



black youth project

January 26, 2016

# Maybe Chicago's Priority Should Be Jobs For The Youth

By Keith Reid-Cleveland

If you were to ask someone what the biggest problem facing Chicago was there's a strong likelihood they'd go for the easy answer of "gun violence." While it's definitely a serious issue that needs to be addressed, it should be noted that it's actually the result of multiple factors, such as unemployment, poverty and access to weapons, coming into play at once. To provide some insight, a new study has revealed just how drastic one of those major factors is in the city. But, the focus on young black men's education and working habits misses the point entirely.

The [Chicago Tribune](#) recently reported that 47 percent of Chicago's black men between the ages of 20-24 were neither in school or employed in 2014, according to a report from University of Illinois at Chicago's Great Cities Institute.

This number is shockingly high when compared to Hispanic men of the same age, sitting at 20 percent, and white men of the same age, which is only 10 percent. To add further perspective, only 31 percent of black men between the ages of 20-24 in New York City and Los Angeles were in this same position, which is actually lower than the national average of 32 percent.

While the numbers for black women in this age range are better than their male counterparts, there's still much room for improvement with 35.3 percent not in school or working in 2014, compared to the national average of 24.7, [according to ABC7](#).

The report found that the overall unemployment rates for Chicago's youth was noticeably higher in South and West Side neighborhoods, which have significant black populations. Englewood, North Lawndale and East Garfield Park are a few of the specific neighborhoods that the study found



*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.*

showed significant youth unemployment.

This essentially means that half of the young black men that can be found in the city have nothing positive to keep themselves occupied during the day, no consistent source of income and no sign of one coming in the near future.

"For young people in Chicago – especially blacks and Latinos – conditions of joblessness are chronic," said Teresa Cordova, director of the Great Cities Institute, as she spoke to a group of lawmakers at an annual hearing hosted by the Chicago Urban League that's meant to focus specifically on youth unemployment.

There's nothing different about Chicago's youth than that of any other major city to make them somehow less in need of work or education. One could easily draw a direct correlation between Chicago's violence, which often involves people in this same 20-24 age range, and the fact that there aren't nearly enough opportunities for them to get on the right track.

For the record, this alarmingly high unemployment rate isn't because young people just aren't out there looking for jobs. It's because many of them aren't being properly trained to fill a full-time position somewhere that they can make a decent living or those that are suddenly realize that the jobs themselves are far and few between. For some, turning to other nefarious means of income are a sad necessity.

To prove that giving jobs to the youth isn't just some magical theory, studies were conducted to see how much of an impact steady employment could have on the community. The University of Chicago Crime Lab took two groups of local young people. The first secured eight-week-long part-time summer jobs with the One Summer Chicago Plus program. The second group didn't.

Not only was there a 43 percent reduction in violent crime arrests for those that secured jobs, but the positive trend continued on for another 18 months, according to the scientific director at the lab, Kelly Hallberg.

Multiple young people spoke at the event about how much employment changed their lives and how much they believed it could do the same for their peers.

There are hopes that the hearing will result in jobs for 2 million unemployed members of Chicago's youth both during the summer and year-round, with 35,000 and 10,000 of those coming from Cook County and Chicago, respectively.

There's really no price that can be put on saving the lives of the future. Whether it be those that would be slain, those spent behind bars or those forever in mourning for a death that should've never happened in the first place.

I don't mean to do an impersonation of a frustrated baby boomer or a politician that's always pushing the same agenda in different words, but if anyone truly cares to see Chicago step out of this dark place, a solution is starting to form that should be fully invested in. Now we just need to find a means towards achieving this solution. One suggestion is to endorse programs like One Summer Chicago Plus so that they can offer jobs to more young people and keep them on a path that will benefit everyone.

No one expects things to play out like they did in Spike Lee's latest movie – or, at least, they shouldn't. Expecting all of the Fortune 500 companies coming together and throwing jobs at Chicago's poorest neighborhoods is unrealistic. But a collaborative effort is what's needed and the benefits could last for generations.

Photo Credit: *The Chicago Tribune/Zbigniew Bzdak*