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### **Man in America Essay Contest**

**Topic:** *Define what it means to be a successful young man in America. What are the barriers you face in becoming a successful young man in America? How would you overcome those obstacles and leave a legacy for those to follow after you?*

As a young man living in America who wants to be successful, I absolutely know that it is difficult to become a successful young man in America with the kind of environment I live in today. In becoming a successful young man in America, you have to be patient, hardworking, focused, and determined. You have to be ready to fail, make mistakes and learn from them. Like grandmother always says, “life is not a piece of cake.” So as life is not a piece of cake, dealing with our environment is not a piece of cake also. Actually it’s hard accomplishing your dreams as a young man with all the distractions around you. As a young man trying to do the right thing all awhile your peers laugh and call you names, it can kill your spirit. We face the challenge of achieving a higher sense of self-worth within our society. There are times you feel marginalized and disconnected from society; the social impact is always tilted toward the negative. This risky and potentially life-threatening situation is due to a intricate crossroads of race, class, systemic racism, personal responsibility, and a lack of access to equal opportunity.

As a young man, not having a father around and having to take on father-like responsibilities while catering to your brothers and sisters is not easy. It can lead you into doing things like selling drugs, stealing or robbing. These are things that face you as a young man who wants to progress, but undergoes adult stress. At one point you wouldn’t be able to handle it

anymore, and decide to choose a path that will damage your future. You can't focus on your studies and work to pay bills at home because your father ran away from his responsibilities. The biggest challenge young men in America face today is that they pose a major risk to the lives and well-being of the individuals and their families. If only my friend Tarley had a father who was there to support the family, then he would not be in jail right now. Tarley had to take the responsibility of supporting his family at the age of 15. The material things he saw a friend had received from selling drugs influenced him so he decided to do the same. But that same friend who influenced him, set him up all because Tarley was making more money than him. Tarley was arrested for selling drugs on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013. That is what happens when young men take on adulthood when they are not prepared.

Today, the futures of young men are being damaged due to the early onset of adulthood. How can you focus on your studies when your girlfriend wants attention at the same time? Some young men choose to pay attention to girls instead of their studies. Girls will always be around but young men don't understand that in the moment. They don't realize this until it's too late and they are expecting their first child at 15 and can't afford to pay child support or go to school at the same time. Majority of the young men today are either high school dropouts or college dropouts, due to teen pregnancy and child support requirements. "Education is the key to life," that's what my father told me. If our young men were educated about their environments, they would be able to avoid the things that distract them from becoming successful. After all, we are human and can be tempted by the pleasurable things we see around us.

As a young man from Africa living in Atlanta Georgia, growing up and getting adjusted to the American system was difficult. It was not easy walking into a school building as a young adult who knows nobody there. People ask me questions and when I open my mouth to speak,

they laugh at my accent. When I talked, teachers asked me to repeat myself because they could not understand me. It was not a fun experience. It came to a point where I told my mother “look, I want to go back Liberia and graduate from high school and return to the States to attend college.” I used to go to school every day and worry about how to avoid a fight from the ignorant people around me. I was sick and tired of people telling me “What you saying bro? Bro, speak English!” People call me “black monkey.” I was surprised by questions like, “Do you sleep in tree Bro?” The only good thing was that I didn’t let that stop me from staying focused on what I was in school for. Transitioning from one place to another is difficult for some young men living in America. Bullying is the most disturbing thing ever in school that can affect your progress as a person. I tried escaping school some days my first year in high school in America because of bullying. Sometimes when peers were calling me names I just felt like hurting them or hurting myself. Bullying is something that needs to stop because it is not a good experience. It’s an experience that can kill you on the inside yet you’re still alive on the outside.

In order to make it as a successful young man in America, you have to be ready to fail, make mistakes and learn from them. My advice to the young ones who are following us is to be a leader not a follower. Friends will stand in your way as you work hard to progress; pay them no attention. Self-respect is the most important discipline a man needs to be young and successful. Please don’t fear to tell a teacher or another adult when you feel hurt, angry, afraid, helpless, hopeless, isolated, ashamed, and even guilty when you feel bullying is somehow your fault. That was my mistake. I did not tell any of the administrators at my school. Attend to your own business and never trust it to your peers. Life is like a roller coaster with lots of ups and downs. Not too many people smile but many frown. And lastly, don’t rush into adulthood because it can get in the way of your bright future.