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## "We Dare Say Love": Supporting Achievement in the Educational Life of Black Boys (Book Review)

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“*We dare say love*”: *Supporting Achievement in the Educational Life of Black Boys*, edited by Na’ilah Suad Nasir, Jarvis R. Givens, and Christopher P. Chatmon, New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2019, 148pp. ISBN 9780807761076. \$36.95.

**Reviewed by** Kala Burrell-Craft, *Old Dominion University*.

“*We dare say love*”: *Supporting Achievement in the Educational Life of Black Boys* provides readers the opportunity to share in the journey of dreaming, implementing, and sustaining an anti-deficit program for Black boys in Oakland Unified School District. This in-depth case study by edited Nasir, Givens, and Chatmon is rooted in their love for Black boys. Nasir, Givens, and Chatmon follow these young men and the small group of Black male educators who love and fight for educational spaces that allow these young Black men to be nurtured and supported.

The African American Male Achievement (AAMA) initiative started in Oakland Public Schools in 2010 as an attempt to counter and resist the dominant narratives that exist of African American males within our society. Expanding upon Oakland’s history of activism, the AAMA initiative sought to empower and affirm our Black male youth through love, culturally responsive teaching, and learning. Spanning ten chapters, the authors lay out for educators, readers, advocates, and lovers of Black males the blueprint of creating such a program through the framework of “politicized caring.” Politicized caring is meant to be intentional, political, and remarkably visible.

Opening with a reference from Toni Morrison’s novel *Song of Solomon* (2004), the book begins with the character Henry Porter saying that the costs of love are formidable when hate is the only register one knows the world to speak from (p. 1). America has proven itself to be well-adjusted to Black suffering (Dumas, 2014), and particularly for African American males. This book unpacks in an up-close and personal way “how Blackness and maleness interact in unique ways, both in terms of Black male students’ identity development, and also with respect to how Black males and their actions are often interpreted in school contexts” (Curry, 2017; Givens, 2016; Nasir et al., 2013). AAMA has supporters and involved stakeholders at multiple levels, including students, community activists, district officials, research scholars, and teachers. These critical stakeholders identify the problems that Black male students’ experience and support them in navigating those challenges in healthy and mentally appropriate ways. This is done alongside “fierce, explicit criticism of things like white supremacy, police violence, and the limited portrayals of Black masculinity via patriarchal societal norms” (p. 6).

While the book offers no definitive solution for reconciling Black male schooling experiences across our nation, the book does a wonderful job sharing how the AAMA initiative has created a safe and identity affirming space for the Black boys in their community. Highlighting the words and experiences of the students, their teachers, and stakeholders affords readers the opportunity to see the level of commitment, planning, and strategy that is required to effectively counter the school-to-prison pipeline structure many schools are built upon, but including some of the definitive solutions that have worked in sustaining the program would have been even more powerful for other program leaders as they implement, grow, or sustain similar programs. The authors make it clear that there is no one size fits all approach to counter the long-standing, persistent injustices that occur in schools against Black males and females (the book includes a chapter discussing the lack of support for Black female students as well). I thought it was interesting that a book about Black boys would contain a chapter about Black girls. I am aware that many of the struggles in the educational system are shared by both boys and girls, but I feel it is important for each of them to have their own space. Black boys are important and Black girls are important. I question why the authors felt it was necessary to give Black girls a piece of the attention when they deserve a whole book of their own. Nonetheless, the authors explicitly state that any program or initiative implemented with the love of Black students in mind must

1) explicitly acknowledge the past failures of schools to meet the needs of Black male students; 2) attend to the social-emotional trauma experienced by Black male students (which extends beyond school); 3) make an unyielding commitment to care about them in ways that validate their experiences; and 4) be willing to construct unconventional structures of support to meet the needs of Black male students based on their needs as children and as a distinct group of learners. (p. 9)

I highly recommend this book to educators at all levels and pre-service teachers. More educators need to see and hear how the problem exists within themselves and not with Black students from disadvantaged communities. Black students are children that should be nurtured, supported, encouraged, and taught equitably. This book sheds light on some of the structures of oppression that Black students face to obtain an education in America. Everything is not free, and everything is not equal. Black education comes with a price and AAMA attempts to lay many of those issues on the table, allowing educators to critically examine and reconstruct current practices. This case study by Nasir, Givens, and Chatmon is lacking nothing, but could easily expand upon the collected data from this study. I would have liked to hear more narratives from the students, especially as it relates to their reflection of their journey and how the AAMA initiative has impacted their lives and mindset. All educators, policymakers, community activists, and educational stakeholders would benefit from the perspective this case study provides in meeting the needs of Black students and creating educational spaces that positively impact their identity development.

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