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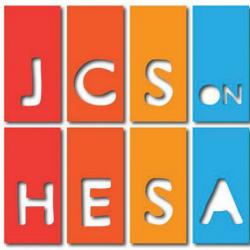
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Book Review

Black Minds Matter

**Realizing the Brilliance, Dignity, and Morality of
Black Males in Education**

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Black minds matter: Realizing the brilliance, dignity, and morality of Black males in education. (2019). Jonathan Luke Wood. Montezuma. 185 pp., \$20.49 (paperback). ISBN 978-0-7442-7494-3.

Introduction

The experiences of Black boys and men in U.S. education is a topic which has sustained increased attention from various audiences over the past few decades. Among the discourse lies a rhetoric that positions this population in a manner that calls to question if and how education regards and values Black boys and men in U.S. society. Such questions sustain relevance due to systemic and pervasive issues in this country and its education systems, which strikingly and continually positioned Black boys and men as a problem (Howard, 2013). As a direct call to action challenging these issues, *Black Minds Matter* introduces pivotal and thought-provoking ways educators, policymakers and leaders can best support and care for this population. In 2015, The Education Trust-West published the *Black Minds Matter Report* focused on the experiences and outcomes of Black learners in the State of California. This report was significant to the field of education and specifically to the work of scholars like J. Luke Wood. The report provided a clear context for education in the State of California and simultaneously illuminated implications for the experiences of Black boys and young men across the country. In addition to this report, Tyrone Howard's (2016) scholarship influenced Wood's authoring of this text, signifying a need to position the "humanity and dignity for the education of Black children" as "critical in today's given context" (Wood, 2019, p. 102). Collectively, the information gathered in the Education Trust report, scholarship on Black boys & men and the narrative experiences of this scholar and other Black men would serve, in part, as the impetus for the Dr. Wood's (2019) text, *Black Minds Matter: Realizing the Brilliance, Dignity, and Morality of Black Males in Education*.

The significance of this book is twofold: (a) it calls into question the role educators play in the development, advocacy, and support of Black men and boys in education, and (b) it provides readers with approaches that may guide praxis and pedagogical approaches in educational environments all over the country. Wood intersects counter-narratives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), prior research on Black boys and men, and introduces the Black Minds Matter Pedagogy (BMMP) to raise awareness of the need for civil resistance in the classroom to advocate for this population. To inform educators and scholars of this contribution, this book review unpacks the relevant literature significant for today's education context referenced in the text and brings about a greater call to action toward the future of teaching, research, and service for educators. In this review, I introduce the author to illuminate his contexts and their significance in the creation of the book. Throughout the text, Wood shares his own experiences through a reflective lens (i.e., personal narratives) at the conclusions of each chapter. These reflections help to theoretically illustrate the narrative approach embedded throughout the text. Additionally, this review expounds on how education might reimagine advocacy and care for Black boys and men in the classroom. I also center BMMP introduced in this volume as a key pedagogical contribution to the field. Lastly, I conclude with critical reflections of Wood's text, offering areas of focus for those whose praxis and scholarship intersect with this population.

About the Author: Informing the Text

Wood serves as Dean's Distinguished Professor of Education at San Diego State University. He is the first Black distinguished professor in the institution's history. He also serves as Vice President of Student Affairs and Campus Diversity at the institution. As a scholar, he is well regarded for his research surrounding Black men in multiple education contexts. As Wood presents this text, the inspiration of this volume emerged through multiple avenues. In addition to the *Black Minds Matter* (2015) report and the work of

notable scholars, Wood threaded pedagogical engagement with teachers, learners, and community from around the country and world and infuses research and storytelling, illuminating his own experiences as well as the lived experiences of other Black boys and men in the United States through his scholarship. For example, Wood introduces the story of Alfred Olan-go, a Ugandan refugee who was unfortunately and wrongfully slain by police. Alfred was unarmed, and the police mistook a vape smoker he had in his hand for a firearm. Similarly, Wood noted several high-profile murders of Black men and expounded on the unique relationships between them and how society frames Black men in society in relation to their educational experiences.

Woods' (2019) text is grounded by data from notable scholarship he has produced concerning Black men. The methods of these works include qualitative and mixed methods approaches. He employs research from several of his own works and collaborative works with notable scholars in the field of education. Collectively, qualitative data are intertwined throughout the text with statistics that fortify the narrative data illustrated. Wood (2019) particularly "highlight[ed] findings from three guidebooks currently used in the field. These guidebooks include *Supporting Men of Color in the Community College* (Wood & Harris III, 2017a), *Teaching Men of Color in the Community College* (Wood et al., 2015), and *Teaching Boys and Men of Color* (Wood & Harris III, 2017b)" (p. ix).

A Black Minds Matter Review

The purpose of *Black Minds Matter* is to provide counter-narratives of often untold stories concerning the experiences of Black boys and men in education. As a result of the findings and connections made throughout the text, Wood introduced a concept characterizing the subjugation of Black boys and men in education. Known as the "D-Three Effect," Wood (2019) articulated this framework as "patterns" utilized to "advance the deficit narratives of Black boys and men" (p. 63) in education and society. Here,

Wood thematically encompasses the research on Black men and utilizes the framework to illustrate a pervasive pathologizing of the population. These narrative themes birth the D-Three Effect, which Wood (2019) argued communicates negative stereotypes of distrust, disdain, and disregard both overtly and covertly regarding this group. Wood (2019) then introduced the BMMP to counter these deficit themes. BMMP emphasizes the need to center Black experiences in the classroom through educators' classroom facilitation. Wood (2019) also acknowledged significant movements that work diligently to shed light on ways in which Black boys and men are devalued. While news and popular media have (mis)informed issues related to Black boys and men, Wood (2019) paid specific homage to organizations such as the Black Lives Matter movement, which continue to shed light on the injustices faced in Black communities. Education is an institution that scholars and researchers have positioned as a microcosm of broader U.S. society. This text contextualizes this notion and showcases how similar forms of oppression Black boys and men face in the broader community also exists in the classroom and college campus.

To develop BMMP, Wood (2019) employed an "ideas grouping approach" (p. xi), which is a "modified grounded theory approach that is used for theory generation" (p. xi) in order to code the qualitative data from all the research projects included and utilized to develop the pedagogical framework. Additionally, it is important to note that Wood also teaches a direct course related to this pedagogy, the Black Minds Matter course, where educators from around the country convene to grapple with this topic. The course's curriculum and pedagogical lenses are grounded in BMMP to provide an additional layer of assessing the usefulness of the framework. This pedagogical approach has proven useful as it provides a platform for rising educators in pursuit of advocacy for Black boys and men, educators in search of developing culturally relevant pedagogical competency, and families (e.g., parents, guardians, and support systems) learn-

ing how to navigate the experiences their children and students may encounter within educational spaces. Collectively, similar themes emerge to combat the D-Three Effect. Rather than focusing on deficit narratives, Wood's framework suggests that educators and stakeholders rely on and "extol the Brilliance, Dignity, and Morality of Black Minds" (Wood, 2019, p. 64). Wood argued that such affirmations should and can inform holistic teaching and learning environments.

BMMP extends Woods' argument that in order to advocate for Black minds, then educators must assume and "embrace the philosophy of civil resistance in the classroom" (Wood, 2019, p. 2). To engage Black minds through a BMMP is to embrace the goal of dismantling oppressive sources of power. This occurs through nonviolent acts, which emphasize an ethic of love for Black minds. Wood is adamant in his position that Black lives cannot matter if their minds do not matter. The two concepts are intertwined, and Woods' positionality often challenges readers to consider civil resistance as a prerequisite to this process. Civil resistance must occur in the classroom because the classroom has been a location that fosters and preserves harm to Black minds. In fact, Wood mentioned that there has been an insistent inability to change a culture maintained by the premise of racism. While this remains a consistent issue, U.S. society increasingly distances itself from slavery and overt racism through calculated approaches. Wood (2019) argued that the fight against racism is becoming increasingly difficult, given that post-racial rhetoric currently permeates U.S. culture. Such rhetoric has tactfully masks the increased racialized experiences prevalent in the United States' institutions. Coupled with the increased and explicit violence against Black lives, this pedagogical approach serves as a mechanism to illuminate the pervasiveness of racialized oppression while shifting harmful thinking around Black boys and men at a crucial time. There have been active attempts to work against some of the more recent strides toward understanding and penetrating racism as a complex phenomenon (i.e., Critical Race Theory), and thus

the BMMP provides a more direct approach to critically examining ways in which educators engage with the learning and development of students while centering Black lives. In particular, Wood (2019) posited that teachers are successful in empowering Black boys and men when they "provide Black boys and men with opportunities to be leaders in learning spaces and activities" (p. 120), providing the opportunity to demystify harmful rhetoric of this population in the classroom.

Closing: A Critical Reflection

Concluding with my own thoughts on this text, Wood (2019) challenges educators, stakeholders, and readers to think about the ways in which Black boys and men matter. The parallels of the classroom to broader society and its institutions lay the groundwork for understanding complexity within U.S. society: The stark similarities to schools and legal systems via policy and practices are striking. What harms exist in schools often exist in other sectors of the United States. For Black boys and men, there is a unique, interlocking system harmful to their humanization in this country. A question that lingers for me is, where might these issues come from? Considering the role of education and its proposed notion to be a "great equalizer," one must ask does education reinforces issues like the negative portrayals of Black men, or does it work to liberate them? Since this question is of utmost importance to me, I am often left to consider what it might look like for educators and leaders to employ liberatory practices in their work. Wood urged educators to survey what positionalities they bring with them into the classroom while challenging them to think about the ways in which they might make Black boys and men equitable partners in the construction of knowledge. What does this process look like? Where do educators begin? As those responsible for facilitating Black boys' learning experiences, Educators must recurrently grapple with challenging questions like these, while understanding what we as human beings carry with us throughout the task. Im-

plications of Woods' BMMP may aid in shifting tides toward a type of education that centers the creativity and brilliance Black boys bring with them in the classroom, calling to question how educators provide a space conducive for the exploration and development of such qualities.

These realities challenge education to consider that "Black boys and men deserve to be leaders in learning spaces" (Wood, 2019, p. 121). Such an excerpt challenges us to ask important questions. In the context of schooling and in the spaces that engage in teaching and learning, how do Black boys & men see themselves? Further, how do we as educators, policymakers and leaders see them? How does this inform our engagement with this population? For Black men to be fully seen, we must continue to grapple here. In order for the dignity of Black boys and men to be restored and preserved, a reimagination of sorts is needed. The ways in which education reifies harmful policies and practices must be challenged, disrupted, and ultimately dismantled. *Black Minds Matter* may serve as an appropriate lens to carry out this task in classrooms and learning spaces. It is because this work calls for a further examination and proactively considers ways Black boys and men are pathologized in education, it shows promise. Because it challenges how representation contributes to the belongingness of Black boys and men in education, while challenging educators, policymakers, and leaders to consider the structures that they provide Black boys and men for learning, it provides an opportunity to challenge the status quo and norms that exist within and outside of education and the classroom. Such a lens on teaching and learning sees the inherent exclusion of education through ways in which disparities persist in classroom settings. For example, Wood (2019) noted that there are disproportionate numbers of White women in the classroom. The hidden messages portrayed through an access lens pay additional dividends in the ways in which Black boys and men think about the classroom. These issues are significant to think about and consider because they contribute to a significant trend

illuminated in many of the outcomes—the ongoing academic plight of Black boys and men and the stereotyping of them as less than capable of academic excellence. *Blacks Minds Matter* reminds readers that there must exist approaches that more effectively center and challenge these experiences.

Black Minds Matter is not only an educational call but a societal call to action. In another example, Wood (2019) highlighted three key stereotypes seen in ways that educators engage Black boys and men, which include (a) deemphasizing their academic talents, (b) showcasing Black men as criminals, and (c) depicting Black men through lesser than, "abhorrent" (p. 62) viewpoints. Because BMMP aims to challenge and shift deficit-informed rhetoric like these examples, it proactively calls into question the role education plays in the lives and minds of this population. A way to challenge these notions might be for educators to consider pedagogically what Black boys and men learn in the classroom. More specifically, who are they learning from and how? An effective *Black Minds Matter* approach might be to allow for true experiences of Black boys and men to exist in learning objectives. This text provides a groundwork to better understand more appropriate methods to foster healthy learning environments for Black boys and men.

Black Minds Matter centralizes the notion that education can and should be a vehicle for the public good. In that regard, *Black Minds Matter* challenges if education *actually* achieves this goal for Black boys and men. Education cannot exist for the public good if it does not see its public as whole human beings whose contributions are essential to moving society forward. Far too often, Black bodies are subjected to less than rhetoric through messages, texts, and people in learning spaces. This text reminds readers to center the minds of Black boys because the bodies of Black boys are misused and abused in by educators and policymakers alike. Combatting this requires intent, unlearning, and action. This involves understanding Black boys and men as complex, intersectional beings with complex, interpersonal experiences

which they carry with them into institutions. Woods' research captures the ways in which the intersection of racial and gendered oppression occurs for Black men in schools. Moving forward, an explicit naming of intersectional significance is crucial, as it centers on the need for a more individualized lens on Black boys and men. BMMP calls into question pedagogies that allow for one-size-fit-all approaches. This might help educators understand the nuances of being "Black" and "man" in schools, challenging the need for educators (and other stakeholders) to sharpen these lenses and knowledge on the complexities of Black experiences. Understanding the intricacies of Black boyhood amidst the current cultural milieu should be a crucial focus to move knowledge concerning BMMP forward. What might this pedagogy look like from the lens of cis heterosexual, trans*, gay, and bisexual men, who also may identify as Black? How do these nuances challenge educators of Black boys and men? What do scholars mean when we cite "males," and how does this impact pedagogical practice? How might class add to layers of understanding of Black boys and men's learning experiences in a society that has negatively targeted this group? This text can serve as the groundwork for continued research exploring these questions. It broadly surveys Black boys and men through a P-20 context to illuminate the severity of the challenges across education's various levels. Scholars should consider focusing on specific sectors of education to dive deeper in these experiences going forward to unearth effective practices for educators and policymakers alike. Wood's pedagogical approach might shift the ways in which harm manifests in and outside of the classroom, and this text brings hope toward giving Black boys and men more equitable learning experiences.

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