

black men in the 16-to-24 age bracket who were out of school and had no more than a high school diploma were out of the labor force. That compares with 23 percent at the beginning of the decade.

Several familiar forces were responsible: declining real wages, the shrinkage of blue-collar employment, the rise of distant suburbs as centers of employment, and racial discrimination. But two relatively new factors made matters worse, according to Holzer, a professor of public policy at the Georgetown Public Policy Institute, and his coauthors. The first was the steady increase in incarceration rates. Today, about 30 percent of all young black men who are not in the military or in jail have criminal records, and thus reduced job prospects. (Inmates are not included in employment statistics while serving time.) Holzer and his colleagues calculate

that the increase in incarceration may account for about a third of the drop in labor force participation rates during the 1980s and '90s.

The other new factor is government's dramatically increased enforcement of court-ordered child support payments. Those payments may be needed to help the children of absent fathers, but they also impose a steep "tax" on earnings from low-wage jobs. A \$300 monthly payment—a fairly typical sum—is a 36 percent "tax" for a man earning \$10,000 a year. (About half of all black men age 25 and over are non-custodial fathers.) And child support debts pile up even if the father is unable to pay because he is in prison or out of work. Those factors give low-income fathers "meager" incentive to work, and may account for roughly another third of the change in labor force participation.

SOCIETY

Naming a Minority

"Finding a Proper Name to Call Black Americans" by Randall Kennedy, in *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (Winter 2004–2005), 200 W. 57th St., New York, N.Y. 10019.

It's one of the most sensitive questions in America today: What's the proper way to refer to the nation's second-largest minority group?

In colonial times, freed blacks gravitated toward "African." But after the American Colonization Society was launched in 1816 by whites seeking to move freed blacks to Africa, that label lost its appeal. And most freed slaves and other blacks born in the United States considered themselves Americans, notes Kennedy, a Harvard law professor and noted commentator on racial matters. There was a pronounced shift toward use of the term "colored."

Not all black leaders felt it was proper to worry over the question of labels. The black abolitionist William Whipper protested that race-based nomenclature created an "odious distinction" between people of European ancestry and people of African ancestry. "Whipper proposed using a political distinction such as 'oppressed Americans,'" reports Kennedy. But other abolitionists re-

jected Whipper's criticisms. By 1854, the National Emigration Convention of Colored People was drawing up a resolution that "Negro, African, Black, Colored and Mulatto" would carry the same token of respect when applied to blacks as "Caucasian, White, Anglo-Saxon, and European" when applied to whites.

Later in the century, "Negro" began emerging as the preferred term, particularly among black intellectuals such as Booker T. Washington. Derived from "niger," the Latin word for black, the term drew fire because it was uncomfortably close to "nigger," which "had become by the early 19th century a term of extreme disparagement."

For two decades *The New York Times* lowercased "negro," on the argument that the word was a common and not a proper noun. In announcing their new policy in 1930, however, the paper's editors wrote that "every use of the capital 'N' becomes a tribute to millions who have risen from a low estate into the 'brotherhood of the

ances.” Many black luminaries embraced the term, including W. E. B. Du Bois, Thurgood Marshall, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Why, then, was “Negro” largely replaced by “Black” (with the same quandary over capitalization) among 1960s civil rights activists? Kennedy marvels at the Black Power movement’s ability to invert the negative “meaning of ‘black’ (just as some African Americans have recently sought to invert the meaning of ‘nigger’).” Among the dissenters was scholar Rayford Logan, who “rejected the term ‘black’ because he saw it as the term of ‘racial chauvinists who denied that the American Negro also had European roots,’” Kennedy writes. But Logan and his allies did not get far.

Jesse Jackson’s 1988 run for the presidency occasioned a brief renaissance for “African American.” Jackson argued that the term “has cultural integrity. It puts us in our proper historical context,” according to Kennedy. That term has become, among all races, “a conventional designation for American-born descendants of

African slaves.”

Today, says Kennedy, nothing seems so perplexing as the popularization—mainly by blacks—of the term “nigger.” It has been used to shocking effect by comedian Richard Pryor (who won a Grammy Award for his album *That Nigger’s Crazy*), the gangsta rap group NWA (Niggaz Wit Attitude), and rapper Ice-T, who declared, “I’m a nigger not a colored man or black or a Negro or an Afro-American.” Kennedy believes that advocates of the term use it to create “boundaries between insiders and outsiders, authentic members of the club and inauthentic wannabes.” Indeed, “some signal their distinction by calling themselves ‘real niggas.’” A second factor may be the desire to corral usage of the most negative term applied to blacks, making it “off limits to whites.”

Where does Kennedy come out in the name game? “If the labels ‘Negro’ and ‘colored’ and ‘black’ and ‘African American’ were good enough for [history’s black] heroes and heroines, they are certainly good enough for me.”

EXCERPT

Pointless U

*If the reasons and rationales for decision making (and making decisions hour after hour, day after day, is what [university] administrators do) do not come from some large vision of education or some grandly conceived national project or some burning desire to correct injustices and save the world—all sources of energy that are now themselves without energy—they must come from somewhere; and the somewhere they come from is the necessity of fusing into a unity—even if the unity is finally spurious—the myriad enterprises that just happened to have collected together in the same space. No longer understood as an ideological system—whether nationalistic, religious, reformist, or revolutionary—the university is understood as a bureaucratic system. No longer organized around a metaphysical value of which all activities are to be the reflection, the university is organized around the imperative that it be organized; it is a contentless imperative that supports and is supported by a set of contentless bureaucratic values—efficiency, maintenance, expansion, resource allocation, development. To the questions Efficiency to what end? or Maintenance of what? or Expansion toward what goal? or Development in what direction? the ethic of bureaucratic management can only give a variation of the answer Marlon Brando gives in *The Wild One* when he is asked, “What are you rebelling against?” and replies, “What’ve you got?”*

—Stanley Fish, dean emeritus of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, University of Illinois at Chicago, in *Critical Inquiry* (Winter 2005)