

# **SOLUTION TO THE CRISIS:** **YOUTH EMPLOYMENT**

88% Black Teen Year Round Joblessness in Chicago  
85% Hispanic Teen Year Round Joblessness in Chicago

**January 25, 2016**  
**Youth Employment Hearing at the**  
**Chicago Urban League**

Use the following URL for all of the documents from the Hearing including the full report, Position paper to address the problem, press release, etc., as well as, view a video of the full hearing - [www.ASNChicago.org/Youth-Employment-Hearing-2016](http://www.ASNChicago.org/Youth-Employment-Hearing-2016)

**Key Findings from the Report: *Lost: The Crisis Of Jobless and Out Of School Teens and Young Adults In Chicago, Illinois and the U.S.* produced by [The Great Cities Institute at University of Illinois at Chicago](#):**

- Nearly 1/3 of all young Black men (20-24 years old) in the U.S. were jobless and out of school in 2014;
- 45% of all young Black men in Illinois were jobless and out of school in 2014;
- 47% of all young Black men in Chicago were jobless and out of school in 2014;
- In the U.S., 79% of Black teens and 74% of Hispanic teens were jobless in 2014;
- In Illinois, 84% of Black teens and 72% of Hispanic teens were jobless in 2014;
- In Chicago, 88% of Black teens and 85% of Hispanic teens were jobless in 2014.

## **Hearing Summary**

The Hearing went well, over 250 people including a large number of youth attended with 19 elected officials and other key agency officials.

The testimony by the youth was powerful and right to the point that jobs will help significantly reduce violence but there must be a significant number of jobs to make a real difference.

We hope that all Democrat and Republican Candidates will recognize this crisis and develop responses to address it in a way that will help significantly reduce the situation of youth joblessness.

Democratic Candidate, [Bernie Sanders](#), has proposed \$5.5 billion for youth (16-24 year olds) employment and training.

Democratic Candidate, [Hillary Clinton](#), has proposed a \$1,500 tax credit for companies to hire youth.

We await proposals by other Democratic and Republican presidential candidates to see how they address this crisis of youth joblessness.

The press coverage has been very strong, both electronic and print. [The Chicago Tribune](#) has published an excellent article on their website yesterday and an excellent front page article in their newspaper today, along with a very strong column. As of yesterday alone, there were over 100,000 views on the Chicago Tribune webpage.

## Links to Media Coverage

**Press Coverage reached a potential of 91,287,058 people per day nationwide – PR Newswire**

**Press and Media Coverage (Save PDF file to your computer to activate videos):**

- [CBS 2 News / Craig Dellimore](#)
- [CBS 2 News / Jim Williams](#)
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- [Fox 32 News](#)
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- [WYCC PBS Chicago/In the Loop](#)
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- [New York Times – February 20, 2016](#)
- [New York Times – February 27, 2016](#)
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## The Sad Demise of the Summer Job

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD



Spencer Platt/Getty Images

President Obama touched on a national crisis [last week](#) when he called on business leaders to help connect young people with summer jobs that give them not just money, but also valuable work experience. Private companies can help. But they are hesitant to hire inexperienced applicants at a time when seasoned, middle-aged workers who lost good jobs during the recession are desperate for any work. The only solution to youth unemployment is for Congress to reinstate some version of the summer jobs program it abandoned in the late 1990s.

When summer jobs were plentiful, young people gained skills and experiences that made them attractive to future employers. Research has shown that people who fail to find work early in their lives run a risk of being unemployed and underemployed into early adulthood and beyond. The effect is far worse for people in poor, minority communities, where [jobs are fewer](#) and unemployment rates are many times the national average.

In the 1990s, the federal summer jobs program provided work experience for more than half a million low-income young people around the country. The opportunities began to evaporate after 1998, when Congress de-emphasized the summer program to adopt what it viewed as a broader approach to helping young people. In most areas, enrollment in the summer programs dropped by 50 to 90 percent.

Congress found a partial solution to chronic unemployment in the Recovery Act of 2009, which included a subsidy program that created more than 260,000 temporary jobs for young people and adults, many of whom were hired permanently once the subsidy ended. Unfortunately, Republicans blocked the extension of this valuable program.

President Obama has nonetheless proposed a [similar program](#) in his new budget, which includes \$3.5 billion to help get nearly one million young people into first jobs over the summer and to provide a year's paid work for 150,000 others who are out of school and out of work. The funds would cover up to half the cost of the wages.

Republicans in Congress who are inclined to fight this spending on ideological grounds should consider the desperation that young unemployed people are facing in this country and the civic costs of standing idly by and doing nothing to help them.

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*A version of this editorial appears in print on February 28, 2016, on page SR8 of the New York edition with the headline: The Sad Demise of the Summer Job.*

# The New York Times

February 20, 2016

NYTIMES.COM

SundayReview / Editorial

## The Crisis of Minority Unemployment

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD

The staggering problem of chronic unemployment among minority men was starkly presented in a report from the Great Cities Institute at the University of Illinois at Chicago. It found that in Los Angeles and New York City about 30 percent of 20- to 24-year-old black men were out of work and out of school in 2014. The situation is even more extreme in Chicago, where nearly half of black men in this age group were neither working nor in school; the rate was 20 percent for Hispanic men and 10 percent for white men in the same age group.

In Chicago, as elsewhere, the crisis of permanent joblessness is concentrated in minority neighborhoods where it feeds street violence, despondency, health problems and a socially corrosive brand of hopelessness among the young. The problem extracts a heavy social cost in those neighborhoods and threatens the viability of entire cities.

The outrage is that there are strategies, which Congress has rejected, that could help rescue a generation of young men from failure and oblivion. Among these is the employment subsidy program that was passed as part of the Recovery Act in 2009. It created more than 260,000 temporary jobs for young people and adults. Governors and employers were ecstatic. But Republicans in Congress denounced the program as useless a year later and blocked proposals that would have extended it.

With that rejection, the country missed a crucial opportunity. The Economic Mobility Corporation, a nonprofit organization, released an analysis in 2013 that looked at the program's outcomes in California, Florida, Mississippi and Wisconsin. By subsidizing the hiring of temporary employees, the federal government lowered labor costs and kept some employers afloat through the recession. The program made a measurable difference in the lives of workers, 37 percent of whom performed so well that they were hired permanently after the subsidy period ended.

These promising results suggest that carefully targeted subsidies that place unemployed people into private-sector jobs can



Keith Negley

be a potent tool in reducing the devastating unemployment in minority areas of big cities where young people are disconnected from work and civic life.

Subsidized work programs have been used to create temporary jobs as far back as the 1930s. The programs typically placed most workers in public jobs that did not involve any connection to the private sector. In the 2009 program, however, a majority of the participants in the four states studied were placed with private businesses.

The program, used in 39 states and the District of Columbia, varied in structure and eligibility requirements but generally sought to give unemployed people real work experience. The study found that subsidized work programs can set people up to earn more money later in unsubsidized employment, perhaps because they give people an actual work credential. Strong evidence of this was found in Florida, where people in the program experienced an average increase of \$4,000 in pay from the year before the program to the year after — as compared with an average \$1,500 increase for workers in a comparison group who were not in the program.

The program also improved the unsubsidized earnings of two groups that would ordinarily have difficulty getting a foot in the door:

the long-term unemployed and people with criminal records. These findings make a strong case that subsidized jobs are an effective way of helping the long-term unemployed re-enter the labor force and helping businesses find good, motivated workers.

Other researchers are eager to see if these findings are replicated in additional studies. But carefully developed subsidy programs are worth pursuing even if they do not produce big earnings gains. Getting jobless young people into the world of work is valuable in itself. Work reduces alienation, gives people a stake in society and allows children in poor communities to absorb the ethic they need to be successful.

If Congress fails to take on this crisis, as it has failed on so many issues, the states should step up and invest in subsidized work programs, especially in minority communities suffering from employment levels not seen since the Great Depression.

*A version of this editorial appears in print on February 21, 2016, on page SR10 of the New York edition with the headline: The Crisis of Minority Unemployment.*

## Nearly half of young black men in Chicago out of work, out of school: report

By **Alexia Elejalde-Ruiz**  
Contact Reporters

Nearly half of young black men in Chicago are neither in school nor working, a staggering statistic in a bleak new youth unemployment report that shows Chicago to be far worse off than its big-city peers.

To 24-year-old Johnathan Allen, that's no surprise.

"It's right there in your face, you don't need statistics," Allen said as he testified before a room full of lawmakers and public officials Monday at an annual hearing about youth unemployment, where the report was presented. He encouraged everyone to walk down the street and witness how joblessness devastates communities.

"Speaking about it every year ain't doing it," he said.

Forty-seven percent of 20- to 24-year-old black men in Chicago, and 44 percent in Illinois, were out of school and out of work in 2014, compared with 20 percent of Hispanic men and 10 percent of white men in the same age group, according to the report from the University of Illinois at Chicago's Great Cities Institute.

The numbers for black men are far worse in Chicago and Illinois than elsewhere in the country. In Los Angeles and New York City, 31 percent of black 20- to 24-year-old men were out of school and out of work, in line with the national average of 32 percent.

While declines in youth employment across all races have raised concerns for a number of years, the new report puts into stark focus the connection between unemployment and Chicago's racially segregated neighborhoods that also are home to high rates of poverty and crime.

The report shows the highest concentration of youth unemployment is in neighborhoods on the city's South and West sides, especially Fuller Park, Englewood, East Garfield Park and North Lawndale, each of which is more



*Young men discussed unemployment on Jan. 25, 2016, at the Urban League. A new report said nearly half of young black men in Chicago are unemployed or not in school.*

than 90 percent black. The lowest concentration is in mostly white neighborhoods on the North and Northwest sides.

"Conditions of joblessness are chronic, concentrated and comparatively worse than elsewhere in the country," said Teresa Cordova, director of the Great Cities Institute. She called the prevalence of joblessness among black males "definitely at crisis proportions."

The report, commissioned by the Alternative Schools Network and based on census data, was presented Monday at the fifth annual hearing on youth unemployment, hosted by the Chicago Urban League at its headquarters in Bronzeville.

A parade of teens and young people from some of the city's poorest neighborhoods described tough lives that were turned around by a job opportunity. The hearing comes as politicians debate school funding and a continued state budget impasse threatens funding to nonprofits that offer employment programs, some of which have had to be suspended.

Allen, who lives in Back of the Yards, said he got in trouble for drug dealing and gang banging — the "same old, same old," "everybody's story," he said — and was on house arrest and on parole when he connect-

ed with the Chicago Area Project, a nonprofit that works to prevent juvenile delinquency in disadvantaged communities. The group steered him toward a job in a youth mentorship program at the community group Fellowship Connection in Humboldt Park, where he helped with a documentary project and got his hands on a video camera for the first time.

Allen now works as an audiovisual technician for an equipment rental service. He hopes to train to be a security guard.

"I see people in my community who want to do better for themselves, but the only way they can do something better is that they have to make something happen," he said, referring to illegal activities. "I'm a product of how good a job can be."

That jobs give youths something productive to do with their time, as well as providing needed income, is not a revelation, but a study two years ago showed the measurable effect jobs have on curbing criminal behavior.

Working with the One Summer Chicago Plus jobs program, the University of Chicago Crime Lab found a 43 percent reduction in violent crime arrests for youths who secured eight-week-long part-time summer jobs with

the program, compared with a control group of kids who didn't, and the positive effect lasted 18 months after the program ended, said Kelly Hallberg, scientific director at the Crime Lab.

David Elam, 25, who testified alongside Allen at the hearing, credited a summer job with redirecting him when he was headed downhill — entrenched in a gang, selling drugs and expecting a child — as it taught him about having a work ethic, managing time and money, and getting up early for work.

"Young people can't be what they can't see," said Elam, a youth organizer with a group called Fathers Who Care.

Counting men and women together, 41 percent of black 20- to 24-year-olds were out of work and out of school in Chicago in 2014, compared with 18.7 percent of Hispanics and 6.7 percent of whites in the same age group.

The racial divisions are also reflected among teenagers. Among 16- to 19-year-olds in Chicago, 14.3 percent of blacks are neither working nor in school, with boys much more affected than girls, compared with 6.8 percent of Latinos and 6 percent of whites.

Overall, 18 percent of 16- to 24-year-olds in Chicago are out of school and out of work, compared with 13.7 percent nationally, 16.4 percent in New York and 13.1 percent in Los Angeles.

Including people who are in school but don't work, the joblessness rate is 57 percent in Chicago, compared with 51 percent nationally. More than 80 percent of 16- to 19-year-olds in Chicago are not working — a problem in poor communities where students are trying to support themselves or their families while they finish their studies.

Deshawn Muldrow, 17, who lives in North Lawndale and is a senior at CCA Academy, a charter school in his neighborhood, said he has been struggling to find a job to raise money for college and help support his family. His mother is unwell and can't work, he said, so his grandmother works at a senior citizens home to support the three of them.

Muldrow, who wants to study math or statistics in college, said he has applied to jobs in retail shops, grocery stores and fast-food restaurants and, though he has gotten a few interviews, hasn't landed an offer. His testimony seemed to stir something in Cook County Commissioner [Robert Steele](#), one of about two dozen legislators in attendance, who called him over and gave him his business card, urging him to call for a possible job opportunity.

In the hallway afterward, Audrey Haywood, a history teacher at CCA Academy, gave Muldrow a big hug.

"I'm hopeful," she said.

While the situation of young black men in Chicago is particularly striking, it is not the only group facing challenges. Teen Latinas experienced a 44 percent drop in employment from 2005 to 2014, the steepest drop among the groups measured.

Declines in teen employment over the last decade have raised alarms because young people aren't getting early experience that helps them secure better jobs and higher wages down the road.

Wendy Bueno, 19, who is a senior in high school and taking college courses, said she searched for a job for two years before finally landing a job recently at Starbucks, thanks to a friend's referral. Part of the trouble was that she was trying to stay away from working in fast food, but also because even the dollar stores she applied to were looking for experience.

"How do you want us to gain experience if you don't give us the chance?" she said.

Bueno, who hopes to study forensic investigation, said she gives half her earnings to her family.

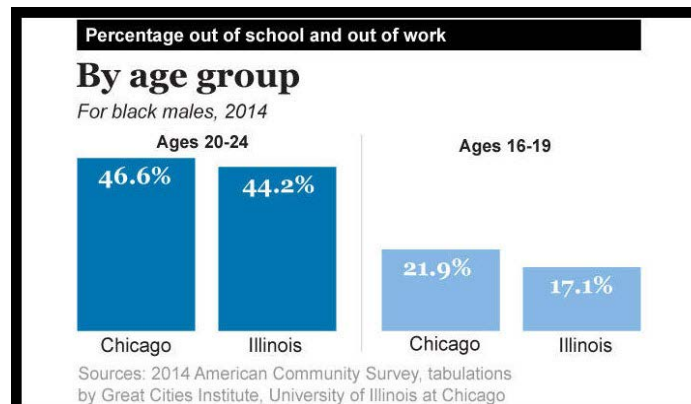
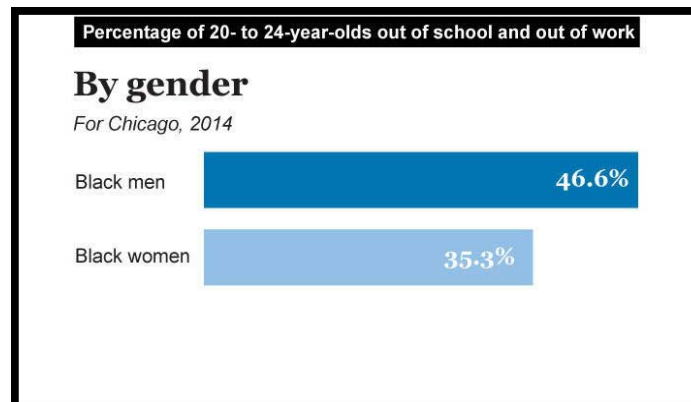
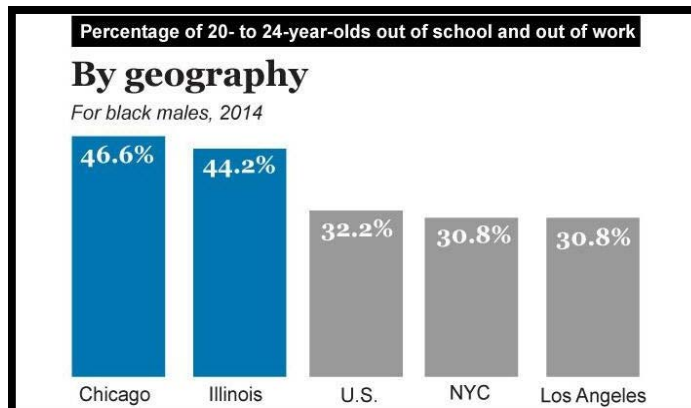
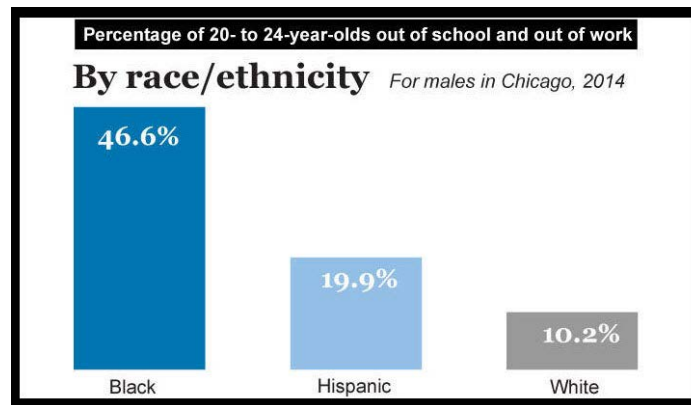
The organizations behind Monday's hearing are calling for a national commitment to employ 2 million jobless youths during the summer and year-round. The groups also propose a state commitment to employ 35,000 jobless youths and commitments from Cook County and Chicago to each employ 10,000 jobless youths.

"If we're not going to invest in our youth, who is going to do it?" said state Rep. Camille Lilly, a Democrat who represents the 78th District on the West Side. "It's our responsibility collectively as the state, city, county and federal government."

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## Black Unemployment Charts (Tribune data visuals)



## Commentary: Want to curb violence? Give Black men a job

By **Dahleen Glanton**  
Contact Reporters

There aren't many things we can all agree with when it comes to curbing violence in Chicago. But it would be difficult for anyone to make a sensible argument against this: If young black men went to work every day, they wouldn't be out in the streets killing each other.

But in our city, nearly half of the young African-American men between the ages of 20 and 24 neither have a job nor are enrolled in school, according to a recent report from the University of Illinois at Chicago's Great Cities Institute. That's a dire statistic by itself, but what it represents is even more disturbing.

It means that only about 1 in 2 black men will be able to lift himself or his children out of poverty. It means that nearly half of all black men in Chicago could be on the path to a life without a future, a journey that will likely land them in the Cook County Jail or the Cook County morgue. It means that the fate of African-American men is being cemented into a permanent underclass, a legacy they will likely pass on to their children, their grandchildren and their great-grandchildren.

And we wonder why Chicago has an escalating problem of violence?

Some minds, I'm sure, already are churning away at the reasons for the high level of unemployment. You say that young black men don't want to work minimum-wage jobs because they can make more money selling drugs on the streets. Your rationale is that black boys goof off in school and eventually drop out, leaving themselves unprepared for the workforce. You think the biggest problem is too many single-parent homes and the lack of black male role models.

All of those things could be contributing factors in some cases. But we won't know for sure how much of a factor they are until there are enough jobs to go around for black men. When someone can show me that black



*Young men discussed unemployment on Jan. 25, 2016, at the Urban League. A new report said nearly half of young black men in Chicago are unemployed or not in school.*

men are being offered jobs and are turning them down, then we'll talk about that.

But for now, let's talk about what we do know. In Chicago, 47 percent of 20- to 24-year-old black men were out of work and out of school in 2014, compared with 20 percent of Hispanics and 10 percent of whites. The rate for black men in Chicago was higher than in New York and Los Angeles.

The highest rates of unemployment in Chicago were in South and West side neighborhoods that also have some of the highest rates of poverty and crime — Englewood, East Garfield Park and North Lawndale. That's no coincidence.

When there is a difference of 37 percentage points between the number of unemployed black men and the number of unemployed white men in the city, it doesn't mean that most African-American men don't want to work. That would be as ridiculous as assuming that every young white man is eager to find a job. What it means is that something is wrong with the system that provides the jobs.

The unemployment report commissioned by the Alternative Schools Network, a nonprofit that supports urban education programs, proposes that the state commit to employing 35,000 youth in summer and year-round

programs. It asks that Cook County employ 10,000 youths and Chicago commit to hiring another 10,000.

That's a tall order when the city and state are facing a financial crisis. We can't rely solely on our government to fix the problem, but we can expect it to lead the charge. If we want to get serious about stopping the killings, there has to be a joint effort between Chicago-area businesses, nonprofits and individuals to mentor young people and give them work.

The research was presented during a hearing Monday on the South Side, where one young male after another talked about the difficulties they have getting a job in Chicago.

In particular, I liked what 24-year-old Johnathan Allen had to say. Allen, who lives in the Back of the Yards neighborhood, last worked in a summer youth program in 2014. No funds were available for that program last year, so when the Urban League needed some young people to talk about their experience, they had to go back two years to find them.

That alone, Allen said, exemplifies the problem. What's more, he asked, what good does it do for young people like him to come in year after year and talk about the benefits of

having a job? Educated, intelligent people, he said, already know that. And for anyone who has any doubts, he suggested that they take a little stroll through the neighborhood.

“It’s insulting to me and everybody here because we’re still seeing the problem. We need jobs,” he said.

“You don’t need any research, all you’ve got to do is come outside. We’re on 47th Street. You can see what happens when we don’t have the jobs.”

Allen is right. Just think about the difference between the quality of life for a young man who has a job and one who doesn’t.

A young man without a job gets to hang out on the corner day and night, whether the temperature is below zero or near 100. He gets to dodge bullets every time he takes a step outside. He gets to hold the hand of a brother or a friend since grade school as that buddy takes his dying breath.

A young man with a job gets to hold his head high when he walks down the street. When his children are afraid, he can look them in the eye and tell them that everything is going to be OK. And a man with a job gets to believe in the American Dream — that if he works hard, he will eventually earn the success he deserves.

You’re wrong if you think the majority of black men would walk away from a chance at that.

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# CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

January 27, 2016

## Mitchell: Job creation should start at home

By Mary Mitchell

It has always been tough for teens to find a job.

But these days, finding youth employment opportunities in the Chicago area is nearly impossible, according to a [study by the University of Illinois at Chicago](#).

In 2014, for 16- to 19-year-olds, only 12.4 percent of blacks, 15 percent of Hispanics or Latinos, and 24.4 percent of whites were employed, according to the study.

Almost half of black men in Chicago between 20 and 24 are neither working nor in school, researchers found.

The study, produced for the Alternative Schools Network, was released this week by a coalition that included the Chicago Urban League, Westside Health Authority, Youth Connection Charter School, Chicago Area Project and Black United Fund of Illinois.

The organizations proposed there be a national commitment to employ 2 million jobless youth across the country, both during the summer and year-round at a cost of \$4.5 billion.

"We are losing a generation of youth who have no opportunity to work in their neighborhoods," the activists stated in a press release.

I landed my first job at 12 years old as a babysitter for my father's employer — after I had been turned away from every store in my neighborhood.

When I went to a vocational high school, having employment was part of the education experience.

Let's see, I was a part-time keypunch operator for a small spice company. That prepared me for the night shift at the Spiegel Catalog facility on the Southwest Side.

Today's high rate of youth unemployment exacerbates an existing challenge for young men.

In "Street God," the autobiography of Dimas



*Finding youth employment opportunities in the Chicago area is nearly impossible, according to a study by the University of Illinois at Chicago. | Sun-Times file photo*

Salaberrios, the former drug boss who now leads a thriving ministry in South Bronx explains the tug of fast money.

"My parents were always telling me, 'If you work hard, you can do things and buy things when you get older.' But I saw kids not much older than I buying nice things whenever they wanted them. To have that kind of power . . . the idea boggled my young brain," he said.

It is particularly disheartening that Chicago had the highest percentage of black 16- to 19-year-olds (14.3 percent) who were out of work and out of school in 2014.

There's just no getting around the barrier a lack of education presents.

These alarming jobless statistics could also explain why there is so much violence in black and brown communities.

Still, it is unlikely the private sector is going to rain down jobs on the West and South Sides or that a state government drowning in debt is going to launch a massive job training and employment operation.

In the past, unemployed teenagers went door

to door with a rake and lawn mower looking to earn some bucks. College-bound seniors sold snow cones on front porches in the summer and shoveled snow in the winter.

Instead of waiting for someone to hand them a job, these youngsters understood it was on them to make a way.

That hasn't changed.

But what would your reaction be if a teen knocked on your door today offering to provide a service for a fee? It should be welcoming.

It is going to take more than the on-again, off-again job programs government sponsors to solve this crisis.

We need to reiterate the value of creative work.

**[Click for Full Report, Lost: The Crisis Of Jobless and Out Of School Teens and Young Adults In Chicago, Illinois and the U.S.](#)**

February 7, 2016

# Young Black men in Chicago: Out of work, out of school, and out of luck

By Sher Watts Spooner

Chicago isn't a safe or profitable place for young men of color, especially on the West and South sides. That in itself is nothing new. But a new report on black youth unemployment, coupled with recent sky-high shooting and murder rates, doesn't leave young black men with many options. Nearly half of all black males in Chicago between the ages of 20 and 24 are neither working nor getting an education.

The statistics also were dismal for the city's black teenagers. The jobless rate for black 16- to 19-year-olds was 88 percent. Rates for these demographic groups are higher than state or national rates, or than rates in other large cities such as Los Angeles and New York. And all of Chicago's highest unemployment rates for black teens and young adults were on the West and South sides, just as they are for older adults.

These facts and figures are from a report titled [Lost: The Crisis of Jobless and Out of School Teens and Young Adults in Chicago, Illinois, and the U.S.](#) It's from the [Great Cities Institute](#), an initiative at the University of Illinois at Chicago College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs. Its mission is to link academic resources with partners to address urban issues by providing research, policy analysis, and program development. The report was produced for the city's Alternative School Network in conjunction with the Chicago Urban League.

The jobless numbers provide only half the story. The Chicago Tribune is among those that keep track of the city's shootings and murders. Its [online tally](#), updated a few times per week, shows daily, monthly, and annual totals of shootings and shooting deaths. So far in 2016, Chicago has had nearly 300 shooting victims and more than 50 homicides (there were nearly 3,000 shooting victims in 2015).

Now compare that map to a [map](#) from the Chicago Department of Family & Support Services that shows unemployment rates in neighborhoods throughout the city. Notice



David Elam, 25, was among those testifying at a recent hearing hosted by the Chicago Urban League about youth unemployment. Elam credited a summer job program with getting him out of a gang. He's now a youth organizer with a group called Fathers Who Care.

the overlap. The areas with the highest number of shootings are the city's poorest and most segregated areas and the neighborhoods with the highest unemployment rates.

It doesn't take a genius to connect the dots. Young black men with few options are getting shot in high numbers—and that's in the middle of the winter. Usually these kinds of totals are more common in the summer, when hot weather drives people outside.

You can blame the high incidence in shootings on easy gun trafficking from other states (true) or the "Ferguson effect" (not true). Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel went so far as to blame the uptick in shootings on an anti-police backlash, saying Chicago police officers have pulled back on enforcing the law—in essence, that that they were forced into a [fetal](#) position.

You can talk about illegal drugs, failed schools, malnutrition, substandard housing, and a host of other issues. There's truth in all of those factors. But the biggest culprit is lack of economic opportunity.

Chicago is no different from many other urban areas that have experienced job flight from the inner city. You used to see large

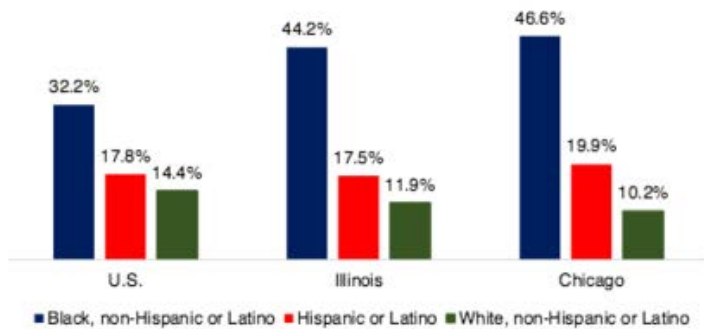
factories throughout the city that employed hundreds of workers. Now, those same workplaces are shuttered or torn down. And not much has been left in their place.

During my commuting days, I always rode the CTA Green Line along the West Side. The worst sight was the old Brach's candy factory, which closed its doors in 2001 after 76 years of making StarBrite Mints and Milk Maid Caramels, leaving 1,100 people out of work. The company moved most of its candy manufacturing to Europe.

For years, the old factory sat empty, a broken shell of a once-thriving company. Worse, the 12-story building was awash with gang signs and symbols. It was finally torn down.

The Rev. Michael Pfleger is head of St. Sabina Church in Chicago's Auburn Gresham neighborhood on the South Side, near Englewood, the neighborhood on which filmmaker Spike Lee based *Chi-Raq*. Father Pfleger is a longtime social activist who has spent years speaking out against gun violence. The unemployment rate near St. Sabina is close to 25 percent.

Father Pfleger often shares weekend shooting statistics on his Facebook page, along



**Percent of 20 to 24 Year Old Males Who Were Out of School and Out of Work in the U.S., Illinois, and Chicago in 2014**

with commentary. And whatever opinion you have of Father Pfleger, he gets it.

*While we fight against corrupt police we must also fight against those who are part of this self-inflicted Genocide that is causing our neighborhoods to live in Fear. Yes, we must demand Jobs, Education, Economic Opportunity, Options and end this Easy Access to Guns, and yes we must Tell the Thousands of Churches that will gather today to pray that Faith without Works is still Dead.*

Our family has a friend on the South Side who grew up in the Robert Taylor Homes, the now-demolished high-rise public housing project of 28 buildings that ran along the Dan Ryan Expressway. He and his family have lived in several South Side neighborhoods, yet the only jobs available to him are far away. Currently he has a 2.5-hour commute to a job in a northern suburb. He has to ride a bus, two elevated trains, and another bus to get to work.

But he says it's worth it. He and his wife, who also works, are scraping together every penny they can (and no doubt creating student loan debt for their son) to send their boy to college—he's now in his junior year. "He had to go away to school," our friend told us. "Two of his friends have already been killed."

He's traveled to job interviews with even longer commutes, all with complicated multiple modes of public transportation. All of this is because of the lack of employment opportunity in his own neighborhood. "All we've got are mostly liquor stores and funeral parlors," he's told us.

"Want to curb violence? Give black men a job," argues Dahleen Glanton in a column in the Chicago Tribune. "If young black men went to work every day, they wouldn't be out in the streets killing each other," she writes, citing figures from the Great Cities Institute report.

*It means that only about 1 in 2 black men*

*will be able to lift himself or his children out of poverty. It means that nearly half of all black men in Chicago could be on the path to a life without a future, a journey that will likely land them in the Cook County Jail or the Cook County morgue. It means that the fate of African-American men is being cemented into a permanent underclass, a legacy they will likely pass on to their children, their grandchildren and their great-grandchildren.*

*And we wonder why Chicago has an escalating problem of violence? ...*

*A young man without a job gets to hang out on the corner day and night, whether the temperature is below zero or near 100. He gets to dodge bullets every time he takes a step outside. He gets to hold the hand of a brother or a friend since grade school as that buddy takes his dying breath.*

*A young man with a job gets to hold his head high when he walks down the street. When his children are afraid, he can look them in the eye and tell them that everything is going to be OK. And a man with a job gets to believe in the American Dream — that if he works hard, he will eventually earn the success he deserves.*

*You're wrong if you think the majority of black men would walk away from a chance at that.*

In its conclusion, the Great Cities Institute report describes "permanent scars" that lead to conditions that are both a consequence and a precipitating factor in youth unemployment.

*This report clearly highlights that youth employment rates are tied to conditions in neighborhoods and cannot be seen as distinct from what is happening in the neighborhoods themselves. The devastation of unemployment, in turn, wreaks havoc on the neighborhood.*

*Chicago is a great city. But how can it truly*

*be great, when this "tale of two cities" provides such stark comparison in the employment opportunities among young people?*

Here's an economic opportunity that will be happening soon. The Barack Obama Presidential Center is slated to be built on the South Side. There are two locations under consideration. One is Jackson Park, south of the Museum of Science and Industry, a park that is well-used for summertime picnics, basketball games, and many programs in the fieldhouse and other facilities. The other is Washington Park, near the DuSable Museum of African American History, a park with fewer amenities which is in a neighborhood that probably could use more development help than the Jackson Park site. Plus, it's right near the Green Line elevated train route, making it easy for people to get to work at the Obama library or any of the businesses that are bound to grow around the new site.

I sincerely hope that the Obamas and those responsible for making the site selection will make neighborhood economic development a key factor in their final choice.