

# Why are black boys failing in school

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



It is easy to point the finger but harder to find a solution as to why the black male child is failing in school. There are several crucial factors that contribute to this epidemic including, parents are not communicating with the teachers, the socioeconomic status of the child's family, and the father's absence in the child's life. Each of these topics intertwine with one another and is preventing a race of young men who will not be given the chance to excel in life. The worst teachers are the parents. Teaching starts at home from the time the child is old enough to speak, he learns from his parents.

We must realize that this is a vicious cycle which must be broken if we are to ever help these young black boys. If a parent is ignorant then they in turn teach their child ignorance. If the parent using profanity and does not speak articulately neither will the child. The main problem is that parents raise their boys until they are able to start school and then they are done. No, learning is a life long process and without involved parents these boys will continue to fail at shocking rates. Perhaps if parents disciplined their children instead of just sending them to school they might actually meet the standard requirements. (Green 7).

In the book titled, *Smart Kids, Bad Schools* author, Brian Crosby stated, " If parents did a better job at parenting, schools wouldn't have so many students who exhibit poor behavior. " (Crosby 253). He feels that poor parenting is a direct cause as to why children misbehave in school therefore, resulting in failing grades. He says that the parents of today are " weak, out of control, and litigious. " (Crosby 253). He says, " Disciplining one's child has become as out of fashion as typewriters, record stores, and unpierced body parts. " (Crosby 252).

If children are not held accountable for their actions at home then how can the school in turn hold them accountable for their actions at school, Crosby asks. Another point Crosby points out is if the child is not in school how does the parent expect the child to learn. “ Education codes do not allow teachers to penalize students for absences. ” (Crosby 255). The parent allows the child to miss school then gets angry at the teacher for giving him a failing grade. We are not living in the 1940's when it was acceptable for a male child to not attend school because he had to work.

Richard Wright wrote a book titled Black Boy, where he re-lives his childhood and tells how education was an after thought. During those times the economy was bad especially for blacks in the deep South so in order to survive certain sacrifices had to be made usually education. Wright writes, “ I began school at Howard Institute at a later age than was usual; my mother had not been able to buy me the necessary clothes to make me presentable. ” (Wright 28). Once again this type of behavior was acceptable during those times but now it surely frowned upon.

Parents of black boys surely do not understand the affect an absence has on a child that is already struggling in their studies. This goes back to my statement that this is a cycle and until we begin to educate parents of black children this problem might continue. Children learn from their parents, mentors, or whatever other figure is in the household. If their parent has a negative attitude about life nine times out of ten that attitude has rubbed off on the child. The child then goes to school with an attitude and it is left up to the teacher of probably thirty other students to try and break through this wall just to reach the child.

Andy Kotner, president of the San Diego chapter of the group California Citizens Against Abuse, said, “ We want parents and their kids to accept responsibility for their actions. ” (Crosby 257). Simply put parents do not want anyone to tell their children that they have a bad attitude, including the teachers. It is instilled in most parents to defend their young with that being said, parents should listen to both sides of the story before assuming that the teacher was wrong in their actions.

Parents + Teachers = A successful student. Another problem with parents not teaming up with teachers is the fear of being called a “ bad parent”. Most parents of black students do not regularly attend teacher/ parent conferences. These conferences are held usually between the sixth and eighth week of school and during these meetings parents get a chance to voice any concerns they might have as well as the teachers suggestions. (Cushman 11). One might ask how can a parent send their child to school without ever meeting the teacher?

There are several problems associated with black parents and the school system which I discuss in depth later in the paper. Parents just do not place enough emphasis on their child's education and in turn the child doesn't either. There is no way that a child could fail if their parents are in continuous communication with his teacher, yes, during these times there is simply not enough hours in the day but if a parent does not care about their child's future how can expect anyone else to? ” Black children are falling farther behind and are victims of an educational system that is failing them.” ( Muhammad 2).

If parents do not realize that a teacher alone can not defeat this task alone, that it takes a village to raise a family its sad to say that these little black boys might be lost forever. In the book titled How to Handle Difficult Parents written by Suzanne Tingley, she offers tips for how teachers can try to get pass difficult parents. She says that teachers need learn parent management skills. ( Tingley 8). By that she means teachers need to understand that during these times there is a lot of obstacles standing in the way.

“ When teachers know that a child's parent stands ready to challenge them at every turn, they can become reluctant to confront inappropriate student behavior or lack of effort. ” ( Tingley 8). If the parents are confrontational the teacher becomes intimidated and therefore the issues go unresolved. She feels that parents should communicate with teachers respectfully and civilly without judging the teachers credentials. In today's society is not always economically possible for the mother to stay at home while the husband works. She says, “ Parents work their jobs, raise their family, and pay their bills.

Kids are responsible for attending school, staying out of trouble, and pay attention. ” ( Tingley 10). Teachers are not always pointing the finger at the parent but they would like it if the parent was more involved in the child's schooling. Somewhere along the way we have gotten lost in our forty plus work hour weeks, consumed by emails, and tied down by bills. Parents must take time out of their busy schedules and make a sacrifice for their children. Another problem, Tingley pointed out was that the parents of today make too many excuses for their child's lack of enthusiasm when it comes to education.

Parents feel that if a child becomes bored at school that it is the teachers responsibility to make learning fun. They say that the child is not being challenged enough and that the teacher should devise a plan that works for their child. It is not the teachers job to entertain students; their job is simple-teach. The unwillingness from the parents makes it harder for teachers to do their job. “ The stress of dealing with difficult parents remains one of the top reasons teachers cite for leaving the profession after only five years. ” (Tingley 7).

There are different parenting styles that contribute to the learning process and should be discussed in order to get a better understanding of why the black child is failing compared to other children. “ In the eighth grade, only nine percent of black males across the country performed at or above the proficient level in reading compared with 33% of white males nationwide”. This statistic comes from the National Assessment of Educational Progress. (Green 2). There is something that other parents from other races are teaching their children that we as black parents are not.

“ Everyday our parents tell us: “ Obey your teachers. Do your schoolwork. Stay out of trouble. You're there to learn, not to fight. Keep trying harder. Keep pushing yourself. Do your homework. After you have done that, you can watch TV. ” Sikh immigrant student in a California high school. (Thernstorm 83). I am a black mother raising two black boys and our morning conversation goes a lot differently than the previous one. I tell my boys to be mindful of their appearance; they are judged on how they look. I tell them to be on time; typical stereotypes of black people is that we are always late.

Don't let anyone make you feel bad about yourself; you are just as good as anyone else. If that teacher calls me because you were misbehaving when you get home you are going to be in so much trouble. Parents of black children must remind our little black boys that the world view them differently and that they must always conduct themselves appropriately. Culture plays one of the biggest roles in how parents teach their children. Once culture is defined and I show correlation between the subject, I will discuss our history of learning in America.

It is important for one to understand that education was not always an option for blacks in America. Culture is defined as the beliefs, customs, and arts of a particular society. It can be defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine, and social habits. “ Twenty percent of the mothers of black children today never completed high school. ” (Gross 124). It is sad to say but within our culture a lot of women have children out of wedlock and usually drop out of school. If we as black parents have no knowledge there is nothing that we can teach our kids except survival.

Asian students do better on average than other students, this has a lot to do with culture. In 2000, a majority (54%) of Asian Americans ages 25-29 had a bachelors degree, as compared to with just a third of (34%) of whites. (Blankstein 34). One reason Asian students are excelling at a compelling rate is that their parents have very high expectations for their children and failure is never an option for them. Another reason, Asian students perform better is because they watch less television than their counterparts.

A study from Northwestern University titled, “ Children, Media, and Race”, shows that black kids watch more television than others. Black children

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watch more than four hours a day and Asians watch less than two. ” (Blankstein 27). “ Asian youths are successful, Steinburg writes, “ Not because of their stronger belief in the payoff for their doing well, but because they have greater fear of the consequences of not doing well. ”(Rochester 121). The last reason Asian students do better than the average American student is because their parents have a higher income than most. (Thernstorm 89).

Socioeconomic status, plays an important role in child's education. According to history, it would appear that black children have been set up for failure ever since we arrived in America. “ From colonial times, educational opportunities for African Americans were extremely limited. ” (Sharp 8). White Americans often used several cruel techniques to make blacks feel inferior including, segregation, discrimination, and lack of education. The fourteenth amendment guaranteed that all Americans were to have equal protection under the law.

At the end of slavery many freed slaves knew that education was vital to their survival and immediately went to register for school. Whites feared this movement, they knew that if blacks received an education and training they would longer depend on the them and their dependency was crucial for the southern economy. ( Sharp 21). During the 1870's at the end of the Reconstruction era whites quickly leaped into action to stop blacks from receiving an education even though there was a law that stated all Americans should be treated equally.

The Jim Crow laws, which were a set of laws that enforced the practice of segregation or discrimination against blacks in public places, employment,

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and other areas of social life. ( Volkomer 318). In the case of Plessy v. Ferguson, an African American Louisiana man had been jailed in 1896 for refusing to sit in the “ black” section of the train. Just when blacks thought they making some headway the Court ruled that as long as the same facilities that were provided for whites were provided for blacks then the Fourteenth Amendment had not been violated. (Volkomer 318).

This decision grabbed the attention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which was founded by W. E. B Du Bois and other great African Americancivil rightsleaders. The main purpose of the NAACP was “ to achieve, through peaceful and lawful means, equal citizenship rights for all American citizens by eliminating segregation and discrimination in housing, employment, voting, schools, the courts, transportation, and recreation. ” (Sharp 18). Founder W. E. B.

Du Bois, the first African American to earn a doctorate degree atHarvardUniversity, felt that “ education was the most was the most priceless possession a black person could have. ” In his book titled, “ The Educating of Black People. ”, he wrote, “ Education must not simply teach work, it must teach life. ” (DuBois 37). The rivalry between DuBois and Booker T. Washington was a break through moment in African American history. While DuBois felt that education was the best opportunity for blacks Washington on the other hand felt somewhat differently.

Agriculture to Washington was one of his soul ideas of his “ racial uplift” theory. “ Washington offered black acquiescence in disenfranchisement and social segregation if whites would back the idea of black progress in education, agriculture, and economics. ” (Rochester 79). This man used his

undeniable wit and political savvy to convince white Southerners that his educational program would keep black people “down on the farm” and in return he promised blacks that through work ethics they could achieve the American Dream and become not only business men but land owners as well.

This political opinion clashed with what DuBois thought was appropriate for the blacks at that present time. I mean weren't blacks trying to get off “the farm” and into classrooms to educate themselves? Even though DuBois viciously disagreed with Washington's view he did however, acknowledge him for being one of the first black intellectuals to defend the black race. DuBois writes, “Negroes must insist continually, in season and out of season, that voting is necessary to modern manhood, that color discrimination is barbarism, and that black boys need education as well as white boys.” (DuBois 63).

While blacks had won the war on slavery, the battle on education was still in progress. Black leaders of the Civil Rights movement like Thurgood Marshall and Charles Houston that fought long and hard so that black children would be able to receive equal educational opportunities. Civil Rights, are defined as the right of an individual not to be discriminated against on the basis of their race, sex, or nationality. The education that blacks received in the South during those times foreshadow our culture and the negligent attitudes of black parents.

For years blacks have fought for not only their freedom but the right to have an education, it seems that the parents of today have forgotten the many sacrifices their forefathers made for them. Not only were the lessons being

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taught inferior to those of the white students but the conditions in which the children had to endure almost made it impossible for them to learn. The books that were given to blacks were often used and were filled with racial and derogatory terms. To add insult to injury the curriculum within the the text books focused more so on the inferiority of blacks.

It was said to have contained lessons that African Americans were referred to as " ignorant and helpless people who were unable to survive without the help of a benevolent and superior white society. " ( Sharp 15). Most of the schools did not have desks and chairs, a black board for the teacher to write instead, the teachers used cardboard to teach lessons, more times than most there were no bathrooms in the schoolhouse and the children had to go outside to relieve themselves. With these horrendous conditions how did whites think that black children were receiving " equal" education compared to the white children?

The answer to that question is they didn't, they figured that if they made it hard almost impossible for the blacks that they would just roll over and conform to their way of life. In an article titled " The Willie Lynch Letters. ", which was written by Willie Lynch, a British slave owner he said, " Keep the body; Take the mind. " He wrote this letter to help slave owners keep their Negro slaves dependent on them. (Abbott 4). Even when faced withadversitythe black community did not falter nor did they give up on their hopes anddreamsfor their their child's future.

In 1926, African American parents formed a group called the Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers. They worked tirelessly and feverishly to inform the state of Mississippi of the injustice that they allowed to continue.

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We have come a long way from the Plessy v. Ferguson, Brown v. the Board of Education, and Martin Luther King Jr. infamous “ I Have A Dream” speech, but many will argue that we still have some ways to go. We are not where we used to be yet we are not where we want to be.

From slavery to the Jim Crow laws to the No Child Left Behind Act we as parents must continue to fight against the injustices that either we created or society. Civil Rights leaders have fought and died for our little black children to have the same equal rights and it seems like the parents of today have forgotten about our history, this is our culture which has shaped black America into the cultural rich and diverse nation in which we live. Parents of black children must not allow fear to cloud our judgment when it comes to trusting our child's teachers.

One reason these parents do not confide in the teachers is because of fear. We are afraid of failure, failing our children because of our ignorance. Majority of the time there are programs and services that are out there to help families that are struggling in areas of their home life. Until this gap is closed parents will continue to shelter their child from success. “ Black parents and Black communities are ultimately responsible for the education of Black children. Not teachers! Not schools! Not elected officials! We are responsible!

If our children are being destroyed in American schools, it is only because we allow it. ” (Muhammad 5). “ It is often argued that the low education achievement levels of African- Americans and Hipics are caused bypoverty. ” ( Strauss 12). Parents of black children usually earn less than parents of any other race and it is the black children that are failing. Valerie Strauss author <https://assignbuster.com/why-are-black-boys-failing-in-school/>

of, “ The Way out of the Black Poverty Cycle. ”, says that, “ It is often argued that the low education achievement levels of African- Americans and Hipics are caused by poverty. ” (Strauss 38).

She feels that poverty plays a vital role in the education of the black child. She continues with, “ if there were more programs to help the black youth improve education this would help alleviate the high rates of incarceration among black males. ” (Strauss 14). She feels that the lack of adequate education in the black community is the number one cause in the high rates of black males dropping out of school and ending up in prison. Once they are released from prison most have little or no skills to find employment adequate enough to provide for the family they have left behind thus, the family remains impoverished.

Gabriel Trip author of, “ Proficiency of Black Students is Found to Be Far Lower Than Expected. ”, says that, “ Only 12% of black 4th grade boys are proficient in reading, compared with 38% of white boys. ” (Trip 3). While this is true Trip feels that, “ Poverty alone does not seem to explain the differences: poor white boys do just as well as African- American boys who do not live in poverty. ” (Trip 8). This author thinks that if Congress would appropriate more money to the failing black schools and establish more networks for young black males that would be more productive rather than , just closing the failing schools all together.

The final topic I will discuss is the absence of the father figure in the young black males life and how it has a major affect on the child's education. Mike Casserly, director of Council of the Great City Schools asks, “ How can we close or narrow the country's black-white achievement gap when African -

American males are not getting the attention and support they need. ” (Casserly 3). The reason black males are not the getting the attention they need to succeed is because their fathers are not involved in their lives.“

The father's guidance to his children and his counsel regarding their anxieties and problems gives them that confidence and a feeling of affection which is necessary to the building of well-rounded personalities. ” (Paige 17). Thirty-six percent of the father's that are currently incarcerated reported that they have one or more school age children. ( Drucker 7). Black children that grow up without a father or a positive male role in their lives have very little direction and often get involved with the wrong crowds.

Studies have shown that children who their father is not in their lives stand the risk of becoming alcohol and drug addicts than other children. (Paige 5). Contrary to many beliefs a father's presence plays an important role in their child's lives. In the case of the black father and the black male child, the father is either incarcerated or has never been involved in the child's life. So there leaves a single mother trying to work and provide for her struggling family because the father is now where to be found.

As Richard Wright writes, in his novel titled “ Black Boy”, “ As the days slid past the image of my father became associated with my pangs of hunger, and whenever I felt hunger I thought of him with deep biological bitterness. ” (Wright 125). This is an example of the negative image and feelings that a young boy will develop for his father when he is not involved. It is impossible for the mother to monitor her children twenty-four hours a day, she cannot be everywhere at once.

Like the saying goes, “ While the cat is away the mice will play.” this leaves the child alone usually in the evening when the child should be studying they are more than likely outside or watching television. “ Under constant watch, care, and concern, children are less likely to experiment with extremes of behavior when they know they have two parents who are watching their every move. ” (Paige 12). It is understandable that divorce and break-ups do and does happen often, the father should still be involved in their son's life. When it comes to discipline mothers are just softer and more reluctant than the father, which leaves the boys free to do whatever it is that they want to do.

“ Studies have shown that when a father is not present in a home, children are more likely to derail and exhibit bad and dangerous behavior. ” (Paige 13). Father's may be unaware that their presence has such dramatic affects on their child's life as well as their educational goals. Children emulate their parents behavior and if the father is non existent soon so will the child. Majority of the black males that are failing live in crime ridden urban cities, where gangs and liquor stores outnumber community centers and churches. Without a father's love and concern what conclusion can one draw about the future of the young black male?

Surely he will wind up in a street gang where he robbing, stealing, and maybe even killing but this stereotype does not have to become a reality of underprivileged black males. There are several tips that can be given for single mothers of black male children whose fathers are either incarcerated or chose not to be involved in the lives of their children. First, mothers must realize that two heads are better than one, meaning even if the father is not

involved find an uncle, brother, or even a male friend of the family that would be willing to assist you.

Second, ask for help. Black mothers are so afraid of being looked at as a “bad mother” that we do not ask for help even when we are on the verge of breaking down. There are a lot of services within one's community that may have several programs like the Big Brother/Big Sister program, that provides positive role models for children. Third, mothers must break the cycle. Education is the key to getting out of that low paying minimum wage job and have an opportunity to have convenient hours and better benefits.

Lastly, nothing can replace the presence of a loving, nurturing, and concerned father but there are close substitutes. The failure of black young males is a nationwide epidemic. While I have only visited a few reasons as to why they are failing like, poverty, lack of guidance, and the absence of the father this is just the tip of the iceberg. I fear that unless “WE”, meaning the parents, teachers, political leaders, community advocates, and neighbors wake up and realize that this is not an easy fix, that this is not something that can be swept under the rug and forgotten about, they will continue to fail.