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Why Black Men Don't Teach: Understanding the Existing African-American Male Teacher Shortage

Joseph R. Gibson

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According to Robert L. Smith, “the achievement gap separating black boys from just about everyone else springs from a powerful, anti-education culture rising in the black community. Parents who undervalue education, and a mass media that peppers youth with the quick, shallow rewards of hip-hop lifestyle, are steering alarming numbers of boys down a dead-end path.” Erik Eckholm explained that “terrible schools, absent parents, racism, the decline in blue collar jobs, and a subculture that glorifies swagger over work have all been cited as causes of the deepening ruin of black male youth.” They also appear to be a large part of the reason why “nationwide, the percentage of black male teachers is 2.4 percent,” according to the National Education Association in 2008. Rather than becoming teachers, Bernard Carver explained that “a growing and alarming number of African American males are either become victims of negative circumstances (e.g., dropping out of school at an early age, being sent to penal institutions, or succumbing to urban violence) or becoming participants in activities that are counterproductive to their development (e.g., involving drugs and gangs).”
Black males are generally alienated as students by and from the American public education, and, as a result, are also alienated as potential educators. Janice Hale explained that “African American [male] children do not enter school disadvantaged, they leave disadvantaged. There’s nothing wrong with the children but there is clearly something wrong with what happens to them in school.” For one, the absence of Black male role models in the classroom is serious obstacle to the education of Black boys. “In order to be a Black man, you have to see a Black man,” wrote Jawanza Kunjufu, who estimated that Black men make up less than 2 percent of all public school teachers. “Without Black men role models, our boys learn to see school as for girls and sissies.”
In addition, Tawannah Allen wrote that “African American male students have traditionally received the most negative treatment by public educators” and, consequently, chronically underachieve academically. Welsing confirmed that “it is little wonder that 98% of all of the Black male children I talk with, who have reached the junior high school level, hate school. Schools and their personnel, like all other aspects of the racist system, do their share to alienate Black males from maximal functioning.”

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