

A VOLUME IN CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON ACCESS, EQUITY, AND ACHIEVEMENT

BLACK MOTHER EDUCATORS

Advancing Praxis for Access, Equity, and Achievement



edited by

TAMBRA O. JACKSON

Black Mother Educators

A volume in
Contemporary Perspectives on Access, Equity, and Achievement
Chance W. Lewis, *Series Editor*

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Black Mother Educators

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Equity, and Achievement**

edited by

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FOREWORD

BLACK MOTHER EDUCATORS

Advancing Praxis for Access, Equity, and Achievement

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On the wall of my office hangs a large black and white etched charcoal print of a Black woman who is leaning beside a large water vase. Her head rests on her hand. Deep in thought, her gaze seems focused toward a distant light. Beautifully dressed in nonrestricting attire, nestled against a deeply textured background, she exudes a sense of confidence and wisdom. This print has adorned the walls of my office for over 20 years and serves as a constant reminder that I descend from a tradition of strong beautiful Black women, who oftentimes are required to look beyond the present situation to find the strength that my Black mothers have modeled for me so that I might pass it on to others in the struggle against racism, poverty, violence, and political and educational repression. Inspired by this print, the reflections that follow emerge from my own experiences as an educator, teacher educator, administrator, linguist, scholar, mentor, mother, “othermother.”

Having had a long career as an educator, I am deeply troubled by how little has changed in the overall schooling experiences of too many children, and for Black children in particular. For decades, scholars have been writing about multicultural education, culturally relevant/sustaining education, African American language, and other pedagogical tools and approaches for teaching Black children, yet Black children continue to be marginalized, minoritized, mistreated, and miseducated in most U.S. schools. On a daily basis, Black mothers send their children to school, and hope, pray, and wish that they come back affirmed, whole, and having learned something.

Years ago, I started a school for my children and other children because I knew that all children deserved to have the kind of education I desired for my own children. I made the decision to open the school when our own first child was born. I simply could not imagine leaving this precious gift on a daily basis to go elsewhere and share my passion for teaching with other people's children while leaving my own daughter in the custodial care of others. As I contemplated the senselessness of such a move, I wrestled with the thought that, while I was working tirelessly to create a learning environment in which students were being prepared to soar to unimagined heights as future intellectual and community leaders, my own child could possibly be spending her day in an environment where she was not being loved or stimulated to achieve to her own fullest potential. I began to imagine that there could be a scenario in which I could do both: provide an enriched learning experience for other people's children and provide a nurturing and stimulating learning experience for my own child. With the encouragement and support of my husband, Children's Creative Workshop was founded as a grass-roots, community-based, early educational center, eventually serving students in pre-K through third grade.

Other predominantly Black schools I'd worked in were characterized by large class size, regimented daily schedules, and curriculum that was generally uninteresting and lacking any semblance of cultural relevance. The early educational center that I opened specialized in its ability to provide small class sizes, a culturally rich curriculum that integrated Montessori theory and methodology throughout the program, and an abundance of parental and community involvement. The teaching staff was overwhelmingly Black women—Nona, JoAnn, Betty, Carol, Carolyn, Mrs. Allen, and Lynn—who lived in the community. Working with these teachers provided me with countless encounters with teachers who had a passion and a love for teaching our students—mostly African American students. These teachers were strong and articulate, firm yet warm and compassionate, demanding yet confident that their students could meet the high standards they set. Each of these teachers possessed a high degree of teacher efficacy—they were creative, loving, intellectually talented. They also possessed reflective optimism, that is, they held very high academic standards and strongly believed in their

students' capacity to achieve to the highest levels—and they wasted no time in letting the students and their parents know it. Most important, they were Black mother educators; they were protectors of the children in our school. Every student who entered the doors of our school was treated with dignity; and they departed with a sense of knowing that they were special, they were loved, they were valued. The school was in existence for over 11 years and many years after its closing I received messages from parents and graduates from the school who were now attending law school or graduating *cum laude* from various institutions of higher education across the United States. While working with these teachers, I observed, first hand, countless examples of the linguistic resources diverse students brought to the classroom and encountered teachers who developed rich, productive learning environments for African American students. Just as these teachers carried out the practices of othermothers at Children's Creative Workshop, the authors in this book have theorized their work, elaborated on their identities, and described the pedagogies used in the safekeeping of Black children.

In this edited volume, Tambra Jackson has assembled a collection of narratives from Black mother educators that illuminate the intersections of their identities as mothers and educators, and provide a complex layering of the personal and professional. Jackson gives special consideration to their roles as protectors of Black children. This book provides a very different assumption about the role of educators. The literature is replete with descriptions of how teachers view themselves in relation to the students they teach. However, teachers rarely describe themselves as protectors, particularly protectors of Black children. The Black mother educators in this volume turn an analytical gaze towards their praxis and the work they do on behalf of Black children. Each chapter provides readers with insights into the pedagogies and practices employed by Black mothers in their professional roles as educators to protect Black children from racially hostile learning spaces. Jackson's volume demonstrates that we are quite capable of studying ourselves, of writing about ourselves, and of telling our own stories. The narratives in this volume illuminate praxis that span PK–12 and into higher education.

This volume unapologetically highlights scholarship that emphasizes the necessity of ensuring that teacher education programs prepare preschool, elementary, secondary, and university educators to effectively and lovingly teach young Black children. It draws on a Black emancipatory framework to explain what it means to teach Black students in ways that are loving and healing so that students experience cultural, social, and academic excellence. The authors problematize the reality that schools and universities have served as sites of trauma for far too many African American students.

This book honors the voices, pedagogies, leadership styles, and practices of Black women principals as protectors of Black children through

othermothering, political activism, and a womanist tradition of caring in service to community uplift and survival. It talks about the role that HBCUs, undergraduate research programs, Freedom School programs, school counseling programs, and disability studies programs can play in improving student learning outcomes and their educational lives. It talks about how these institutional spaces often function in familial ways to nurture and protect minoritized, underserved, nontraditional students from feeling as though they do not belong, cannot succeed, and have nowhere in which they can feel comfortable, supported, and accepted. It further emphasizes the fact that these spaces remain under threat since they exist within places that are owned, policed, controlled, and confined by predominantly White institutions.

As this volume demonstrates, othermothering is an integral part of the work we do as Black mother educators. Black mothers love, protect, and chastise other people's children as if they were our own. Over the years, I have served as an othermother for preschool, elementary, secondary, and university students, for junior colleagues, and for mentees at every level. And given that the research confirms that widespread racial prejudice against Black people and generalized gender bias will continue, this positions all Black mothers, regardless of income level, as objects of discrimination but also as critically important entities. This suggests that a Black mother's financial resources will not privilege them against gender and racial violence. This means that Black mothers from every socioeconomic level will need to employ intensive protective strategies to care for their own and others children. Therefore, the curriculum of Black motherhood to sustain and bolster the community and the culture of Black people is greatly appreciated.

Jackson does not present the narratives in this volume as a panacea for solving complicated issues that impact Black children in school spaces. Rather, she positions Black mother educators as producers of knowledge and as important voices for action on behalf of Black children. This volume is essential in considerations of equity, access, and achievement for Black children. This book will have a place in my office right alongside the etched charcoal print of the Black woman. Together, they will serve as a catalyst, reminding me that the important work of Black mother educators continues. And each time I see the print, I will see how her intersectional identities as Black, woman, and mother has shaped her journey. I will see how her gaze must be focused on the enlightened struggle that she must wage against racism, poverty, violence, and political and educational repression. And I will see that she must seriously contemplate the work that she is called to do in the service of all children, but specifically Black children.

INTRODUCTION

BLACK MOTHER EDUCATORS

The Dora Milaje of Black Children in Schools

Tambra O. Jackson

From ages 3 to 5, I attended a preschool that was part of a church located in the inner city of my hometown. My mother selected the preschool primarily based on her desire for me to be taught Christian beliefs alongside my academic learning. She also did not like the status quo for Black children at that time in many of the city's public schools. She felt as though there were low expectations and limited opportunities for Black children. My mother selected this particular preschool because of the presence of Black women as teachers. My preschool teachers, Ms. Diane, Ms. Trulaine, and Ms. Claudia were Black women whose own children also attended the preschool. At that time, there was a test to enter kindergarten. Because they were Black mothers, my mother told me she trusted them, and she could tell that they had a plan for teaching us what we needed to know in preparation for kindergarten. After preschool, I was the only Black girl in my class for the majority of my schooling in parochial contexts from kindergarten through eighth grade. I attended a predominantly White high

school where I had one Black male teacher, but my preschool teachers were the only Black women teachers I had during my PK–12 years. Reflecting back on my experiences in school, I now realize that my preschool teachers gave me confidence as a learner. I also realize that my preschool teachers protected me from deficit perspectives about who I was as a Black learner. With the foundation they laid, I never felt inferior or incapable in school. I always felt as though I could figure it out. I know that I am not alone in experiencing the benefits of Black mother educators and their protection in school spaces, yet there is limited scholarship specifically focused on this group and their praxis.

In the movie, *Black Panther* (Feige & Coogler, 2018), the fictitious country of Wakanda and King T'Challa are protected and defended by the Dora Milaje (“adored ones”), a guild of women warriors. Though the Dora Milaje are fictional, their characterization of an all-female military group is connected to an actual group of female warriors in precolonial West Africa (now the Republic of Benin) known as the women soldiers of Dahomey (Coleman, 2018; Joubaud, Masioni, & Serbin, 2014). These women were an elite troop of soldiers and surpassed their male counterparts in courage and effectiveness in combat (Joubaud, Masioni, & Serbin, 2014). The women soldiers of Dahomey were assigned to be the personal protection for the king and the royal palace. They were a formidable military force that contributed greatly to the military power of the Kingdom of Dahomey and never fled danger. This is an example of a precolonial African society that, although positioned leadership power with a king, had transcended the norms of gender roles and foregrounded the physical, inner, and intellectual strength of women. The imagery of the Dora Milaje in the movie illustrates the multifaceted strength of the women soldiers of Dahomey in ways that resound with contemporary Black women, and more specifically Black mother educators. In this volume we posit that, similarly (albeit in nonfiction form), Black mother educators are uniquely positioned as the Dora Milaje of Black children in school settings. Important to note in this comparison is the role of Black mother educators as protectors.

In order to understand the characterization of protector for Black mother educators, I first discuss the context of schooling for Black children and describe the reasons why Black children need protection in school spaces. I then look at notions of Black motherhood and the ways in which the idea of protector is conceptualized within Black motherhood. From there, I briefly discuss the pedagogical practices of Black women teachers and their role in protecting Black children. I conclude with the ways in which Black motherhood has shown up in the professional practices of Black women educators and detail the outline for the organization of the book.

SCHOOLS AS SITES OF SUFFERING FOR BLACK STUDENTS

Persistent narratives about Black children in U.S. public schools are deficit-laden and position them as in need of fixing or being reformed. These narratives also situate the underachievement of Black students as an indicator of a Black pathology rooted in eugenics rather than the historical and systemic oppression of Black people in schooling spaces in the United States. Such discourse is so normalized that it was used as a plea for the Black vote in the 2016 presidential election from then candidate Donald Trump (Jackson & Flowers, 2017b). Thus, the entry point for uninformed discussion about the misinformation, misrepresentation, and the mistreatment of Black children in schools (Jackson & Flowers, 2017a) often starts with the outcomes of standardized test scores rather than the “educational debt” (Ladson-Billings, 2006) and “opportunity gaps” (Milner, 2012) that frame the context of underachievement of Black students. However, critical scholars offer analyses about the experiences of Black children in schools grounded in systemic racism and inequity (Allen, Davis, Garraway, & Burt, 2018; Zimmerman, 2018) and assert that for many Black children schooling is a site of suffering (Dumas, 2014). Black children are targeted in schools for simply being Black, and Black parents know these experiences all too well. Our children are targeted for their self-expression, cultural ways of being, and Black skin. Dress code policies are written with language that discriminates against Black youth’s self-expression through hair (Belsha, 2020). For example, a school outside of Atlanta made headlines due to a display of “inappropriate hairstyles” that depicted only Black children (Vigdor, 2019). Another story of the Black high school athlete, who was publicly humiliated by a White referee who would not allow him to compete unless he cut his dreadlocks, demonstrates the ways in which Black expression, specifically hair, is positioned as a problem even outside of the classroom (Washington, 2019). School discipline policies have been under scrutiny for the ways in which Black children are disproportionately represented in school suspensions, expulsions, and disciplinary infractions (The Advancement Project, 2005; Young, Young, & Butler, 2018). A study conducted by Yale Child Study Center (2016) exposes how this phenomenon of administering more frequent and harsher forms of disciplinary measures for Black students starts as early as preschool. The study revealed that preschool teachers tend to more closely observe and administer discipline for Black children, especially Black boys, over White children for misbehavior and disciplinary infractions. The surveillance of Black bodies in school spaces is pervasive, and the criminalization and dehumanization of Black children in schools is every Black parent’s reality regardless of social class, zip code, educational attainment, or professional status.

While the aforementioned examples center PK–12 contexts, higher education is not exempt from holding deficit views of Black students. Scholars have examined the ways in which Black students experience college and university campuses as racially hostile spaces (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Harper, 2015; Patton & Croom, 2017; Kelly, Gardner, Stone, Hixson, & Dissassa, 2019). Harper (2015) examined the experiences of 143 Black male college students considered high achievers and high-profile student leaders. His analysis reveals that despite the academic accomplishments of these students, they were not immune to being stereotyped by their White peers and professors.

Reportedly, White students on many of the campuses in this study often assumed that the achievers and other Black men could dance, knew where and how to find drugs, spoke broken English or used slang, knew the lyrics to rap and hip-hop songs, always came from urban high schools and economically impoverished neighborhoods, and were athletically gifted. (Harper, 2015, p. 658)

Similarly, in an analysis of the invisible emotional labor of Black women college students on predominantly White campuses, scholars found that Black women college students experienced anger, exhaustion, and alienation from being positioned in a performer role at historically White institutions:

Black women were in vulnerable positions as undergraduate students and felt pressure to conceal their true emotions of anger, exhaustion, and alienation in academically gendered/racist (among other oppressive) environments, in which they performed for peers to be included in study groups and for faculty who held power with grades. Black women participants struggled to maintain their gendered-racial intersectional identity development while performing within White spaces on campus. (Kelly et al., 2019, p. 5)

Given contemporary incidents that have made national headlines and subsequently drawn national attention to racial and state violence against Black bodies, scholars have elicited connections between physical violence and other forms of violence aimed at Black children in school spaces (Boutte & Bryan, 2019; Hines & Wilmot, 2018; Johnson, Bryan, & Boutte, 2019; Love, 2016, 2019). Johnson and colleagues (2019) posit five types of violence in schools (physical, symbolic, linguistic, curricular/pedagogical, and systemic school violence) that are interconnected and the nexus of pain and suffering for Black youth resulting in harm to their bodies, hearts, and minds. Moreover, scholars have explicated the notion of *spirit murdering* as a form of violence against Black youth in schools (Hines & Wilmot, 2018; Love, 2016, 2019). Love (2019) explains,

Legal scholar Patricia Williams coined the term “spirit murdering” to argue that racism is more than just physical pain; racism robs people of color of their humanity and dignity and leaves personal, psychological, and spiritual injuries. Racism is traumatic because it is a loss of protection, safety, nurturance, and acceptance—all things children need to enter school and learn. (para. 7)

As further contextualized by Hines and Wilmot (2018), “Spirit-murdering pedagogies are intended to murder the spirit (e.g., educational, human, intellectual, and inner-joy) through racist teaching practices, schooling culture, and curriculums rooted in White hegemonic pedagogies and policies” (p. 68). Thus, the protection of Black children in school spaces is warranted, and I posit that Black mother educators are uniquely positioned to take on the role of protector in schools.

BLACK MOTHERHOOD

This volume counters the prevailing deficit-based narratives of Black youth in schools by illuminating the teaching practices of Black mother educators. The exploration of Black mother educators as protectors of Black children in schools begins with an understanding of Black mothers. There is no question that Black mothers have a biological and ancestral commitment to nurturing and protecting our children. However, there is a distinction between the commonly known dangers to all children and the dangers of White racism, especially for Black children. In her analysis of motherhood for women of color, Collins (1994) writes,

Racial ethnic women’s motherwork reflects the tensions inherent in trying to foster a meaningful racial identity in children within a society that denigrates people of color. The racial privilege enjoyed by white, middle-class women makes unnecessary this complicated dimension of the mothering tradition of women of color. While white children can be prepared to fight racial oppression, their survival does not depend on gaining these skills. Their racial identity is validated by their schools, the media, and other social institutions. White children are socialized into their rightful place in systems of racial privilege. Racial ethnic women have no such guarantees for their children; their children must first be taught to survive in systems that oppress them. (p. 57)

In order to protect Black children, Black women have had to learn to first protect themselves. Black women have had to develop and rely upon wisdom (garnered from their own experiences and the experiences of other Black women) to navigate and survive systems of oppression and hegemony. Collins (1989) asserts,

As members of a subordinate group, Black women cannot afford to be fools of any type, for their devalued status denies them the protections that white skin, maleness, and wealth confer. This distinction between knowledge and wisdom, and the use of experience as the cutting edge dividing them, has been key to Black women's survival. (p. 759)

From a Black feminist thought perspective (Collins, 1989, 2009), a key question is: *How do Black mothers create knowledge and praxis that enables them and Black children to resist oppression?*

Acknowledging the fact that there is diversity amongst Black women, and therefore diversity of thought and practice also exists within the construct of Black motherhood, Collins (2009) asserts, "The institution of Black motherhood consists of a series of constantly renegotiated relationships that African-American women experience with one another, with Black children, with the larger African-American community, and with self" (p. 190). So as not to essentialize, she acknowledges the diversity that exists within the institution of Black motherhood while purporting enduring themes across the experiences of Black mothers. Collins puts forward five themes that characterize Black motherhood.

1. *Bloodmothers, Othermothers, and Women-Centered Networks:* While biological or bloodmothers are expected to raise and care for their children, African and African American communities recognize and value the sharing of mothering responsibilities. Women-centered networks of bloodmothers and othermothers are inclusive of biologically related women as well as "fictive kin" which demonstrates the notion of community responsibility for children. "The resiliency of women-centered family networks and their willingness to take responsibility for Black children illustrates how African-influenced understandings of family have been continually reworked to help African Americans as a collectivity cope with and resist oppression" (Collins, 2009, p. 197).
2. *Mothers, Daughters, and Socializations for Survival:* Black mothers bear a responsibility for teaching their daughters how to navigate the sexual and gendered politics of Black womanhood and oppression in order to survive. Black women teach their daughters that they must work and/or get an education to support themselves and their families, and Black daughters are also encouraged "to develop skills to confront oppressive conditions" (Collins, 2009, p. 198). This socialization is often evident in the emotional intensity of Black mother-daughter relationships.
3. *Community Othermothers and Political Activism:* The obligation that many Black women feel in their roles as othermothers for children in their community often develops into activism and com-

munity leadership. Inclusive to this theme is also the concept of “‘mothering the mind’ relationships that can develop between African-American women teachers and their Black female and male students” (Collins, 2009, p. 207).

4. *Motherhood as Symbol of Power*: Black women attain status and power in African American communities from their activist mothering as community othermothers. “Such power is transformative in that Black women’s relationships with children and other vulnerable community members are not intended to dominate or control. Rather, their purpose is to bring people along, to . . . ‘uplift the race’” (Collins, 2009, p. 208).
5. *The Personal Meaning of Mothering*: While Black mothers are valued within the African American community, “Black motherhood can be rewarding, but it can also extract high personal costs” (Collins, 2009, p. 211).

Drawing upon the themes that characterize Black motherhood, Black mothers resist oppression through their networks (familial, fictive kin, and community) with other Black women centered on raising and protecting Black children. Thus, Black children are socialized to value Black mothers and see them as a communal source of protection. This idea of Black mothers as protectors was on display for the entire world in the video of the murder of George Floyd. Though George Floyd’s mother was deceased, he believed that her protection was still real as he called out for her while being murdered. The spiritual underpinnings of his call were captured by Reverend Mary White, a Black woman, who offered prayer at his funeral in Houston. Reverend White eloquently described the response that mothers had as they viewed the heinous act when he called for his mother as he was being murdered.

Master, we thank you for the life of George Floyd, Oh God. That at a moment when he called out for his mama, we believe that the ears of mamas across this nation reared up; that the ears of mamas across this world heard him cry even though for one mama, all mamas began to wail. We began to wail for our children. We began to wail for our grandchildren. We wailed for men across this world because of one mama’s call. (NBC News, 2020)

Since Black mothers assume communal responsibility as othermothers and are valued by the community, it is then reasonable to consider the ways in which the characterization of Black motherhood is evidenced in the practice of Black mother educators.

THE POLITICAL CLARITY AND OTHERMOTHERING OF BLACK WOMEN TEACHERS

Scholarship on the practices and pedagogies of Black women teachers (Acosta, 2019; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Dixson, 2003) is often included within the larger literature on Black teachers (Acosta, Foster, & Houchen, 2018; Foster, 1997; Irvine, 2002; McKinney de Royston, Madkins, Givens, & Nasir, 2020) and has focused primarily on K–12 contexts. Characteristics of practices and pedagogies specific to Black women teachers include relationship building, othermothering/embrace of the maternal, political clarity, and an ethic of risk. Two salient aspects of Black motherhood evidenced in the practices and pedagogies of Black women teachers that are aligned with the goals of this volume are *othermothering* and *political clarity*.

The communal care of children via othermothering is a frequent characteristic in the practice of Black women teachers. The Black women teachers in Dixson's (2003) study believed that they served as surrogate parents to their students. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) found that "exemplary African-American women teachers use the familiar and familial mother-child relationship as a guide for their interactions with students" (p. 74). She further explains, "In fact, these teachers saw their maternal qualities and the mother-child relationship as *central* to their resistance to domination, both patriarchal and racial" (p. 76). Whether or not Black women have biological children of their own, othermothering is normalized within the values of the Black community. Black girls are socialized to be othermothers, and when they begin caring for their siblings, cousins, play cousins, and family friends, they come to learn that adults are dependent upon their community care. For Black mother educators, school is an extension of the community wherein othermothering is valued and in some ways expected.

Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) explains the notion of political clarity in the practice of Black women teachers as

the recognition by teachers that there are relationships between schools and society that differentially structure the successes and failures of groups of children (Bartolome, 1994). Womanist teachers see racism and other systemic injustices as simultaneously social and educational problems. Consequently, they demonstrate a keen awareness of their power and responsibility as adults to contest the societal stereotypes imposed on children. (p. 77)

In Collins' (2009) characterization of Black motherhood, othermothering is so prevalent that it warranted an additional category paired with political activism. In the United States, Black motherhood is constructed within a context of oppression. So, it is not surprising that Black motherhood intersects with political activism. "Black women's activist motivations derive from a conjunction of empathy for other Black women who suffer or have

suffered similar social disadvantages and of African American norms of solidarity, responsibility, and accountability” (McDonald, 1997, pp. 775–776). Black women’s motivation for community activism is a synthesis of both personal and social motivation. Their motivations for social activism are driven by shared gendered experiences from the effects of slavery and developed primarily out of their mothering practices. “Such activism exists on a long historical continuum, as Black women are powerful change agents who have indelibly shaped the Black community and the entire nation” (Berry & Gross, 2020, p. 3). For Black mother educators, our profession and our children are mutually linked. Thus, the activism that we engage in on behalf of Black children in schools through our professional praxis is an extension of motherhood.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE PRAXIS OF BLACK MOTHER EDUCATORS

In her book, *Queen Mothers: Articulating the Spirit of Black Women Teacher-Leaders*, Jeffries (2019) notes, “In the field of education, Black women’s greatest impact has been their ability to shoulder the huge responsibilities of mothering, teaching, and leading everyone’s children” (p. ix). Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002), Collins (2009), Crenshaw (1991), and Dillard (2012), this volume makes a case for centering the voices and experiences of Black women in the protection and educational uplift of Black children. While examinations of how Black educators articulate and enact a need to protect Black students from racialized harm exist (McKinney de Royston et al., 2020), this book is a collection of autoethnographic narratives from Black mother educators who work at the intersections of their personal and professional identities to protect Black children. Intersectionality allows us to look at the nexus of our identities in regards to race, gender, and occupation—as Black, women, and educators. Our goal for this volume is to bring together scholars who can support theorizing the intersectionality of our identities as Black mothers and educators, particularly its influence on our pedagogical practices and the safekeeping of Black children. This work is distinguished from other critical frameworks (e.g., critical race parenting; Matias, 2016), because it narrowly centers the experiences of Black mothers and children. While there are certainly parallel experiences amongst ethnic groups of color in regards to racial oppression, the experiences of Black mothers and children are worthy of study independent of comparison.

Moreover, this volume posits that Black mother educators are best positioned to tell our own stories. Instead of being objectified through someone else’s lens, we use autoethnography to study our practices and personalize

the work in only a way that Black women can. As expressed in the words of Ruth Shays (as quoted in Collins, 1989), “I know what I’m talking about because I’m talking about myself. I’m talking about what I have lived” (p. 760). Through the telling of our stories of praxis, we endeavor to *(re)member*. Dillard (2012) informs us that to *(re)member* is not just to recall or think of again, but to also put back together. She reminds us that *(re)membering* is an act of decolonization as “we must remember in order to be whole” (p. 4). She further explains,

It is the *deliberate* work of engaging and preserving these memories, both the memory itself and our engagements and experiences with it. But, it is also our *duty*—our responsibility—to *(re)member*: We are those who can bear witness to our African “past,” diasporic “present,” and “future” as a full circle. (p. 13)

Likewise, through the telling of our stories, we endeavor to pass on *wisdom* to others who teach Black children. Wisdom, from an endarkened/Black feminist standpoint, encompasses a set of experiences that, “when shared and passed on become the collective wisdom of a Black woman’s standpoint” (Collins, 2009, pp. 274–275). Such collective wisdom is invaluable to the education, protection, and spirit healing of Black children in school spaces.

OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS

The book is divided into ten chapters organized according to three themes. Each chapter explores prevailing narratives of Black children in particular school or school-related settings. The authors discuss major themes from the research literature as to how Black children are misunderstood, misrepresented, and mistreated in particular school settings, as well as identify clear voids in the literature that do not account for the brilliance and potential of Black children. The authors also add reflections of their pedagogy and practices as Black mother educators in the particular settings they report on as well as offer solutions to perceived challenges. This volume explicates stories of motherwork from Black mother educators whose professional spaces span K–12 to higher education contexts. Collectively, this volume expounds upon the dimension of “protector” within the literature on Black women teachers.

Part I: Black Mother Educator Praxis in PK–12 Contexts

The chapters in this section focus on the ways in which Black mother educator praxis manifests in PK–12 (preschool through Grade 12) schooling

contexts. In Chapter 1, Gloria Boutte and colleagues draw from a Black emancipatory framework and explain what it means to teach Black students in ways that are loving and healing so that students experience cultural, social, and academic excellence in early childhood contexts. In Chapter 2, Jasmine Graham presents literature on school counseling for Black children, as well as discusses the impact of her own experience as a Black mother educator with expertise in school counseling and how she pushed back against harmful school counseling practices to protect her son's brilliance and humanity. In Chapter 3, Leana Cabral and Sonya Douglass Horsford explore how Black women principals serve as protectors of Black children amid the oppressive structures, policies, and practices characteristic of education in the age of neoliberal school reform. They consider the extent to which these qualities shape the leadership epistemologies, philosophies, and praxis of Black woman principals and their implications for the education of Black children in the New Jim Crow. In Chapter 4, Valerie Bass-Adams and Chonika Coleman-King highlight the ways in which their intersectional identities as Black women and mothers have shaped their journeys as mother-scholars and their work in the service of all children, but specifically Black children. They highlight central aspects of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom Schools program and what they have learned through their experiences as site coordinators in one of the most vulnerable communities in a moderately sized city in the northeast and their transition from supporters of Freedom School to both supporters and parents.

Part II: Black Mother Educator Praxis in Higher Education Contexts

The chapters in this section focus on the ways in which Black mother educator praxis manifests in higher education contexts. In Chapter 5, Mercedes Cannon draws from the tenet of *voice* within Womanist Theory and Disability Studies in Education (DSE) to address Black mother educators who care for and about Black children/students with/out dis/abilities. She discusses her praxis of valuing *humanity* and *spirit* as an asset pedagogy of care and of radical love that she implements within her daily roles. In Chapter 6, Gwenda Greene and Damara Hightower Mitchell build on the legacy of Queen Nzinga the fearless, warrior Mother of Angola, and discuss how they, as two Black mother educators, employ African diaspora literacy as a pedagogical tool to address institutional dysconsciousness at HBCUs in the service of improving student learning outcomes, but more importantly, student living outcomes. In Chapter 7, Khalilah Shabazz illuminates her journey to becoming "Mama K," an othermother to Black college students, while simultaneously raising her own daughters. As she evolved personally