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## **Inner-City Rural: The Transmission of Problematic Black Male Identities from Urban to Black Rural Communities in the United States**

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# Inner-City Rural: The Transmission of Problematic Black Male Identities from Urban to Black Rural Communities in the United States

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## **Abstract**

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This paper introduces the term inner-city rural to describe a conceptual framework that seeks to explain the transmission of urban and street-based alternative constructions of black manhood identities to majority black rural counties in the United States. The central theoretical argument advanced in this paper is that exposure to urban street culture as it is represented in some versions of gangsta rap and hip hop music, videos and culture is a major mechanism by which marginalized African American males residing in rural communities come to internalize and enact problematic urban male street-based masculine identities.

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**Keywords:** African American men, masculinity, inner-city rural, Black popular culture, urban street culture

# Ciudades Rurales Desfavorecidas: La Transmisión de las Identidades Masculinas Problemáticas de los Hombres Negros de las Zonas Urbanas y Rurales de los Estados Unidos

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## Resumen

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Este artículo introduce el término de ciudades rurales desfavorecidas para describir el marco conceptual que ayuda a explicar la transmisión de las construcciones urbanas y callejeras de las identidades masculinas de los hombres negros de la mayoría de los condados rurales de la población afro-americana de Estados Unidos. El argumento teórico central que muestra este artículo es que esta exposición a la cultura callejera de las ciudades se representa en diferentes formas musicales como el rap “gangsta” y el hip hop, los vídeos y la cultura es el mayor mecanismo por el cual son marginados los hombres afroamericanos residentes en comunidades rurales, los cuales interiorizan una identidad masculinidad problemática y callejera.

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**Palabras clave:** Hombres afroamericanos, masculinidad, ciudad rural desfavorecida, cultura popular negra, cultura urbana callejera

The study of social problems in rural America has largely ignored the social construction of gender and its association with substance abuse, crime, interpersonal violence, and incarceration among African Americans who reside in rural communities, particularly rural communities in which African Americans constitute a substantial portion of the population (Weisheit, Wells, & Falcone 2006). Despite this trend, criminologists and other researchers are beginning to recognize that rural areas are an important location for the occurrence and study of challenging social problems, including crime and violence (Osgood & Chambers 2000; Weisheit, Falcone, & Wells 2006; Websdale, 1998). As such, to advance research which examines the social construction of gender identity and rural crime, the inner-city rural conceptual framework is introduced here to consider the mediating effects of Black popular culture relative to the intersection of rural structural challenges, the social construction of masculinity and the situational dynamics of violent crime offending and victimization among rural African American men.

### **Structural Challenges and Rural Black Communities**

Prior to 1865 majority-black independent rural communities in America were uncommon as most African Americans were enslaved and resided on plantations or small farms in the southern states (Frazier, 1949; Stampp, 1956). The emergence of independent black communities in the rural South is directly linked to the abolition of slavery (Snipp, 1996). Therefore, it is not surprising that most rural black counties and towns are located in parts of the eleven Southern Black Belt states (North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Virginia, Arkansas, Texas, Florida, and Tennessee), (Wimberley & Morris, 1997).

The term the Southern Black Belt was initially introduced by Booker T. Washington (1965) in 1901 to refer to counties in the southern region of the United States where African Americans outnumbered whites. The high concentration of blacks residing in the contemporary Southern Black Belt states is a direct result of the large number of African slaves brought to the region to work on plantations and farms as unpaid labor, particularly in the production of cotton, rice, sugar and tobacco (Wimberley & Morris, 1997). There are 623 counties located in parts of the 11 southern states that

comprise the Southern Black Belt (Wimberley & Morris, 1997). Within the 11 Black Belt state's 388 counties have 25% or more black residents; and another 171 counties have a population of 40% or more (Wimberley & Morris, 1997).

Overt intergenerational racial oppression precipitated by deeply entrenched racial prejudice, economic exploitation, and an institutionalized commitment to subordinate and control African Americans has had a major impact on the quality of life of blacks who reside in rural communities (Jordan, 1968; Oshinsky, 1996). While there have been major strides toward achieving racial equality in both the South and the larger American society as a result of the Civil Rights laws enacted during the sixties, economic development in the South has been primarily limited to urban areas and small towns and rural communities adjacent to urban centers (Falk & Lyson, 1993). Consequently, economic development in southern urban centers has largely bypassed rural black communities in the Southern Black Belt (Zerkerie, 2003; Snipp 1996). As such, both historical and contemporary patterns of racial discrimination have contributed to the fact that rural blacks comprise a major portion of the "rural underclass" (Allen-Smith, 1994). That is, rural people, regardless of race/ethnicity, lives are often characterized by high rates of unemployment, underemployment, poverty, female-headed families, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, and contact with the criminal justice system (Davidson, 1996; Rural Sociological Society Task Force on Persistent Rural Poverty, 1993).

There are significant gaps in our understanding of the lifestyles and problematic behaviors that typify the lives of African Americans who reside in rural communities. What we do know is that nearly 5 million African Americans reside in rural, primarily southern counties (Allen-Smith, 1994). For example, all non-metropolitan counties with a black population exceeding 20% are located in the south (Rural Sociological Society Task Force on Persistent Rural Poverty, 1993; Wimberley & Morris, 1997). Furthermore, African Americans who reside in rural communities have some of the lowest incomes and the highest poverty rates in the United States (Allen-Smith, 1994; Beale, 1996). In fact, the 623 counties that comprise the Southern Black Belt account for 23% of all US poverty, 47% of all African American poverty and 84% of rural black poverty (Wimberley & Morris, 1997).

The economic challenges confronting rural blacks is also evident in the finding that black two parent households in rural communities are more likely to have income below the official poverty (24%) level than urban black households (12%) and rural white households (9%) (Allen-Smith, 1994). Yet, the plight of rural black communities has been largely hidden compared to the focus on the urban black underclass (Anderson, 1999; Wilson, 1987, 1996). In fact, the disadvantages associated with the legacy of slavery and more contemporary patterns of racial discrimination in the rural South continue to play a central role in the lives of African Americans who reside in rural and small towns in the Southern Black Belt (Adimora, et al. 2001; Rural Sociological Society Task Force on Persistent Rural Poverty, 1993). From slavery to sharecropping, the corporatization of agricultural production, globalization and the displacement of low skilled workers, economic opportunities have been systematically limited for blacks in the rural South (Zekeri, 2003). For example, in 255 of the 550 persistent-poverty counties in the United States, African Americans either are a majority of the poor, or their high incidence of poverty produces an overall county rate of 20 percent or more. These persistently poor counties stretch across the heart of the old agricultural South; once mostly dependent on cotton and other types of agriculture production. Consequently, African Americans constitute 67.5% of the 1.5 million poor persons residing in persistently poor counties in the United States (Beale, 1996).

An important feature of many rural areas characterized by high rates of black poverty is the significant variation between poverty rates for blacks and whites. The black persistent high-poverty counties in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi had average 1990 Census poverty rates of 51.4% for blacks, compared with 15.4% for whites (Beale, 1996). The poverty disparity that exists between rural blacks and whites reflects social and economic conditions that are radically different for the two racial groups.

### **Inner-City Rural**

A recurring theme in the field of rural sociology is the observation that residence in rural areas isolates rural residents from urban-based cultural trends (Snipp, 1996). The characterization of rural communities as being isolated assumes that most rural places as a result of geographical isolation

have very little contaminating interaction with adjacent or distant urban communities (Weisheit & Donnermeyer, 2000). In contrast to this perspective, the term inner-city rural as it is introduced and developed here rejects the view that rural populations, particularly rural black communities, are isolated from black urban cultural trends. Rather, the term inner-city rural is conceptualized here to suggest that key aspects of urban Black popular culture, particularly rap music's emphasis on the glorification of urban street culture is having a major influence on gender constructions, aspirations, the lifestyles of marginalized young rural African American males and the situational dynamics (e.g., high risk social settings, sources of conflict, motives and justifications) associated with acts of interpersonal violence involving black adolescents and young adults (Kitwana, 2002; Sarig, 2007).

The emergence and popularity of hip hop is one of the most significant post-Civil Rights Movement cultural transformations to affect the content of Black popular culture and social practice in the United States since the emergence of "soul music" in the 60's (Neal, 2002; Kitwana, 2002). According to Hill-Collins (2005), Black popular culture has increased in importance as a source of information and gender and racial identity given that many African American youth and young adults are no longer able to depend on stable extended family networks, churches, and other community organizations to assist them negotiate challenges associated with living in a society plagued by racial, economic, and technological challenges. Furthermore, the popularity and influence of hip hop and gangsta rap music and culture has moved beyond the inner-city ghettos where it originated to influence the attitudes and behavior of youth and young adults who reside in suburban and rural communities (Kitwana, 2002, 2005; Sarig, 2007). This is most evident in the emergence of hip hop and rap as a major cultural site influencing the more generalized American popular culture in areas of music, film, television, fashion, advertising, merchandising, and sexual imagery (Kitwana, 2002; Boyd, 1997). One of the most significant ways in which the content of Black popular culture mediates the association between adverse rural structural challenges and the motives and situational dynamics of interpersonal violence involving African American youth and young adults in rural communities is through exposure, internalization and

routine enactment of problematic manhood identities that are prominent in hip hop and gangsta rap culture.

### **Constructing Manhood Alternatives**

A fundamental claim of contemporary men's studies literature is that masculinity is not a monolithic identity construction. Rather, men's studies scholars tend to argue that there are "multiple masculinities" or ways of enacting manhood resulting from variations in the influence of race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation (Clatterbaugh, 1988; Franklin, 1987). However, while men's studies scholars acknowledge that there are "multiple masculinities," they also suggest that there exists a master narrative or dominant view about how men are expected to behave. This perspective is generally referred to as the traditional male role, which places emphasis on male dominance over females, economic independence, and the capacity to provide for oneself, as well as one's female partner and children (Pleck 1987). However, in the United States, African American males, across successive generations, have been the primary target of laws and social practices designed to limit opportunities for racial equality that hinder successful enactment of the traditional male role (Staples, 1982). As such, the systematic deprivation of equal access to political rights, educational and employment opportunities has served to frustrate the efforts of many black males to achieve and successfully enact the traditional manhood role (Staples, 1982; Madhubuti, 1990). For example, Welsing (1991, p. 87) has suggested that : "the resultant frustration of black manhood potential forces behavior into dysfunctional and obsessive compulsive patterns in the areas of people activity in which greater degrees of maleness are permitted to be expressed (i.e., sex, sports and entertainment)." Thus, exposure to the constraints of race and gender-specific racial discrimination, has led generations of black men, particularly low-income and working-class men, to re-define manhood in terms of ideals and roles that they perceive as being achievable for them given their status and environment (Clark, 1965; Majors & Mancini-Billson, 1992).

In his classic ethnography of the cultural dynamics of life in a low income black neighborhood in Washington, DC, Hannerz (1969) introduced the term "compulsive masculinity alternative," to describe a unique race,



class, and gender-specific compensatory adaptation that many lower and working - class black males adopt to cover up their inability to achieve the standards of the traditional male role. However, rather than being an effective and functional strategy to cope with environmental stress (e.g., racial discrimination, high rates of unemployment, and poverty), enactment of “the compulsive masculinity alternative” among black males functions as a dysfunctional compensatory adaptation. That is, rather than solving problems resulting from structural challenges in American society, adherence to “the compulsive masculinity alternative” compounds personal and social problems (Oliver, 1989, 2007).

In what I regard as the first wave of black men’s studies scholarship spanning (1965-2000) there are three major ghetto or street-based manhood roles that have been identified as representing the enactment of “the black compulsive masculinity alternative,” including: “the tough guy,” “the player of women,” and “the hustler.” For example, “the tough guy” has been conceptualized to refer to a masculine role orientation in which manhood tends to be defined in terms of demonstrating a willingness to resort to violence as a means of resolving interpersonal conflict (Hannerz, 1969; Oliver, 1998). A central feature of “the tough guy” role involves projecting an image of aggression and unyielding autonomy. “The Player of Women” has been characterized as a manhood construction that attaches overt emphasis on sexual conquest and the emotional and economic exploitation of women. According to Anderson (1999, p. 136), “Casual sex with as many women as possible, impregnating one or more...brings a boy the ultimate esteem from his peers and makes him feel like a man. And, “the hustler” is a manhood role orientation in which manhood is defined in terms of using one’s wits to aggressively manipulate the limited resources of others to improve one’s economic condition and social esteem (Anderson, 1999). While these methods of manhood enactment are not unique to African American males, what is unique are the racialized structural pressures and cultural-specific adaptations that have led these men to pursue these manhood roles in a ritualized manner that is distinctive to the African American cultural experience as a means of mitigating the impact of intergenerational racial oppression (Hannerz, 1969; Staples, 1982; Oliver, 2007). Furthermore, one of the most unique aspects of the enactment of problematic masculine identity among lower-black men in the

United States is the role that “the streets,” that is, the network of public and semi-public social settings (e.g., street corners, vacant lots, bars, clubs, after-hours joints, convenience stores, drug houses, pool rooms, parks and public recreational places, etc.) function as an alternative site of race and class-specific gender socialization facilitating the internalization and enactment of ghetto or street-based manhood roles (Oliver, 2006).

### **Transmission of Urban-Based Street Identities in Rural Communities**

One of most salient characteristics of hip hop, particularly the gangsta rap genre, is that the street-oriented male worldview generally dominates the content and public visibility of hip hop culture (Neal, 2002; Pough, 2004). As a result, the experiences, aspirations, and fantasies of young black men constitute the foundation of hip hop culture and functions as a standard that is used by many adolescent and young adult black males to assess their personal and social significance (Kitwana, 2002). Consequently, because hip hop and gangsta rap appropriates a substantial portion of its thematic content and ritual style from urban street culture, street credibility has evolved as the primary standard used by members of the hip hop generation to assess the character, intentionality, and authenticity of others (McLeod, 1999). For example, it is common for many rappers and hip hop artists in their lyrical and video products to situate young black males in various street-corner settings (e.g., street corner hangouts, nightclubs, parties, cruising the streets in expensive or customized automobiles, etc.) or portraying males in intimate settings and situations interacting with attractive women, who convey a sensuous persona and a compliant sexual availability (Kitwana, 1994, 2002; Pough, 2004). Included among the problematic masculine images represented in contemporary hip hop and rap music culture are “the gangsta/thug,” “the player/pimp,” “the big balla,” and “the nigga,” (Neal, 2002; Kitwana, 1994, 2002; Oliver, 2007). As such, hip hop and particularly gangsta rap constitute a major mechanism facilitating the dissemination of urban street-based masculine roles and scripts that encourage favorable attitudes toward involvement in a broad range of problematic behaviors associated with urban street culture (e.g., pursuit of sexual conquests, affiliating with criminal street networks, carrying weapons, using illegal drugs, selling drugs, spending an inordinate amount

of time in club and street-corner settings and condoning violence as a means of resolving disputes) (Kurbin, 2005; Oliver, 1998; Jacobs & Wright, 2006; Wilkinson, 2003). In addition, the genre's thematic emphasis on "the streets" as a source of values, norms, roles, lifestyles, and worldview provides a supportive context for the assumption of valued alternative constructions of manhood and womanhood (Oliver, 2006, 2007; Stephens & Phillips, 2003). It is in this sense that gangsta rap has represented the role of violence as a means of resolving disputes, the routine consumption of marijuana and liquor (Kitwana, 2002; Kurbin, 2005), the sexual objectification of women, sexual and emotional exploitation of women, as well as the perpetration of physical and sexual violence against women as a means of asserting masculine dominance (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003; Kurbin, 2005; Sharpley-Whiting, 2007) in disadvantaged urban communities.

The emphasis on "the streets" is a dominant theme in the gangsta rap variant of hip hop (Kitwana, 2002; Kurbin, 2005). One of the most important functions of "the streets" as a ghetto institution in disadvantaged urban communities is that the various settings that comprise inner-city street culture (e.g., street corners, bars/nightclubs, drug houses, etc.) serve as a major location and cultural site for organizing and expressing gender identity among marginalized black males and females (Horton, 1972; Anderson, 1999; Oliver, 2006). Consequently, the gangsta worldview and its overt emphasis on materialism, an insatiable appetite for marijuana and liquor, and sexual conquest has evolved as a culturally relevant iconic worldview and alternative manhood construction in which inner city street culture (Neal, 2002) has been imported into the rural black communities, offering an alternative means of achieving social significance and valued gender and racial identities (Kitwana, 2002). Listed and described below are major urban street-based masculine roles and scripts that are commonly disseminated in African American youth Black popular culture.

### **The Nigga**

In both urban street culture and Black popular culture the word Nigga is commonly used to refer to black males. According to Kelley (1999), the modern day Nigga, that is, the hip hop Nigga, is a product of the ghetto.

The term has also been used to identify individuals who associate their manhood identity, social significance, and lifestyle with “the streets.” That is, to be an authentic man, one deserving of respect and deference, one must have some street credibility or familiarity with the ways of “the streets” and the challenges associated with life in urban under-class black communities (Kitwana, 2002; McLeod, 1999; Oliver, 2006). Accordingly, an authentic Nigga in hip hop and urban street culture is a black male who has grown up in poverty or in close proximity to impoverished neighborhoods, is willing to resort to violence to resolve disputes, is always looking for opportunities to engage in sexual relations with willing females, sees value in mastering “the code of the street” and succeeding in the world based on one’s adherence to the “code of the street” (Anderson, 1999).

### **The Big Balla**

Hip hop culture, similar to urban street culture, openly celebrates capitalism and material acquisition (Kitwana, 2002; Neal, 2002). It is common for many male hip hop artists (both rap and neo-soul) to situate themselves in their lyrics and video images wearing designer brand clothes, driving expensive cars, living in luxurious homes, “hanging out” at the club where they consume top shelf liquor, on the beach or at the yacht party to showcase a rich and glamorous lifestyle (Pough, 2004). According to Neal (2002, p. 193-194), “The challenge ‘to keep it real’ and ‘still get paid’ is the dominant ethos of generation hip hop. Thus, the street hustler role adopted by previous generations of marginalized black males has been resurrected in the lyrical content, video images and personas of many rap and hip hop soul artists (Dyson, 2003; Horton, 1972; Kelley, 1997; Kurbin, 2005). Thus, “the Big Balla” persona in hip hop culture is a manhood role orientation in which manhood is defined in terms of using one’s wits to aggressively pursue access to legitimate economic opportunities, as well as the illicit opportunities that exist in the urban ghetto to improve one’s economic and material condition in an effort to achieve social esteem and the American Dream.

## **The Player/Pimp**

The image of men as players and pimps is hyper-present in the lyrics and video imagery of rap music. The player/pimp ideal of manhood encourages men to perceive women as objects to be emotionally, sexually, and economically exploited (Weitzer & Kurbin, 2009). Overt emphasis on sexual conquest and promiscuity is not unique to African American males. Indeed, it is quite possibly a universal feature of problematic manhood constructions throughout the world (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). However, what is unique about the ritualization of the player/pimp ideal of manhood in rap culture is that rap music often serves as a site for the dissemination of misogynistic lyrical and visual content, as well as the representation of public personas of male artists that glorify and ritualize the expression of sexual conquest as a valued feature of black male masculine identity and social practice (Kitwana, 2002; Neal, 2002). It is in this sense that the elevation of the player/pimp in rap music has emerged as an alternative means of achieving manhood and perpetuating the normalization of sexism, sexual objectification of women, and misogyny among urban and rural residing black males who look to hip hop and urban street culture to inform their social construction of manhood, as well as providing guidance on the pursuit and maintenance of relationships with members of the opposite sex (Morgan, 1999; Pough, 2004; Hill-Collins, 2005; Weitzer & Kurbin, 2009).

## **Rural Diffusion of Urban Street Culture**

Intergenerational exposure to the collateral consequences associated with racial inequality and the proliferation of hip hop culture, particularly the gangsta image of masculinity and its thematic and ritual emphasis on toughness, sexual objectification and domination of women, and materialism, has precipitated a reorganization of race and gender-specific identity constructions among marginalized youth and young adult black males residing in both urban and rural communities (Kitwana, 2002; Kurbin, 2005; Pough, 2004). Many black youth and young adults residing in rural communities, particularly in the Southern Black Belt, as a result of increased exposure to the erosion of family and community networks,

poverty, inadequate education, and diminished economic opportunities, are vulnerable to embracing the urban street culture worldview and style that is prominent in urban-based Black popular culture as an alternative means of achieving social significance (Kitwana, 2002; Adimora et al., 2001; Sarig, 2007).

The influence of hip hop and particularly gangsta rap is expressed in attitudes, musical interests, fashion, and the assumption of roles, personal aspirations, and social activities of rural black youth and young adults who identify with hip hop culture (Kitwana, 2002; Neal, 2002). In fact, as a result of the popularity of hip hop and gangsta rap, urban street culture has penetrated the geographic and cultural isolation that is characteristic of rural communities (Adimora et al., 2001). There are several pathways that contribute to the transmission of urban street culture to black rural communities as well as the mediating effect that Black popular culture has on the intersection of rural structural challenges, alternative social constructions of masculinity and the situational dynamics associated with acts of interpersonal violence involving African American youth and young adults residing in rural communities. These pathways include: the national dissemination of street-based Black popular culture, frequenting hip hop concerts and other places in which members of the hip hop generation congregate to socialize or be entertained in nearby or easily accessible larger cities; family relocation from urban to rural communities; and exposure to urban street culture as a result of incarceration in state juvenile and adult correctional facilities (Adimora, et al., 2001; Weisheit, Falcone & Wells, 2006).

### **National Dissemination of Black Popular Culture**

Prior to the emergence of gangsta rap, to learn “the game” (i.e., the code of the street and street-oriented manhood roles) as it is enacted on “the streets,” one had to be physically present in various street settings (Hannerz, 1969; Horton, 1972; Anderson, 1999). In contrast, the national dissemination of urban street culture through social media, urban contemporary radio, satellite and cable television, music videos, gangsta films, hip hop magazines, and television programs featuring hip hop artists has provided black youth, as well as youth and young adults of other races,

ethnicities, and class levels opportunities to be exposed to urban street values, norms, roles, behaviors, and activities without being physically present in street-corner settings (Kitwana 2002, 2005; Oliver, 2006). Although there are gaps in access to the internet among both urban and rural black youth, the emergence of the World Wide Web has enhanced and improved rural black youth and young adult's access to urban-based Black popular culture. Hip hop video clips are shared through social networking sites like Face Book and online downloading has become the primary method by which many adolescents and young adults purchase music and share information about trends in hip hop culture, as well as issues and concerns that are salient in street culture. Thus, technological advances and economic incentives associated with the global dissemination of Black popular culture have functioned to enhance the visibility and prominence of urban street culture as an alternative site of gender socialization (Oliver, 2007). As such, the increased visibility and availability of urban street culture has the effect of reinforcing street-oriented masculine roles as viable alternatives to achieving social recognition among youth and young adults who reside in marginalized urban and rural communities (Oliver, 2006; Wilson, 1996). Recent trends in gang involvement, carrying weapons, drug trafficking and the manner in which disputes are attributed meaning in black rural communities are being influenced by urban street culture as portrayed in Black popular culture (Weisheit & Wells, 2004; Sarig, 2007). However, while the dominant trend in the dissemination of street culture involves an urban to rural transmission of street-oriented values, norms, roles, and lifestyles it is important to recognize that as a result of the emergence of rappers and hip hop artists with a southern and rural backgrounds that Black popular culture trends are beginning to be influenced by a southern/rural to urban cultural transmission (Sarig, 2007). Rural youth aren't just observers in the creation of the street-oriented aspects of Black popular culture, they are increasingly emerging as innovators in its development and dissemination (Sarig, 2007).

### **Urban Travel, Dispatching Dependents and Family Relocation**

It is not uncommon for youth and young adults who reside in rural communities and small towns to routinely travel to nearby or distant large

cities within their state or across state lines to engage in shopping, visiting family and/or to engage in various recreational activities that exist in the larger city. Travel to nearby larger cities from predominantly black rural communities is common because rural areas often lack adequate entertainment. In the course of travel to larger cities young people residing in rural communities are likely to be exposed to urban trends in music, fashion, social activities, and other aspects of African American youth popular culture as a result of frequenting social settings where urban youth and young adults congregate (Adimora, et al., 2001).

Rural youth and young adults' exposure to urban Black popular culture and urban street culture also occurs as a result of urban-based parents making decisions during difficult times to dispatch their children to more stable home situations "back home" "in the country" or "down South.". The reliance on extended kin for support as a means of managing personal and familial crises is a common cultural practice among African Americans (Stack, 1996). Furthermore, it is common for African Americans with southern roots, but who reside outside the South to maintain close ties with their relatives in the South by frequently visiting family during the summer months and holidays or sending children or adolescents to reside with grandparents or other kin when their parents are unable to provide adequate care or supervision during challenging times (Grim, 2001; Stack, 1996).

Since 1975, the U. S. Census Bureau has released data describing a pattern of return or reverse migration of African Americans involving leaving large urban cities of the Midwest, Northeast and West and returning to small towns and rural areas in the South. Prior to 1975 black migration from the North and other regions outside the South to the South was very rare, approximately 15,000 per year. However, by 1990, the South had regained half a million black Americans returning to the South from other regions of the U. S. Many of these migrants were born in the South and upon retiring have opted to return home (Stack, 1996). When families return and bring along with them teenagers and young adults who have grown up in urban areas, particularly disadvantaged urban neighborhood, these non-southern born youth and young adults import their experiences and exposure to urban life and in some cases, street culture, to black rural communities.



## **Incarceration in Juvenile and Adult Prisons**

African Americans are disproportionately represented among incarcerated juveniles and adults in the Southern Black Belt states. For example, 10 of the 20 states with the highest incarceration rates in the United States are in the South. Furthermore, the four states with the highest rates of incarceration are all in the South, including Louisiana, with 1,138 sentenced prisoners per 100,000 state residents, Georgia (1,021), Texas (976), and Mississippi (955), (Pew Center on the States, 2008). Consequently, many African American youth and young adults returning to rural communities from state juvenile and adult correctional institutions are importing values and behaviors derived from their enforced association with members of urban street culture and the urban influenced culture of prison (Donnermeyer, 1994). For many marginalized African American males who reside in both urban and rural communities, the prevalence of incarceration in the experiences of their family members and neighbors has come to be regarded as an expected reality and a significant aspect of the rite-of-passage into manhood (Whitehead, 2000). The anticipation of experiencing imprisonment at some point during the life-course is enhanced by exposure to those elements of Black youth popular culture that represent incarceration, prison-style clothing and images of prison life as a normal feature of the experiences of young black men in America (Clayton & Moore, 2003). Furthermore, it is common for those youth and adult men returning to the community from prison to face challenges in finding a job or housing and reuniting with family. As such, for those males who are unable to manage these challenges, problematic masculine scripts, peer associations and activities are more likely to be relied on to satisfy their quest for material acquisition and social recognition (Wodahl, 2006).

## **Conclusion and Implications**

The inner-city rural conceptual framework has implications for research that seeks to uncover the evolving influence of urban street trends, including the influence that Black popular culture is having on the construction of masculine identity among marginalized youth and young adult males residing in rural communities. Furthermore, the inner-city

conceptual framework seeks to explain how exposure to adverse social conditions and various mechanisms by which urban street culture disseminated contributes to the adoption of problematic masculine identities among African American males residing in rural communities. There are a number of questions that must be addressed in order to enhance understanding of rural crime and violence beyond identifying problematic masculine role orientations that have been found to increase the risk of involvement in risky behavior and violent confrontations occurring among African American men residing in lower and working-class urban neighborhoods (Oliver, 1998; Anderson, 1999; Jacobs & Wright, 2006). As such, the inner-city rural conceptual framework suggests that there is a need for research that seeks to uncover the situational dynamics associated with acts of interpersonal violence among rural blacks. That is, there is need for research that seeks to explore how various rural social settings (e. g., hangouts, clubs, drinking establishments, etc.) serve as staging grounds for sociability, interpersonal conflict and violence in rural black communities. And finally, there is a need for research that seeks to uncover how rural black men justify and attribute meaning to their involvement in acts of interpersonal violence. As such, the inner city rural conceptual framework may be useful to frame future research addressing both acts of community violence and intimate partner violence involving black males who reside in rural communities.

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