

Part One

Source: <http://educationnext.org/educating-african-american-boys>

Educating African American Boys

Our schools deserve an “F”

By Kaleem Caire

In 1989, my dream of attending college on a football and track scholarship was shattered when I graduated high school with a 1.56 GPA, a ranking of 413 out of 435 students in my senior class, an 820 on the SAT, a 19 on the ACT, a dismal attendance record, and absolutely no idea about what I wanted to do with my life. Two years later, on December 24, 1991, I was sitting behind bars in the prison at Norfolk Naval Station in Virginia, awaiting notice of the numerous charges being brought against me for an altercation I had with a naval officer.

Fortunately, after spending just a few days instead of a few years in lockup, I was exonerated. Two weeks later, I met my wife, Lisa, dedicated myself to reading two books a week to improve my speaking and writing skills, changed my peer group, and moved on with my life.

In 1993 I returned home to Madison, Wisconsin, from Hampton, Virginia, having spent three years in the U.S. Navy and one year attending Hampton University. I immediately went to my old neighborhood to check in with everyone, to see my guys and the girls on the block where I'd spent so much time as an adolescent. I was shocked and dismayed to find that so many of the young men I grew up with had succumbed to the crack cocaine trade and were either addicted to it or selling it, died or were killed for it, or were in jail because of it. Most of those still around were not in the labor force, were not attending any education or training program, and expressed little optimism about their future or their value to society.

I switched my academic major at the University of Wisconsin from pre-medicine and nutritional sciences to urban education and spent the next decade working with city youth. I soon became determined to expose how unproductive our education system was at graduating students and preparing them for college. I enlisted the support of a then up-and-coming researcher named Jay Greene to help me identify a reliable formula for calculating high school graduation rates and secured the support of the organization I was then presiding over to spend \$15,000 on a study.

At the time, I was concerned that “dropout” statistics were masking a much larger problem that many in government knew existed but weren't sharing: hundreds of thousands of black and brown students nationwide were not graduating high school. That initial study and others that followed have stimulated national interest and growing financial investment in high school graduation and college-readiness initiatives. But the central problem that drove me down this road in the first place—the lack of educational and career success among young black and brown men—has garnered very little attention.

As we celebrate the election of our country's first black president, I can't help but ponder how very few black males are being prepared to successfully complete a college education and assume leadership roles in the fields of business, industry, government, family, and community. How will this brain drain affect the future of families and children in our country? How will this affect our economy and national interests? How many public and private prisons are we willing to pay \$38,000 annually per inmate to have black men imprint license plates and pick up debris on U.S. highways?

The 2008 Schott Foundation report on high school graduation among black males found that only 19 percent of black males in Indianapolis, 20 percent in Detroit, 27 percent in Norfolk, Virginia, 29 percent in Rochester, New York, and 47 percent nationally were graduating from high school. When I read that report, I felt as if I'd been impaled by fragments from a hand grenade. I asked myself, If our school systems are producing such small numbers of graduates, what is the purpose of K—12 education for black males? Why are we allowing our children to languish in schools and school systems that produce far more failures than successes?

Kaleem Caire is the president and CEO of Next Generation Education Foundation, an organization that prepares young men to succeed in college, careers, leadership, and life.

Selected Reader comments

Kebra says:

[08/21/2009 at 8:04 pm](#)

Are the schools really the blame? What about the influence of the family, parents, and church? Having attended inner city public high school, and currently serving in administration in the same district, I find it totally unacceptable to blame the school system for the failure of our people. Stop making excuses! I love the fact that you see the need for mentorships- and positive examples. What's really wrong with the military? boarding schools? etc.

D, Miller says:

[08/23/2009 at 6:04 pm](#)

I have come to the realization that we are not serious about educating African American males. When we examine school data, homicide reports and other information it is clear that young African American males are marginalized and forgotten about.

If we are serious about addressing the challenges that African American males face parental involvement and community reinvestment are critical areas.

We can no longer blame school districts and teachers for the alarming academic and social challenges that are crippling many African American males.

At some point we need to realize the importance of grooming community based organizations to create alternative educational models to support school aged boys. To often we are waiting for governmental interventions to address the challenges that we have the power to correct.

Finally, it is amazing that groups like NAACP, Urban League and other organizations have not made this issue a priority. How serious are we about educating our boys?

Marilyn Ruffin says:

[08/28/2009 at 11:01 pm](#)

Since day ONE, my sons, ages 12 & 10, POSITIVELY know I won't take ANY excuses for poor performance. Kaleem, how active/involvement were your family members in education success?

□ *Terry* says:

[11/03/2009 at 8:45 am](#)

Julie Barnes hits the nail on the head in her comment. I would echo her and add that as many black folk as possible pull their kids out of public school.

Can't afford private? Neither can we which is why we have chosen homeschooling.

Google African American homeschoolers and you will find tons of support groups (nationwide), resources, and private schools that offer cut rate tuition to homeschoolers who live in states where school registration of some sort is required to home educate.

Outside the umbrella of black homeschoolers is a wealth of help, support, curriculum, and resources.

Oh, and colleges love homeschoolers, too. Did you know that Heisman Trophy winner Tim Tebow is a homeschool graduate?

I know its not for everyone, but it is an option.

□ *Karl* says:

[11/06/2009 at 1:24 am](#)

As a white homeschooling parent and longtime early childhood (K-3) teacher educator in Cleveland, it's important to understand how little boys and especially little black boys often get into the wrong pigeonhole early on.

Who is usually identified as having ADHD/behavior problems/ needing special education in the early years: boys, especially African-American and Hispanic boys.

Who are the kindergarten teachers of these boys—usually white females.

When I taught preschool and kindergarten with female co-teachers, I always found that a lot of the boys behavior that they considered problematic seemed fine/normal to me. I expected more physical activity from kids, and less sitting around quietly, and saw no problem with kids a little less able to sit still.

So here's the thought experiment I do with my mostly female classes. Replace all the female K-1 teachers in America tomorrow with men. The class always realizes that a lot of those behaviors that are seen as problematic by female teachers will be seen as normal by their new male teachers. Meanwhile, lots of behaviors that are more stereotypical of little girls will suddenly be seen as problematic by us men. Perhaps we'd hold back little girls for an extra year of kindergarten if they were over emotional, overly social or had any knocking-down-building deficits. We'd be worried about the kids who do sit still too much, and perhaps medicate them for Hyper-Sitting-Still-Disorder.

There's a subset of boys who gets unfairly labeled early on because school expectations in the early years don't fit well the normal characteristics of so many real boys, and many real girls.

We could help more of these boys get off to a great start if gender and cultural blinders didn't make so many teachers unfairly label so many boys early on.

If that doesn't work, yes, there's always homeschooling.

Peter Cobee says:

[04/19/2010 at 4:58 pm](#)

In 1965 D. P. Moynihan issued his report, "The Negro Family: The Case For National Action." He was decried as a racist for pointing to the high rate of African-American children born out of wedlock, teen pregnancy, and single-parent (almost always the mother) household, dependent on public assistance.

He was charged with "blaming the victim." Things have not changed: 70% of African-American babies born presently are to unmarried women. If I have the figures correctly, something like 11% of adult black women between 30 and 44 are married. The rates on black teen pregnancy and multiple out-of-wedlock paternity are depressing. In 1967 M. L. King Jr gave his Massey Lectures in Canada, Conscience for Change. In one of them he extolled young black people, especially young men, for abandoning "middle-class white values," for "dropping out of school" to engage in activism and assert their ethnic identity. He meant well but did not live to see the consequences. They are doing exactly that.

The achievement gap is not a gap in achievement but a chasm of identity. It is an extraordinarily complex social condition that will not yield to governmental solutions and will not be resolved anytime soon. I suggest, first, that we regard students as individual young people, not as tokens or ciphers of monolithic racial-ethnic groups; and second, that we look more to the traditional power of family, friends, and religion. Government can help, of course. But the past history is that government only created more dependency on government and exacerbated the problem.

Part Two

Source: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/mar/15/black-boys-too-feminised-fathers>

Black boys are too feminized



More than racism, the absence of father figures is the main problem holding back black kids in school

[Tony Sewell](#) [The Guardian](#), Monday 15 March 2010 18.30 EDT

Martin, a mixed-race 15-year-old south Londoner, had just downed half a bottle of vodka. The boy was already known for attention-seeking, bad behaviour and aggressively challenging authority figures. But in his drunken state, with his inhibitions gone, he wasn't more threatening. He was crying – violently sobbing – for his father. "I want my dad. It's not fair. I've only spoken to him once on the phone. Why does he hate me? I fucking want to see him now."

Martin was taking part in a residential summer camp run by my charity, which takes black boys and offers them educational coaching and mentoring. Martin had smuggled in the alcohol without us realising. Raised by a single white mother, he had never known his dad.

Higher education minister David Lammy today [appealed for black fathers](#) to become more involved with their children. He is aware, as I am, of the devastating consequences of absent fatherhood within the black community: 59% of black Caribbean children live in lone-parent households, compared with 22% of white children.

Another boy at camp couldn't get along with the others; he told me that he loved fighting and displayed an excessive amount of attention-seeking. The headteachers of each boy's school – who were also both black – told me that the mothers blamed school for making their sons behave badly. The heads spoke of a personal dislike shown by the students, which they reported as a wider dislike of black male authority. When the boys did open up at camp, it was to our female staff whom they felt they could trust.

Psychologists have known for some time that children's attachment to fathers and mothers derives from different sets of early social experiences. Specifically, mothers provide security when the child is distressed, whereas fathers provide reassuring play partners. As part of our orientation we played a simple game called Trust; I stood behind Martin who had to blindly fall into my arms. He refused to do it.

Typically, this kind of tough play love would never come from his mother. Instead of allowing him to fall, she would probably grab him from behind and whisper in his ear: "This game, it's too dangerous; I'll buy you a PlayStation instead." A typical father would say: "Come on, son, fall. I'm behind and you'd better not look back."

We have been running summer camps for five years: boys are taken from their familiar environment and work on high-level science projects at universities. All the boys have bucked the trend for inner-city African-Caribbeans, scoring an average of nine high-grade GCSEs.

When we set up the programme, we had high aspirations to nurture the next generation of black Britain's intellectual best. However, our academic ideals soon became secondary; many of the boys, once freed from the arms of their single mothers, suddenly had to cope with a world run by adult black males – figures in their lives who were mostly absent, unreliable, despised by their mothers, and usually unsuccessful.

These boys kicked up against us. It was like we were their dads who had walked out of their lives, and suddenly we demanded their respect.

More than racism, I now firmly believe that the main problem holding back black boys academically is their over-feminised upbringing. First, because with the onset of adolescence there is no male role model to provide guidance and lock down the destructive instincts that exist within all males. Second, in the absence of such a figure a boy will seek out an alternative. This will usually be among dominant male figures, all too often found in gangs. This is the space where there is a kind of hierarchy, a ritual and, of course, a sense of belonging.

We have wasted years, and lives, looking in the wrong direction as to the causes of crime and education failure. We've had endless studies attempting to prove institutional racism – while all along our boys' psychological needs weren't met.

The current [British] government policy of rolling out role models to black youngsters is another attempt to externalise the problem that lies within. It has left us with little research and knowledge about a group that gets kicked out of school the most. Meanwhile, the black family continues to disintegrate and it seems no one dares say a word.