimately turn out.

After personally experiencing friendly teenagers who at first were hostile because of their apprehensions over a stranger, I realized that there is no clear cut way to make such a determination about their backgrounds as either "decent" or "street" without having some extensive exposure to a particular group of youth – a luxury I could not afford in this study. The majority of inner city young people I encountered both in this study and on occasions outside of it have been pleasant and polite. On the surface, they wear the clothes typically associated with the "gangsta' rappers" of music video fame – baggy pants, oversized t-shirts, cap pulled down, etc. (outward characteristics of "street" life), but a brief conversation with these young people quickly dispelled any fears. Stereotyping briefly got in the way of research participant recruitment.   Most of these youth in the neighborhoods, I surmised after a time, were pretty "decent", but still unassociated with any supervising entity from which I could be granted permission to conduct formal interviews.   These youth had a chance of at some point interacting with "giving back to the community" activities or with more formalized "civic engagement" activities. But the more "street" youth are oftentimes completely cut off from the guidance of older people and institutions and are thus most frequently the ones left out of civic engagement work.

A CASE STUDY ON REACHING "AT-RISK" YOUTH

I did interview one community activist who was able to shed some light for me on the best way to tap the more "street"-oriented youth.   Bilal Qayyum (pronounced "KI-YOOM") is a founding member of Men United for A Better Philadelphia, a hands-on intervention group of African American men who go to the "street"-oriented youth where they live and hang out – on the mean streets of North Philadelphia. Mr. Qayyum's group of over 50 African American men who come from a cross-section of backgrounds (from civil servants to private sector businessmen, to menial laborers) take turns nightly to drive the "Men United Van" through the crime-ridden neighborhoods of North Philadelphia between the hours of six pm and midnight and stop wandering young men in their tracks on the street corners with conversation about living a more positive lifestyle. Men United for a Better Philadelphia has been in existence for two years.   The group grew out of a 15 year initiative called the Father's Day Rally Committee, which brings African American men together to talk about African American manhood, the meaning of fatherhood in the African American community, the problem of incarceration rates among Black males and issues of commitment and family in the African American community.

Mr. Qayyum described the Men United group's activities as "grassroots, street-level intervention with young men to channel and redirect their energies into pro-social activities (like GED's and jobs) and dissuade them from engaging in criminal activities". Their goal has been to reduce the number of African American homicides in the city. In 2002, the group was publicly recognized by the Police Commissioner of Philadelphia for its role in the city's Safe Streets Program – crediting them with helping to reduce the violent crime rate in Philadelphia for that year.

Bilal, talked at length with me in our interview about the harshness and hardened outlook that these "street" youth had. He explained to me how he and the other Men United make it a point to go out onto these particular streets with a healthy amount of fear for their safety through the night. The majority of these "street" youth do not have a stable home environment or even an address where they can be found regularly – they sleep in multiple locations. They do not attend school regularly; they

are involved in criminal activities (which drives them underground); and violence to them is a very viable form of interacting with strangers. The men of Men United for a Better Philadelphia travel in pairs and groups. Fortunately, as I mentioned before, familiarity with this population breeds trust and a measure of safety when venturing out into "their territory". So the very real dangers to the Men United group members' safety has been minimized to a degree over time, but the risk of random violence always looms. I realized that I was not connecting with true "street" youth because there was no other way to connect with them other than through the "guerrilla-style tactics" used by Men United. Based upon that realization, I decided that I would not at this time risk my safety in attempting to reach out to these obviously deeply disenfranchised youth. More could be gained through a longer conversation with those already in relationships with them.

I should reiterate that these youth are the true "street"-oriented youth of the inner city and as such only make up a part of the inner city community scene. Not everyone in the inner city should be looked upon as "street", as I mentioned discovering for myself, even though their outward demeanor may at first make them appear so.

WHAT IS REALLY MEANT BY "THE ENVIRONMENT"?

This research has shown that when it comes to discussions about the inner city and the environment there are two distinct schools of thought on the subject. One school of thought is what many of my organizational interviewees described as "greening". The overwhelming majority of organizational representatives that I talked to about civic engagement in the inner city mentioned actions such as: cleaning up a vacant lot, planting a community garden, painting a mural to remove graffiti, planting a tree and sweeping the street as the way to address environmental issues in the inner city. Indeed, on Martin Luther King Day, youth were expected to be outdoors at a recreational center playground picking up litter and painting walls in blustery 20 degree winter weather. The second school of thought about the environment that I came across in my studies was what I saw most succinctly flashed across the computer screen of a New York City elementary school featured in a Summer, 2003 MTV Special as "the sum of your surroundings".

The majority of the community people and youth that I talked with talked about their environment in terms of their "surroundings". Most of the references I heard were to: abandoned buildings, people who don't care about keeping the sidewalks clean, people hanging out on corners, lack of corner stores/ lack of business development, the number of businesses that are owned by other ethnic and racial groups, emergency response time in their neighborhoods, the number of bars in a neighborhood, the closed recreation centers that limit their children's access to safe areas for play and dangerous parks and playground areas. Much of what people considered their "environment" was connected to the people who made up the environment, not to the "natural world" itself. People did not talk about "abandoned lots" they talked about the "mess" that the people who used to own the property left behind when they moved away or that an absentee landlord allowed to grow out of control. The city's Department of Licenses and Inspections cite many instances of people calling in city workers to clean up the debris, but cite just as many instances of the debris reappearing in the same open, unclaimed location soon after the cleanup.

As a broader example, when the current Mayor of the city was first elected in 2000, the main issue that was documented in the newspapers as to why people voted him into office was his promise to remove blight from the Philadelphia inner city landscape. Following his election, the Mayor instituted a massive abandoned car removal program and a program to raze abandoned houses in impoverished neighborhoods to make way for new developments and to improve the city's urban "environment". The election outcomes proved that what inner city residents wanted addressed most with regards to community development and community building programs are their concerns around "ownership" – who in the community has the sense of it and who does not, and how to resolve the differences that are being perpetuated by the lack of

a sense of it. The reason low-income housing is a priority for the current city administration is because of the problems associated with having too many rental properties in the city.   People complained to me in my interviews about the renters in their neighborhoods who show a consistent disregard for healthy community norms by hurling bags of garbage onto the street days before the trash is to be collected, by not reporting or attempting to fix broken doors and windows, through noise pollution (from music to voices) late at night, dangerous pets such as Pit Bulls running loose in the neighborhood and destructive, unsupervised small children. Interviewees reported witnessing suspicious foot and car traffic patterns to various residences, not to mention the irresponsible behavior of the landlords as well. People did not express concerns about "tree planting", "community garden building", or the need for more "mural arts".

On balance, however, I should note that what I have discussed here (like the "street" youth observations) is reflective of <u>a part</u> of the picture about the "environment" and African Americans. Because African Americans have been stereotyped as not caring at all about "greening"-type issues, I would like to call your attention to research that was compiled by Dr. Paul Mohai, Associate Professor at the University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources and Environment, that provides some background and adds some more substance to the reasons the two schools of thought on the environment and the inner city exists.

Published in June 2003 in Environment magazine, "Dispelling Old Myths: African American Concern for the Environment" exposes the myths and realities behind African Americans and the environment. A synopsis of the article reads: "Contrary to widely held assumptions, African Americans are concerned about environmental issues – and not just issues directly related to human health. An analysis of extensive national and Detroit area data reveals fundamental flaws in the idea that White Americans care more about a healthy environment than do African Americans." "In 1982", the article states, "the mobilization of the Warren County community

received national media attention and prompted a U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) study of the racial make-up of the communities surrounding the four major hazardous waste landfills in the South. The GAO study found that the communities surrounding three of the four landfills were predominantly African American…Grassroots protests over toxic waste and pollution in people of color communities soon formed what is known as the environmental justice movement…Evidence from (a 1990 survey) demonstrated that, nationally, African Americans express as much concern about the environment as do white Americans". The difference, however, lay in types of environmental concerns people have. For example, Mohai's article cites that, "the percentage of Blacks mentioning neighborhood environmental problems as among the most important problems is significantly greater than the percentage of whites mentioning such issues (26 percent versus 3 percent)…whites are more likely than blacks to mention loss of or harm to trees and plants as important. Tt was somewhat more likely," Mohai goes on to say, "that Blacks would mention other nature preservation issues (such as oil spills and harm to lakes, rivers and streams)". Finally, Mohai corroborates my field observations and analysis by stating:

> Table 2 on page 16 (of the article) revealed that African Americans, when asked to identify three of the most important environmental problems facing the country, were more likely than were whites to mention environmental problems that occurred primarily in neighborhoods. Consistently, when they were asked to rate the seriousness of such problems as the noise level in the neighborhood; abandoned or boarded up houses; litter or garbage; rats, mice or roaches; and exposure to lead, (African Americans) rated all of these as more serious than did whites…In addition,…the number of available recreation and play areas nearby".

Mohai goes on in great detail to also discuss environmental action by race and the racial makeup of national environmental groups, but that information has little relevance for this report's main purpose.

HOW DOES ADOLESCENT PEER PRESSURE COME INTO PLAY FOR THESE YOUTH?

I wanted to gain insights into how peer pressure plays out among my population of youth. One organizational interviewee offered this observation on peer pressure and civic engagement through an anecdote about one of his students. The interviewee (mimicking the boy) said the boy felt that if he participated in the program, "my buddies are going to think I'm a dummy if I get tutoring or they will think I am acting White". I found numerous references to the pressure that African American teens put on one another to dumb themselves down in an effort to not be seen as "White". I put "White" in quotes because the idea of "acting White" is an expression of a stereotype that Blacks have about Whites regarding meeting society's standards for acceptable behavior – something Black students/ youth learn early in life that they are challenged to do. Saying that one is "acting White" is a form of post-modern rebellion against the common standards for success that, historically, have disallowed opportunities for success to Blacks.

The pressure to "act Black" in the African American community is real and enormous. It is a phenomenon that can occur throughout one's lifetime and it often steers the course of an African American adolescent's life. It seems to be the most significant peer pressure the youth encounter other than the pressure to have sexual intercourse at an early age. In a December 10, 2002 Philadelphia Inquirer article entitled, "Weighing two views on why some middle-class blacks lagging in school?", columnist William Raspberry discusses a,study of a middle-class African American Ohio community conducted by Berkeley anthropologist, John Ogbu. Ogbu is cited as observing:

> "What amazed me is that these kids who come from homes of doctors and lawyers are not thinking like their parents. They don't know

how their parents made it. They are looking at rappers in ghettos as their role models, they are looking at entertainers. The parents work two jobs, three jobs to give their children everything, but they are not guiding their children".

It seems to go back to what the Reverend Marcus said in the panel discussion I mentioned in my section on The Black Church – the African American community is investing its faith in the popular culture's portrayal of itself rather than looking at itself as it is. I have to spend more time on this topic because I could not fit a comprehensive study of it into the timeline, but perhaps accusing someone of "acting White" in an effort to dumb them down comes from stereotyped media portrayals of African Americans in ghetto scenes, in prison, or dead. Perhaps the youth really do believe that that is how the majority of African Americans spend life even to the point where suburban middle class African American youth reject the responsibilities of civic participation.

HOW MIGHT EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES SHAPE AN INNER CITY AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUTH'S PERCEPTIONS OF CIVIC INVOLVEMENT?

As a bit of backdrop I would like to briefly offer this snapshot of educational experiences for minorities in the national landscape. In the summer of 2003 I came across a news item on the CNN.com website. The piece was posted on August 27, 2003 (3:33pm EDT). It was the story of a report on the results of a survey conducted by the National Education Association (NEA). The report was entitled, "Status of the American Public School Teacher". The report's aim, as the article stated, is to "help education groups shape their agendas and mold the country's image of teachers". The report is updated every five years and draws its latest findings from the most recent previous years. Of the most remarkable discoveries of the survey that year was the disparate proportion of males and African Americans in the teaching profession in comparison to the number of African American students in the nation's public schools. The survey results were based on responses from a nationally representative sample of 1,467 teachers with a reported margin of error of 2 percentage

points.   The NEA study found that, "Male teachers made up about one-third of the teaching force in the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's, but their numbers slid through the 1990's and hit the low of 21% in 2001".   "Whites", the report continues, "have accounted for about 90% of all teachers for the past three decades, including in 2001.   Six percent of teachers were Black, a number on the decline". NEA President, Reg Weaver, was reported as remarking that the "lopsided representation of whites and females in teaching is troubling because it denies students a range of role models".   In March, 2005 Annual Report Card on the Schools, The Philadelphia Inquirer published the results of the first teacher racial demographic survey ever conducted on the Philadelphia School District.   With the total number of Philadelphia public school teachers numbering at 11, 372 – 63% were reported as being "White" and 32% were reported as being "Black".   The student population breaks down to total student body: 189,960 – with 14% of the students reported as being "White" and 65% reported as being "Black".

A visit to the Philadelphia School District's website in January, 2004 (the original timing of this study) revealed that there were currently 48 Charter Schools in operation around the city.   With their varied curriculums, 17 of those schools cater to high school students.

An editorial in the February 25, 2003 issue of the Philadelphia Inquirer reported that "…Fewer than 50% (of Philadelphia public high school students) graduate.   There is limited college guidance; few AP classes.   More than 70% are performing below basic levels of standardized tests…Less than 40% live with two parents, many live with neither parent…".   Another search on the Philadelphia School District's website in October, 2003 also revealed that along with "limited college guidance" and "few AP classes", there are no classes taught through the curriculum that support civic education or civic engagement.   My list of key search words on the District's website and their results are: "citizenship – 0", "civic – 0", "service – a list of administration services", "service learning – 0", "volunteer – 0", "social justice – 0", "diversity – 0", "voting – 0", and "citizens – 0".

THE SCHOOL SYSTEM IS HARD TO BREACH

Concerned that I was missing something in my searches, I began calling the District's offices to find out whether it was indeed true that the students were getting zero civic education from their public schools.   I talked to many office assistants but none who could give me a definitive answer or put me in touch with someone who could.   In November of 2003, I finally came in contact with a member of the District's Office of Communications (Public Relations Office).   This contact and I played phone tag until December 12, 2003 when I was finally able to interview him by phone.   I wanted to know whether the School District really was not teaching civic education at any level to its students.   His answer was a roundabout "yes", the School District really is not offering civic education at any level through its curriculum.   The explanation he offered was a mix of a reporting on the burden caused by the number of free and reduced meals the School District served in 2002 (160,000), to an attempt at explaining how the District is trying to provide a "holistic education" to students at this time so civics could not be part of the curriculum, to a lengthy discussion about how "the little guy" at the District "is all stressed out" because "he just wants to help, but he's fighting an uphill battle".   I should remark that my contact at the District stated that he had quit his job as a marketing consultant in the private sector to work for the District's new Office of Communications that was formed when the new Reform Commission came in. He talked about the role of the media in portraying the District in a bad light when "incidents" occurred in the schools and downplayed the positive activities occurring in the District.   In the end, however, my contact still would not reveal to me for certain whether the District offered or was even planning to offer civic education through its curriculum to students at any level.   So, I moved on.

While I was playing phone tag with this contact, I was also managing communications with the District on another level for a different purpose.   I needed to simultaneously prepare to administer my proposed survey to 500 students in the high schools of the neighborhoods I was targeting.   I began preparations,

according to my email documentations, on October 6, 2003. My first email was to Mr. Paul Vallas, the School Superintendent, himself. Apparently, the Superintendent read my email and forwarded it to an associate – the Chairman of the Research Review Committee at the Office of Research and Evaluation in the District's main administration building. On October 9th, the Chairman responded to my email instructing me in the appropriate procedures for conducting research in the school district. The "procedures" consisted of submitting seven binders assembled with: a four-page introductory letter of how my intended study meets with the guidelines for research in the district, the original research proposal, my four-page resume, an overview of my findings to date, and the proposed survey as it stood (at three pages at the time). I submitted all requested materials on October 20, 2003 in person in time for their last meeting for the year to review research proposals for 2004. The Review Committee was scheduled to meet on November 6th (they wanted the materials at least two weeks in advance of their meeting). I was told in mid-December, by letter that my request had been denied.

I called the Committee Chair to ask for an explanation for the request denial and was told that my request was turned down for two reasons: 1) District policy states that any researcher who wishes to conduct their work within the District must first get the approval of the District to participate in the study prior to writing the District into any original grant or research proposals. (That was the first I had heard of any such policy); and 2) my study was refused because I was conducting it as a "consultant researcher". Preference for research conducted in the District is given to students and organizations. They thought that as a consultant I could potentially sell the student data for personal gain. They did not believe I would remain altruistic through the terms of my proposal. The Chairman said I could appeal the decision if I felt strongly enough about my study, so I did. From December 2003 to April 2004 I fought the School District of Philadelphia to allow me to conduct my study to no avail. There was a point at which the District contact was willing to concede to my request, but by that time it was

state testing time for the students, and then the end of the year activities. By May 2004, the case was imminently and indisputably closed.

This was a great disappointment to me mainly because it was an opportunity to acquire a valuable store of new information direct from the youth themselves that got lost because of red tape. For the entire six months that I wrestled with the District on this matter I was reminded of the countless remarks I heard from parents and community members from my other studies and on-the-ground work about how "it's (decision-making) all done behind closed doors;" "the teachers and administrators only look out for themselves;" "they don't want to hear what the parents/community has to say;" how people described themselves as feeling powerless against the system and the institution; and how they say they feel like they are treated as "strangers" or even "the enemy" in their own schools. As a significant side note, now I really know how they feel.

HOW DOES THE WORK OF THE (URBAN) BLACK CHURCH FACTOR INTO AFRICAN AMERICAN CIVIC LIFE IN THIS NEW MILLENNIUM?

Gaining private access to clergy in the network of The Black Church is an extremely difficult task. In the vast majority of instances it is an impossible task. Pastors and other religious are busy attending to the needs of their community – either fulfilling their obligations to Committees and Boards, or preparing for ceremonies, rites and holidays.

For a researcher who is unfamiliar with the networks and norms of the inner city but who wants to tap into the "heart" of the inner city's civic life, go to church – any church, whether it be a storefront church or an historic landmark that still holds services, identify the programs and services it offers the community and communicate with the people who are in charge of administering those programs. It is clear from my studies that the life-blood of activism in the African American community is located in some measure of spirituality – not necessarily in a church, but in faith. It would be wise to keep that in mind at all times when approaching people about their commitment to the community. A researcher will likely never get to speak with the Pastor, but then the Pastor only

knows as much as his delegates need to tell him. On a daily basis, the community's youth is in closest contact with the pastor's delegates, administrators, secretaries. The element of organization that these contacts bring, albeit not at the level of university-community partnerships, et al, is priceless when recruiting subjects.

The Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society (CRRUCS) at the University of Pennsylvania was founded in 2000 with the mission of:

> producing and disseminating cutting-edge edge empirical knowledge about the role of religion in contemporary urban America. With an interdisciplinary team of Penn-based colleagues, and in close working partnerships with other universities, think tanks, research intermediaries, and news organizations, the Center focuses on how national and local faith-based organizations help to solve big city social problems; how religion relates to contemporary urban political participation, civic engagement and social well-being; and how local congregations, grassroots ministries, and other communities of faith matter in the daily lives of disadvantaged urban children, youth and families.

The Center has published such reports as "Black Church Outreach: Comparing How Black and Other Congregations Serve Their Needy Neighbors", "Good Dads: Religion, Civic Engagement and Paternal Involvement in Low-Income Communities" and countless others. While I believe that the statistical data approach to this subject of "faith and the inner cities" the Center undertakes is no substitute for the depth of data qualitative investigations can uncover among these communities, I have found that the Center's work does provide a substantial backdrop from which an ethnographer can springboard into her fieldwork in such a vast, uncharted and formidable factor in African American urban life.

For example, a Spring, 2003 CRRUCS report about Mark Regnerus, a fellow at CRRUCS and an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Texas at Austin, discussed a study he conducted entitled, "Living Up to Expectations: How Religion Alters the Delinquent Behavior of Low-Risk Adolescents". According to the report, Regnerus identified and surveyed approximately 9,700 African American seventh to twelfth graders from two-parent and/or suburban families of privilege who reportedly were failing to live up to family and societal expectations for their demographic. Regnerus compared what he observed were the effects of the influences of religion in these low-risk young people's lives with the effect of religious influences in the lives of similar youth who managed to not engage in "at risk" behaviors (such as delinquency or drug use) at all – meaning they met societal and family expectations for their demographic. What Regnerus found was that church attendance helped low-risk/privileged youth stay out of trouble mainly because church attendance enabled them to tap the social support systems of fellow churchgoers. (The youth who failed to meet expectations for their demographic did not have a strong basis in the church). Churches, Regnerus reports, reinforce parental support networks and parental control. A similar research proposal on the Center's website looks at the opposite population – my population – the "at-risk" youth and the effects of religion on their lives. What the proposal asserts is that, "the ecology" of urban life, especially in the poorest neighborhoods, is often "a religious one". The proposal observes that, "It is not just that churches, synagogues, mosques and other religious institutions, are everywhere one turns in these communities; it is simply that after decades of public and private disinvestments, virtually all other institutions committed to civil society have left these neighborhoods". The proposal asks, "What would it cost for government or other non-religious organizations to replace the social services provided annually by congregations and community-serving ministries?" The proposal goes on to state, "…suppose that a low-income, semiliterate urban youth with a mom or dad behind bars is not in any faith-based program nor has had any experience attending religious services of any kind.

Nevertheless faith could still be a significant factor in his life…the child might not be in any formal faith-based program, but he might receive food, money, medicine, shelter or attend pre-school, or summer camp through local religious congregations." In sum," the proposal states, "even though he may not consider himself religious or spiritual, he may still be exposed to and perhaps affected by a community rich in spiritual capital". The author goes on to report that in June, 2001, the United States Conference of Mayors unanimously resolved to stimulate public partnerships with faith-based organizations, with over one hundred mayors reportedly creating local offices of faith-based initiatives. What this survey of documented information has told me is not that "churches are important to the maintenance of inner city community strength", which is an oft-repeated observation about the Black Church and civic engagement, but that "the 'church' is a metaphor for the 'sense of spirituality' that permeates African American communities, both poor and privileged, in their efforts at maintaining community strength". Researchers must recognize that "the church" is a building where the "heart" of good intentions in an otherwise desperate community can be found. Even "street" youth who do not participate in formal church activities can experience and be affected by the sense of spirituality that church members can spread to him. "The Black Church" is the embodiment of the Black people's aspirations for itself and its community. The leaders of the Black Church (pastors, ministers) are meant to guide the intentions of the congregation as they are expressed through various deeds. Like the steward in the New Testament parable, the pastor/minister must remain a peer to his community while exhibiting his special talents (for leadership, for example) for the betterment of everyone around him.

WHAT IS THE CONDITION OF "SOCIAL TRUST" AMONG THIS POPULATION?

Mike Jones, a self-described '70's activist and current Program Director at the Sam Morris Recreation Center in West Philadelphia characterized the social capital ingredient of "trust" in the African American inner city in this way:

> Community groups tend not to network even if they have the same goals…there is a competitive atmosphere. They want to control other's behavior to get them to do what they want them to do – to work on their own particular problem, solving agendas. They're afraid that if they collaborate or partner on a project, they will end up scrapping their identities. There are some strong personalities leading these groups with territorial attitudes, and volunteers are hard to come by.

Mike Jones identified the lack of trust among community activists as a major setback to advancing his work as a recreational leader with the city's youth.

In 1997 the Washington, DC-based Pew Research Center for The People and The Press released a study of the relationship between urban Philadelphians, social trust and citizen engagement. The study called, Trust and Citizen Engagement in Metropolitan Philadelphia: A Case Study, largely revealed that although most Philadelphians actively participate in the civic and social lives of their communities, the majority of city residents (67%) were found to be more "wary" than "distrusting" of others in civic life – with the respondents saying that one "can't be too careful in dealing with other people". The Center's study defines "social trust" as "a connectedness among citizens that fosters sensible government, thriving commerce, and cooperative communities" fueled by engagement in civic associations. "Wariness" was characterized in the study as citizens being "cautious of strangers, and…not have(ing) a lot of trust in neighbors, co-workers or casual social acquaintances". The study reports that more residents in the city proper than in the Philadelphia city suburbs are wary of others, and Blacks were found to be more wary of others than are Whites. With 39% of respondents in the study stating that their greatest reasons for distrusting others stems most from "people's characteristics – dishonest/selfish/unpredictable/inconsiderate", it has been found that "fear of manipulation and exploitation"

are the main contributors to low levels of social trust among African American urban residents in Philadelphia – more so than crime.

In his writings about Philadelphia urban street culture, Elijah Anderson talks at length about how the social capital glue of "trust" has eroded within the inner city – with residents distrusting other residents for fear that "street" tendencies may overtake "decent" ones in the community. Extenuating circumstances like prolonged periods of unemployment, alcoholism, and vengeance can push a "decent" person to take on a "street" mentality, catching many in the community by surprise at times. These "transformations" tend to happen on a case by case basis, so many people have learned to be always on guard with one another, guarding against manipulation and exploitation, especially with the youth who are seen by older community members as lacking in self-discipline and guidance. The majority of the inner city community, according to Dr. Anderson, distrusts mainstream institutions because of its history with racism and prejudice.

Both my random sample and focus group youth said that they distrust the police in the city because they claimed to have witnessed injustices in their neighborhoods by some officers. My observations track with The Pew Research Center's findings, in which their study states that 33% of Philadelphians distrust the police. I experienced having to build trust with community contacts by revealing personal information about myself (such as whether or not I have children of my own and why not, for example) as a way of working to break through people's strong defenses. In the end, people's defenses proved too strong and would not be broken down by my temporary visits. Maintaining prolonged contact and a level of transparency with community members or at least maintaining continued high visibility through your work in the community is a way a newcomer can break the ice when trying to enter an inner city community's circle. Maintaining an awareness of the cultural norms in the community such as hierarchies, networks, cliques, gathering places, negative associations as well as positive ones; and working those insights into your relationships also

helps to build trust.

HOW DO THESE YOUTH FEEL ABOUT VOTING?

When I was attempting to conduct my interviews about voting in the city, the memory of the debacle of Election 2000 proved still very fresh in people's minds. In addition, the race for Mayor in Philadelphia that year was a hotly contested re-match between the African American Democrat incumbent, John Street, and the two-time, White Republican challenger, Sam Katz. There was a great deal of drama surrounding this election – from Molotov Cocktails being thrown into republican campaign headquarters to FBI probes on the democratic incumbent bringing far-reaching accusations of corruption at City Hall. A great deal of hostility and animosity was actively being exchanged between parties and among various groups of supporters and citizens. This situation created fissures along racial, economic, and political lines that grassroots community groups and individuals were clearly more focused on than anything I was bringing to them. No one trusted anyone outside of their inner social, political, civic circle with any information about themselves. Everyone was a potential enemy, including me.

I attempted to talk with youth on-the-ground about voting, but the youth would not attach to the subject. I had learned about a youth voting project based at the University of Pennsylvania called Student Voices run by Phyllis Kaniss, but since I had already reached the point in my research where I needed to pursue my forward focus on community contacts, I put my search for more organizational insights aside for another time. As well, Student Voices was a program focused on the more academically-inclined youth of the city whereas I was interested in talking with the more "at-risk" youth.

On my tour of neighborhood polling places on that Election Day, I observed some teens at a West Philadelphia polling place, but they were loitering and playing, and looked too young to vote. In North Philadelphia, I observed scores of older (approximately 35 years old and up) and elderly (senior citizen) voters, and numerous poll watchers

(North Philadelphia was the neighborhood base of the Democrat incumbent). I did not observe any younger adult (18-30 years old) voters.

Realistically, I did not expect to be able to devote much time in my investigations to this particular aspect of youth civic behavior because among the civic engagement community, voting is considered to be the last act of civic engagement – predicated by essential prolonged deliberation and dialogue on issues (see Daniel Yankelovich's seven stages of forming public judgment formulated in his book, Coming to Public Judgment: Making Democracy Work in a Complex World, Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1991), that culminate in the act of voting. But I was satisfied to have had the opportunity to observe and report on community events to the degree that they related to my population of youth during such an eventful Philadelphia election year.

PART V – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. SHIFT FOCUS OF WHAT IS EXPECTED TO BE LEARNED ON-THE-GROUND

Youth-serving civic engagement professionals must make greater efforts to learn from the contexts of the "at-risk" inner city communities they target in order to expand their programs to be more reflective of and therefore more conducive to the successful building of civic capacity in those environments. Because of the prevalence of plaguing operating and administrative issues, professional program development efforts in civic engagement organizations fall short in letting their learning evolve through identifying, acknowledging and integrating the diverse practices of "giving back to the community" into the "civic engagement" program goals they set. A recommendation for increasing impact on targeted African American inner city "at-risk" communities is for professionals to focus more on their target populations' actual, real-time observed behaviors to inform their programs (for example, where African American youth were earlier in this report cited as "placing more faith in government" than their White counterparts) than on static, standard theories about African American inner city civic behaviors and attitudes. Professionals can use the findings

of this ethnographic study report to help begin to identify authentic core inner city community civic engagement concerns and practices and then adapt existing and future organizational resources to more practically address people's expressed concerns.

2. COMMUNITY ADULTS ARE THE GATEKEEPERS OF AUTHENTIC YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Because of the cultural norm of deferring to a generational hierarchy that exists within the African American community – one shared by both the adults and the youth alike – professionals in civic engagement organizations must actively work to seek out and maintain relationships with the various adult community members who are connected to the "at-risk" youth they seek to assist and not attempt to seek out long-term relationships with the youth only. People in these often volatile neighborhood environments demand adherence to a code of respect from outsiders, and approaching these community members respectfully as the rightful gatekeepers to the children of the community is a sign of cultural sensitivity that will likely be rewarded by trust and access. The level of sustained trust needed for making progress in these inner city communities can only be built through prolonged personal contact with the community's decision-making adults. These activists are out working in the community (versus in an office) throughout the day and night – in accordance with the population's schedule – so researchers should limit their use of voicemail and email when attempting to work with this population. Researchers must go out and meet people where they "are" – on the street, in the various sites throughout the community, at various community events – with a full knowledge that this initial process of relationship-building will be at least a months-long one. It is possible that this relationship-building phase could be shortened through the offering of such substantive incentives as an organizational Board Membership, a Committee Membership, or through bringing active community adults onto organizational projects in a consulting capacity. The benefits of such organizational engagement efforts are increased community-centered insights for informing program efforts and the greater likelihood for sustained and eventually measurably increased independent civic

engagement activity.

3. RECRUIT THROUGH THE FAITH-BASED

The level of civic mapping involved in recruiting the most marginalized inner city youth for a formal program is immensely labor intensive. For efficiency sake, civic engagement professionals should focus on tapping faith-based groups' program administrators, secretaries, program associates and program volunteers first and foremost when seeking to recruit non-academically inclined "at-risk" youth. On a daily basis, the community's youth are in closest contact with these program delegates (a researcher will likely never get to speak with a church's Pastor, for example, because of his demanding schedule) who, whether directly or indirectly, almost always certainly make an impression upon the youth's lives in the inner city. Also, there is likely more of a tradition of family support to be found in faith-based programs which help to sustain youth civic involvement elsewhere. These faith-based groups – whether they are well-endowed, historical churches; poorer storefront churches; mosques; crisis intervention programs; or summer camp and after-school programs – offer a combination of: a history of community engagement for this categorically disenfranchised public, an element of formal organization for ease of access to this hard-to-reach population, and an authentic representation of the "at-risk" community being targeted by so many urban civic engagement efforts. Recruiting first through city recreation centers and municipally-based after-school programs, I have found, is inefficient and unreliable. Although their systems for communications are more familiar, the youth of these groups and their families tend to be less dedicated to the outcomes of involvement in civic-oriented programs, and municipal program administrators' potential for partnership opportunities are constrained. Follow up with these secular program administrators and activists, but go to religious program administrators first.

4. DIFFERENCES MAKE A DIFFERENCE – AND MAYBE THEY SHOULD

Because this population of "at-risk" youth is not usually studied for their capacity for civic involvement, professionals' traditional theories of "civic engagement" miss what matters to them. I have found that racial and cultural differences do make a difference in the way grass-roots civic engagement programs get developed and administered. There is a prejudging that occurs in the field of practice that is subconscious and unarticulated, yet it is unquestionably acted-out by both the majority White professional civic engagement community and the majority African American grassroots activists. I heard references made by both groups about both groups that played to stereotypes about "level of desire for involvement" and "motivations for working with the community". Citizens have reported feeling "used" by researchers, so they said they condition themselves to not become invested in the researcher's pursuits no matter what the intended outcomes of the process.

Perhaps along with expanding the list of legitimately considered types of civic engagement headings and corresponding actions to include "giving back to the community", also incorporating a degree of staff diversity training into organizational programming can help address the repeated communications breakdowns that occur between community members and program professionals that lessen the potentially wide-ranging impact of good, well-intentioned programs. On-going research on the condition of the relationship of the "public" with the nation's public schools, for example; or on the apparently increasing shift in the racial makeup of major political party participants will require considerable adaptations in cultural perceptions on the part of the civic engagement community.

"Giving back to the community" is a form of civic engagement that already exists and has long-standing roots in the civic and social culture of African Americans. Diversity is increasing. Rather than attempting to subsume the idea of "giving back to the community" into the four headings of civic engagement types, mainstream civic engagement professionals should add "giving back to the community" as the fifth heading of legitimate types of civic engagement work to be studied and funded, and begin attempting to apply the definition of "giving back to the community" as it has been begun

to be built here to enrich the most appropriate aspects of their work.

This effort on the part of the professionals will help to bridge the existing communication gaps that are borne of unexplored racial and geographic (specifically city vs. suburban) differences. Professionals should gradually incorporate the phrase in interactions with their target inner city, "at-risk" populations in the field to test uses and reactions to the phrase in real time community settings and situations – substantiating its status as oral history and transforming it into documented history for more prolonged use among the population that not only enacts it most, but is also the most targeted by formal social capital building programs. We should consciously attach to reactions to the phrase and probe for concrete examples that can be further incorporated into the now far-flung family of civic engagement work.

PART VI – IN CONCLUSION

This report has divulged an array of preliminary findings about the phrase "giving back to the community" – it's history, meanings and applications. Continued research is essential on as many avenues of "giving back to the community" as have been made evident here. This research will in turn help promote civic engagement in all its potential forms and advance democracy in America and elsewhere.

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