

## Black Male Teachers: Diversifying the United States' Teacher Workforce

by Lewis C. and Toldson I.

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### Introduction

As a former black male teacher, teacher leader and school leader with over 20 years of experience, I found the book *Black Male Teachers: Diversifying the United States' Teacher Workforce* to be a needed contribution to the conversation about increasing the diversity the K-12 teachers. Having a teacher workforce that reflects the increasing diversity of the nation's K-12 student population is necessary to ensure the academic achievement of all students, and it has been well documented in the scholarly research literature. [Ladson-Billings \(2009, p. 161\)](#) described the need in American schools to employ teachers who can teach all students regardless of their culture. Ladson-Billings is the first researcher to coin the term, "culturally relevant teaching," she identified the characteristics of teachers who can meet the instructional needs of culturally diverse students. She goes on to describe these teachers in the following way, "Culturally relevant teachers utilize students' culture as a vehicle for learning".

The decision to intentionally identify the areas in need of diversification within the teacher population is a necessary first step. As we examine the US teacher population, there is a segment of teachers often underrepresented and in some cases misunderstood, and they are black male teachers. The need to examine and address the underrepresentation of black males in the teaching profession is a complex issue. This dilemma is an adaptive challenge. [Heifetz et al. \(2009\)](#) described adaptive challenges as challenges that cannot be easily and simply addressed by logistical and or practical solutions. Often, these challenges are functions of race, gender, culture, norms and beliefs. Thus, the factors impacting black males entering into and remaining in the teaching profession are multifaceted.

This book, *Black Male Teachers: Diversifying the United States' Teacher Workforce* examined the critical factors that impacted the participation of black males in the teaching profession. Drs Chance Lewis and Ivory Toldson masterfully assembled a variety of scholars to create a collection of manuscripts depicting the diverse factors that impact black males entering into and remaining in the teaching profession. Moreover, Lewis and Toldson described how conventional approaches to address this shortage are inadequate and that any method used to deal with this issue must be detailed and thoughtful.



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### Organization of the book

This book is separated into five sections comprising 18 chapters, with each section building off of the previous, resulting in a comprehensive portrait of black male teachers and school leaders in the USA. By the conclusion of this book, readers will have an increased understanding of the complex issues black male teachers face. This book serves as a guide and resource for stakeholders who desire to increase the numbers of black males in the teaching profession. Lewis and Toldson contend:

*Black Male Teachers* is a book to provide black male teachers with the resources to advance in the profession, teacher education programs with needed training materials to accommodate black male students, and school district administrators with information to help recruit and retain black male teachers (p. 13).

The book is divided into five sections to introduce the book, examine scholarship of black male teachers in US classrooms, voices of current black teachers and voices of leading scholars.

### Section I: Introduction

Section I serves as the introduction for the book, and it comprises two chapters authored by each of the book's editors. In the first chapter of the book, Lewis set the context for the subsequent sections and chapters of the book by presenting the case for the need for black male teachers by chronicling and describing the stages of black male teacher pipeline. This opening chapter sets the context for this work by telling the data story of black males within the American education system, as they matriculate through high school and college, and as they entered the teaching profession. In the latter sections of the chapter, Lewis provided the rationale for subsequent sections of the book by describing the general theme that unites the chapters of each section. Lewis described the book like this:

The research and ideas presented in this book expand our knowledge base to paint a clearer picture of issues surrounding this unique population [Black male teachers] in the US teaching force (p. 10).

In Chapter 2, Toldson discussed the role that race plays in the classroom by examining the racial disparities that exist among the current American teaching population. Toldson goes on to describe the importance of having black male teachers in American schools. He opens his chapter by posing the question, "Do black kids have problems in schools because so few teachers look like them?" (p. 15). While this question is more complex than it may appear, by asking this question, Toldson inserts students in the center of the present discussion regarding black male teachers. Moreover, Toldson asserted the need to increase black male teachers will be in the best interest of the students whom these men teach.

### Section II: scholarly examinations of black male teachers in US classroom

Section II of this book comprises ten chapters. Each chapter provided a glimpse into the multiple dynamics that impact black male teachers by examining or answering several broad and sometimes rhetorical questions.

### Am I black enough and smart enough to teach black children?

This question provided some context for the readers to get a snapshot of some of the experiences of black male teachers. In Chapter 3, Brockenbrough examined the intraracial dynamics of black male teachers and their black students in a southern black community. Brockenbrough described the delicate dance of "blackness" that the black male teachers in

his study engaged in with some of their black students and parents. The description of these interactions depicts a complicated narrative of the perceptions of “blackness” that are held by some the students and members of the community. This chapter described how the black racial identity of the black teachers is questioned. Brockenbrough described this phenomenon in this way:

The scrutiny of the study participants’ racial authenticity emerged as a key dilemma. From being accused of “acting white” to being considered an “uppity Negro”, participants sensed the boundaries that marked them as inauthentic and unrelatable in the eyes of some black students and parents (p. 36).

In Chapter 4, Croke, Dale and Ebenstein described a program where black male para-educators are trained to become fully certified teachers. In many cases, para-professionals are the hidden gems in the school house. As a former teacher and a school leader, I saw this first-hand and their ability to establish positive relationships with the students, as they assist the classroom teachers to deliver instruction and to create a safe and orderly learning environment. Data from the study described in this chapter illuminate that when given the opportunity and proper support, black male para-professionals can successfully make the transition to become teachers.

### **Do black female students need black male teachers, too?**

In Chapter 5, Crowell, Woodson and Rashid explore the male/female dynamic for black male teachers and their black female students. The authors of this chapter highlight the absence of literature that addresses the idea that black females can benefit from black male teachers. The dominant theme in the scholarly literature highlights the need for black male students to have positive role models in the form of black male teachers. As a former black male teacher, I have found that black female students need black male teachers as well. This chapter explores the interactions between black male teachers and their black female students. The authors presented a thought-provoking examination of the teacher–student relationship by introducing a framework called the gender dynamic awareness model. Learning and unpacking this model should be mandatory for all male teachers as a mechanism to raise awareness of the gender dynamics in the classroom.

### **Can black male teachers teach math?**

While the need to increase the number of black male teachers is the topic of this book, targeting specific teacher shortage content areas to focus on recruitment could prove to be fruitful. As a former black male mathematics teacher, I found Chapter 6 written by Davis, Frank and Clark to be of great interest. They presented findings from a case study of a black male mathematics teacher and provided a snapshot of the teacher by documenting his family’s influence to encourage him to enter into the education profession, and by sharing some of his milestones on his journey to the classroom and the sociopolitical climate that he teaches. This chapter served as a counter narrative to the notion that black students, especially males, can persist and achieve in mathematics. Moreover, this chapter presented some nuisances with respects to the participant’s learning experiences with the mathematics content in college. This chapter along with others provides a framework to discuss the recruitment and retention of black male mathematics teachers.

### **Why do black men want to teach?**

The remaining six chapters of this section discuss the climate surrounding black men entering the teaching profession. Chapter 7 presented four themes that emerged from a

study of four black male teachers. The author, Tafari, masterfully used the narrative methodology to give a voice to these teachers. She describes her goals like this:

My goal was to highlight these four black male teachers and to share their stories. Each of these stories is unique and passionate, and I hope that more black men will be “called” to take this important path (p. 104).

I concur with Tafari and I also hope more black males will enter the teaching profession.

Chapter 8 continues this dialogue by using the voices of two pre-service black male teachers attending a predominately white institution. The chapter author by Hill-Carter engaged these young men in a critical dialogue surrounding their perspective on how to get more black men to teach. While simply getting black men into the classroom may appear to be a daunting task, there still exists many more complex issues that emerge once the black men arrive in the classroom.

In Chapters 9 and 11, the authors discuss some of the unrealistic expectations placed on black male teachers once they enter the classroom. In Chapter 9, Jackson, Boutte and Wilson document and unpack the expectations placed on black male teachers as they enter urban schools. This study highlighted the vacuum of authority that exists in many urban schools. Unfortunately, black male teachers are placed at the center of this authority vacuum and expected to bring order to chaos. As a 6'4 240-pound black male teacher, I was often seen as the disciplinarian and authority figure in many urban and suburban schools that I worked in. In Chapter 11, Morris and Morris described the roles that black male teachers played in the segregated schools of the past by sharing interview results of seven teachers who taught during that period.

In Chapter 10, Viesca, Bianco and Leech shared findings from a case-study where they describe two black male teenagers, enrolled in a pre-college program, who wanted to become teachers. The findings in this chapter are so relevant because it supports Dr Chance Lewis' chapter one assertion of the importance high school graduation as the first stage of the black male teacher pipeline. It also highlights the need for more school districts to develop or adopt high school teacher preparation programs to help increase the number of black male teachers.

The last chapter of this section, Chapter 12, concluded with a narrative of a black male teacher. Warren reflects on his experiences as he matriculated through a teacher education program and his early years as a classroom teacher. His experiences portray a picture of wins and losses, challenges and triumphs. He described these challenges in this way:

The problem of black males' underrepresentation in the teaching profession is exacerbated when those who do pursue a teaching career are continually abused, marginalized, and mistreated (p. 177).

Warren's story described how writing and reflecting on their experiences could be a source of therapy.

### **Section III: the voices of current black teachers**

Section III of this book comprises four chapters that provided a snapshot of classrooms that are currently led by black male teachers. These chapters are powerful narratives that illustrate the effort, care and concern these teachers invest in their classrooms and students. In Chapter 13, Newell provides five practical strategies for parents and students he found successful. In Chapter 14, Alhassan reflected on his personal experiences, and he identified those experiences that would be helpful to black male students. In Chapter 15, Golden challenged the teacher education community to move beyond the rhetoric of diversifying the

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teacher profession to creating a viable structure that promotes and support diversity in the classroom. This section concluded with Chapter 16 where Miller compares his role as a history teacher to discipleship. He described his moral obligation to use history as a mechanism to educate black youth. He states:

Many of our black male students, and urban students in general, are unaware of who they are because they have no frame of reference when it comes to their history. What they know is what they've been told by society. To teach history accurately, is to teach truth (p. 221).

This section provided a voice for black male teachers by allowing them an opportunity to share their experiences.

#### **Section IV: voices of leading scholars**

Chapter 17 of this book extends this discussion beyond black males as classroom teachers; it addresses topics of black males as educational leaders. In this chapter, Fenwick and Akua explore the dynamics that influence black males decision to enter into school leadership. Unfortunately, the shortage of black males exists among multiple levels in the education profession and leadership. In the 18th and final chapter of this book, Flowers shares quantitative data of pre-service black male teachers. He identified the importance of self-regulation as a predicator of academic success of black male education majors.

#### **Reviewer's reflection**

As a black male who has spent over two decades as a teacher, teacher leader and an administrator in public schools, I found this book to be timely and appropriate. This book encapsulates the thoughts, observations and experiences that I have had during my career in K-12 education. While the editors did an excellent job of identifying salient topics that speak to the multiple perspectives and complex issues that contribute to the underrepresentation of black male teachers, there are several areas that would benefit from further discussion. First, the teaching profession would benefit from an increase in black male teachers at the early childhood and elementary (primary and intermediate) levels. Identifying strategies for the targeted recruitment and retention of black male teachers at the early childhood and elementary levels would be mutually beneficial for the profession and students. Second, I would recommend a reevaluation of the culture of early childhood and elementary teacher education programs. As noted in this book, the majority of the teachers are female, and therefore, the culture of teacher education programs may unconsciously favor female students over male students.

Another area the teaching profession would benefit from is an increased representation of black male teachers in gifted education and special education. As a former gifted education teacher who was also responsible for writing and revising gifted curricula and providing professional development to teachers of gifted students who were often shocked and sometimes awe when I arrived to conduct a professional development training. I think that there is a need for research and strategies to educate and recruit more black males into the teacher education program and profession as [Bryan and Ford \(2014\)](#) call for to increase the number of these teachers in gifted education.

A final area that needs to be addressed in the profession is providing support for black male teachers teaching in American schools that are from other countries. These teachers are among the underrepresented and misunderstood population of black men teachers. This special issue provides insight into the experiences of black male teachers and school leaders

in American and international teacher education programs, classroom and schools throughout the teaching profession. Increasing the presence of black male teachers in US classrooms can provide validation for students of color and expose ALL students to varying perspectives of education, culture and human interactions.

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### **Further reading**

- Lewis, C. and Toldson, I. (Eds). (2013), *Black Male Teachers: Diversifying the United States' Teacher Workforce*, Emerald Group Publishing, Bingley.

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