



America Fails to See the Worth of Black Boys

By Educator Barnes – September 8, 2020

I've only been pregnant once. Early in my pregnancy, I learned that I was pregnant with twins. I prayed to God multiple times to bless me with two boys and not two girls. I would have

been happy regardless, but I really wanted to be a boy mom. God heard my prayer, and I delivered identical twin sons.

When I looked into their small scrunched up faces, I saw joy and love. They are one of the best parts of my life. I also had fear. They were born ten weeks early and had to stay in the NICU for eight weeks. As they fought to get stronger each day, I wondered if there would be any lingering issues because of their premature birth. Although it took them longer to crawl and walk when compared to the typical time of other children, they developed fine.

They went to preschool reading basic books and knew some math. I saw two young intelligent Black boys. The world didn't see them the way I saw them. Back then, they didn't know the way the world saw them; they know now. This is why the film "Black Boys" is important for everyone to watch, not just Black people, all people.

The film is divided into four sections: body, mind, voice, and heart and explores what life is like for a Black boy in America. One young Black boy said, "I feel like I have to be better even though I feel as though I'm already good enough, but they want to make you feel like even lesser. I've got to try to bring myself up even more which is kind of hard." It is hard to exude Black excellence when the world around you doesn't believe you are worthy or even capable.

In the movie "Black Panther," Queen Ramonda yells, "Show him who you are!" to T'Challa as he is participating in the challenge with M'Baku. Too many times, I had to pick my twin sons' self-esteem off the floor and remind them to show the world who they are. They are young, gifted, and Black, but that is not the message they receive from the world including inside of school.

In preschool, my son tackled a little white girl just like he tackled his brother at home. This turned into the parent accusing my son of bending her daughter over the playground equipment with indecent ideas. Instead of the principal dealing with the parent to let her know this idea was outrageous, my husband and I were called at 7 p.m. by the principal and asked if our four-year-old son had been watching inappropriate grown-up movies.

When I sent my boys to preschool, I saw readers, I saw mathematicians, I saw scientists, I saw explorers, and I saw artists. Others saw deviant children. In the film "Black Boys," several Black boys and Black men expressed frustration about being judged or accused without any reason. The only reason they could identify was being a Black male.

Now, my sons are in 4th grade. From preschool through third grade, they have been suspended, wrongly accused, thought to be older than they actually are, and yelled at by white strangers in public for being playful. Those are just a few incidents I care to bring up. As an educator, I also know they are being subjected to different curriculum across multiple subjects that is not for them. Educator Sharif El-Mekki shared in the film:

One of the things we talk about is this windows and mirrors. A Black child in a typical school in America, they get windows, from the literature that's put in front of them, from the teacher, from all the messages, they get windows to other people's world. This other world, these other people are better than you, not a shared humanity but a separate level of humanity. White children typically get the mirror, who's in front of them, the literature they're read, the posters on the wall, everything reinforces their whiteness and their superiority.

As a Black parent, I can expose my children to resources and additional literature, but white parents don't have this burden to teach more at home to affirm their children. Despite all of the struggle, despite the fear I have of my sons one day becoming a hashtag because their lives were unjustly taken, there is nothing else I rather be than a mother of two Black sons.

Despite the achievement gap between Black and white children that is talked about so much, I know that if Black children are given the opportunities, the same opportunities as white children, they would achieve, too. My sons haven't been reading above grade level for years because they are any more special than someone's else Black son. The difference is my Black sons had access to a good school and to a mother who happens to be an educator. What would this world look like if all Black children had access to what they needed? Black boys aren't broken. The film "Black Boys" reminds us that Black boys don't need a savior; they need opportunity. The Black boys in the film give their viewpoints on what they need, but you'll have to watch the film to learn more about that.

When I see another Black boy, I see excellence. I see potential. I see the same greatness I see in my sons. I know they are all young, gifted, and Black despite what some people in this world might believe. I will continue to fight to change the narrative, to get access to opportunity, to get them to a place where they are not feared but are unconditionally loved.

