

TRANSFORMATIONAL MOMENTS: TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITY TO SAVE OUR SONS

Our ability, as a nation, to take advantage of the opportunities available throughout our global 21st century community depends in large measure on our ability to support African American educational excellence. The United States has long held fast to the belief that education paves the pathway to the American Dream – to opportunities and experiences that help Americans acquire the means to be successful, care for a family, and fully participate in a community. In the African American community, high-quality education and developmental opportunities have enabled us to create jobs and new industries, overcome income and social gaps, and transcend as other significant challenges emerge. Students at any age, birth through adulthood, deserve meaningful opportunities that enable them to be successful at school and prepared for careers that can support them and their families.

Regardless of zip code or genetic code, every child in America should have access to a high-quality education and the social and emotional support that prepare him or her for college and a career. The chapters, included in *African American male students in PreK-12 schools: Informing research, policy, and practice*, highlight promising and proven strategies supporting African American males beginning at birth. While learning lessons from what has worked, we still need to remember that there is still work to be done. While we should be careful not to generalize and suggest that all Black boys are in crisis, all Black boys can benefit from knowing that they are valued, supported, and protected – especially at home, school, and in their communities.

As evidenced in the chapters that follow, all caring and concerned adults should ensure that Black boys are developing fundamental academic and social skills; learning and engaged in school and out-of-school settings; are supported in developing a strong sense of black masculine identity; and have parents, grandparents, and mentors who are committed to supporting their growth and development. Creating protective, safe, and productive

environments for Black boys requires correcting myths that give life to the fallacy that they cannot achieve at extremely high levels. As a society, we should dispel myths like there are more Black men in prison than college.

The chapters, included in this edited compilation, provide important facts, information, and other resources that can contribute to this effort. When I worked as a classroom teacher, some of my colleagues used myths and deleterious stereotypes of boys and men of color to convince themselves they did not have to put in the work to provide quality instruction to Black boys because they are presumed to end up dead or incarcerated. Changing the narrative around African American males requires telling more stories about the everyday examples of their achievement and success, resilience, and grit.

We should talk about opportunities for boys and young men at all ages to support each other and continue to have conversations, in public and private, about the opportunities and obligations as a nation to expand opportunities. Additionally, we should support programs and people both inside and outside the African American community who are doing the work. Beyond simply talking about it, we have to move beyond the rhetoric to ensure that the gains made, during the early years, are sustained throughout a Black male's lifespan. This includes ensuring that they have access to high-quality learning opportunities beginning at birth. Thus, it requires collective efforts of committed adults focused on implementing positive educational programs, policies, and practices designed to support African American males throughout their PreK-12 schooling and beyond.

And, as we do this work, we should be careful to avoid neglecting our daughters in the process. Our Black girls and women need our care, love, and support too. These are only a few of the ways that me and many of the contributors of this edited volume are working to support African American males in schools and communities across the nation. Personally, I believe that this edited volume is a valuable resource on what parents, schools, and the public, more generally, can do to support African American males of all ages. I also trust that this edited volume will add substantially to the growing body of research on black boys and contribute to advancing the national dialogue on critical issues concerning education, economics, government, and diversity in America – issues that have significant implications for the future success of our schools, communities, and country. I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this edited volume, and I close with, “Teach The Babies!”

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