



February Mayor's Report - The Fruits of Education

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As we enter Black History Month, I am reminded of the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Nothing in the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity.” Education is the cure to the ignorance and stupidity that Dr. King referenced.

The 1954 Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*, paved the way for the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This Act outlawed segregation in schools and in the work place. African Americans now possessed greater opportunities in the labor market.

Did these changes translate into economic advancement for blacks? A study was recently done, on a national level, across fourteen (14) large metropolitan areas, in order to get a more accurate picture. The study appeared in an article by Natalia Koleniskova and Yang Liu in the July 2010 issue of the *Regional Economist*.

A few pieces of information need to be kept in mind when viewing the data. Firstly, cities across America differ widely in their characteristics, labor market conditions, and industrial structure. Secondly, the history of the black population varies widely in different regions of the country. It is important to take into consideration geographic locations when studying racial differences.

The study concentrated on African American men twenty-five (25) to fifty-five (55) years of age and compared them to non-Hispanic white men. The survey tracks economic progress of African Americans in a context of specific labor markets and compares it across cities. While the report was disturbing across the nation, I am concentrating on information pertaining to the St. Louis area only.

In 1970, eighty-three percent (83%) of black men in the St. Louis area had a job compared to seventy-two percent (72%) in 2000. Ten percent (10%) of black men in St. Louis were not in the labor force in 1970 compared to twenty-one percent (21%) in 2000.

The authors believed the loss of manufacturing jobs and lower education levels were the contributing factors to this decline. Once again, the **importance of a quality education** is what caught my attention. In 2000 only fourteen percent (14%) of black men had a bachelor's degree or higher compared to thirty-one percent (31%) of white men. The decline of manufacturing jobs and a move to high tech and service industries left the less educated labor force facing tougher labor market conditions.

As the Mayor of a community with a significant number of African Americans, I, at every opportunity, stress the importance of a quality education and the rewards associated with an education.

The rewards of education are endless, including higher self esteem, financial rewards, heightened social acceptance, reduced crime rates and unemployment rates, one becomes a leader instead of a follower and an asset to their community, and, most importantly, the chain of ignorance is broken. A strong education can raise individuals, families, and whole communities out of poverty.

We are fortunate to have high quality educational institutions in our community. The Alton Community School District, Marquette Catholic High School, Lewis and Clark Community College, and the colleges and universities in Edwardsville, Carlinville, and St. Louis provide us with abundant opportunities to prepare for future employment. These facilities are available to teach our children, and, if necessary, retrain our neighbors.

We, as a community, cannot afford to have nearly twenty-five percent (25%) of one of the major segments of our population out of the labor force. We, as parents, grandparents, civic leaders, and business leaders must focus on providing the foundation and incentives for educating and training the workforce of today and tomorrow. A strong educational system is, was, and always will be the key to success for communities.

Mayor Hoechst