



“Moving from Complaint to Possibility...from Planning to Implementation”

Civic Engagement: The Role of the Citizen

Civic participation is the foundation of Democracy. True democracy *is* government *by* the people in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system. Civic education helps prepare people, especially the young, to carry out their roles as citizens and to help them understand that one’s vote *does* matter. Civic education, therefore, is political education which cultivates the virtues, knowledge and skills necessary for political participation. Therefore, to give all citizens the necessary tools to fully participate in the democratic process and to politically impact violence, we should challenge and hold accountable all elected officials, governmental bodies, and encourage social service agencies, schools, community groups *and* the family to do the following:

- **Create** an enlightened community through institutions that educate, motivate, organize, and mobilize citizens in the African American community to encourage *full participation* in a barrier-free democratic process.
- **Encourage** all citizens to participate in the struggle to eliminate barriers to civic participation that will in turn promote greater social and economic justice to enhance the quality of life for all residents.
- **Develop** educational programs, leadership training and coalitions that will strengthen and empower our communities to make voting and civic participation a cultural responsibility and tradition.
- **Institute** and expand curriculum at all grade levels to include lessons about democracy that include such topics as fundamentals of constitutional government, civil and human rights and equality before the law, free and fair elections, due process of law – which should be, and are, the pillars of democracy. Teach young people the true meaning of a *fully* democratic society.
- **Provide** formal and informal opportunities for discussion and action around civic and democratic education. Provide venues for civic engagement in schools, libraries, workplaces, civic organizations, unions, communities of faith, during campaigns and elections and through the mass media.
- **Join**, be active and support organizations that are working for social justice, community empowerment, economic empowerment and violence reduction.
- **Exercise** one’s right to express one’s political voice *at any time* by contacting elected officials, contacting the print and broadcast media, writing petitions and participating in other forms of active engagement to hold accountable elected officials *at all levels* of government, from the local up to the federal.

- **Make** a lifetime commitment to vote in *each and every* election to exercise one's rights as a citizen of this society. Be a willing participant at *every* level of the political process. Practice and also teach children, from an early age, to practice democratic values such as mutual respect, freedom of thought, commitment to diversity and social justice.

The culture of civic participation must be brought back to a vibrant and relevant lifestyle if we are to be successful in our efforts to stop the increasing violence in our homes, schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, cities and the region.