Kindling the Spark of Black Male Genius through Education

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The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worth while, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples. (Woodson, 1933/2011, p. 5)

Almost four generations have passed since Woodson's (1933/2011) declaration, and we can only speculate how he would evaluate the impact of contemporary American society and K-12 educational processes on the spark of Black male genius. In the 1930s, the notion that Black Americans possessed a latent form of genius that Euro-dominant schooling diminishes may have seemed like the ramblings of a misinformed radical. In hindsight, Woodson's pronouncement was quite prophetic and largely supported by a host of educational outcomes and research spanning eight decades. Yet, such social scientific "truths" war against an established racialized power structure that has yet to reconcile the possibility of being a Black male and genius. Are we arguing that all Black males are Einstein's or more appropriately Imhotep's in waiting? No, we do advance however, an urgent movement away from outdated ideologies tethering Black male learners to expected mediocrity in nation now led by a Black male. The more pressing question is, should we adopt a form of education that prepares Black male learners to be the next Barack Obama or continue to signal that prison and poverty are their expected futures?

The narratives offered by the contributors to this volume provided hopeful insights into how P-20 education can be supportive of Black males' academic, cultural and social maturation. Yet, such a radical shift in educational responsiveness must be divorced wholly from traditional hegemonic praxis, and instead embrace approaches informed by the complexities of *blackmaleness*. Toward this aim, initially, this summative essay considers the nature of inopportunity associated with *blackmaleness* in greater detail. Then this essay details a theoretical synthesis of the collective narratives crafted by contributors to this volume, the factors they considered most salient to their matriculation, and recommendations for various stakeholders.

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The Inopportunity of Blackmaleness

This section quantifies the social limitations associated with *blackmaleness* via a synthesis of research detailing the impact that interlocking systems of inopportunity have on Black male opportunity structures. Informed by the emergent themes throughout this volume the guest editors theorize that inopportunities related to *blackmaleness* consist of interconnected and mutually reinforcing ideological worldviews, institutional structures/cultures and individual nuances, yielding systems that by intent or tradition counter Black male intellectual, emotional, cultural and social development. Moreover, the forthcoming analysis of inopportunity is informed by the "permanence of race" lens, which remains a central pillar of critical race theory (Bell, 1998; Lawrence, 1992), and ethnic/racial stratification theories (Aguirre & Turner, 2004; Feagin & Feagin, 2003; Mckee, 1993). These frames enriched our analysis of contemporary research on how ideological worldviews, individual nuances, and institutional structures/cultures constrain Black male genius.

Ideological Inopportunity

In 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois penned a historic and prophetic essay entitled, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings"; in this work he delved into the spiritual state of African Americans. His insightful essay spoke to the contradictory existence of being both African and American in a society resisting the melding of the two. Furthermore, Du Bois critiqued the tendency of the American power structure to confer second-class citizenship status upon African Americans, while broadcasting the constitutional principles of liberty and justice for all. In his day, African Americans were considered as a *problem*, beset by both natural and cultural imperfections, rendering them unfit for full membership in a progressive society (Mckee, 1993). In this present era, this *problem paradigm* has not given way in a more egalitarian America; rather, it continues to form an ideological worldview that when actualized into policy and practice limits the quality of life and the opportunity to access the complete array of privileges in modern American society for minoritized populations (Aguirre & Turner, 2004).

Moreover, this ideology informs the opportunity structure in modern American education. Lewis, James, Hancock and Hill-Jackson (2008) emphasized the longstanding nature of American ideologies suggesting that African Americans' culture, children, and communities are intellectually, socially, and morally inferior to White Americans. Researchers Skrla and Scheurich (2001) and Valencia (1997) note how *deficit thinking* is the governing epistemology that informs the quality of education and educational leadership for many economically, linguistically and culturally diverse children in America. In this light, systems of thought animate social-historical realities and inform human social practice. Therefore, American schooling is not neutral but reflects this *problem-based* approach by:

1. Organizing schools around the notion that African American children, culture, and communities are inherently pathological (Feagin, 2006; Mckee, 1993);
2. Examining African American educational experiences through Eurocentric standards, philosophies, concepts, theories and research methodologies (Skrla & Scheurich, 2001; Valencia, 1997; Winndance-Twine & Warren, 2000);

3. Crafting educational policies, programs, and other measures designed to promote African American student achievement through these pathological and Eurocentric frameworks (Lewis et al., 2008);

4. The educational practice of labeling African American students as "at risk", and African American communities and cultures as the risk factors that must be circumvented in order to achieve academic success (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1978; Waxman, Gray, & Padron, 2003);

5. Creating school cultures characterized by low teacher expectations, a low sense of responsibility for student learning, and a lack of culturally responsive pedagogy (Anyon, 1997; Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2006); and,

6. The practice of dismissing the professional responsibility of educators and the greater society for creating and sustaining educational disparities, while "blaming the victims" of educational discrimination (Ford, 1996; Lewis et al., 2008).

This long standing system of thought is arguably responsible for more than a century of educational policies, practices, and programs that have failed to meet the needs of African American learners, particularly African American males in urban schools (Kunjufu, 2007; Noguera, 2008).

Furthermore, this unbroken chain of American thought is systemic in nature, because it is equally present and operative in other major social institutions including, (a) local, state and national governmental agencies; (b) county, state and federal legal systems; (c) the mass media; (d) religious doctrines and practices; (e) economic institutions; (f) the military, and (g) the American family (Aguirre & Turner, 2004; Feagin & Feagin, 2003). Supportively, Rushing (2001) concluded, "American education is not a neutral institution, but one that functions in the context of political, cultural, and social inequalities and plays a role in maintaining and legitimating those inequalities" (p. 32).

For Black males, these ideologies type them as violent, untrustworthy, anti-intellectual, hyper-sexual and immoral, regardless of the content of their personal character (Kunjufu, 2007; Noguera, 2008). The stories shared throughout this volume indicates that microaggressions based upon these ideologies hunt Black male learners starting in elementary school and do not relent even after they are accomplished professionals in education (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). The looming and unavoidable confrontation between Black male learners and this system of thought warrants highlighting the role that individual actors play in fostering inopportunity.

Individual Inopportunity

The second element for consideration is individual in nature or so it appears. *Individual opportunity* is a byproduct of educators' conformity to the tenets of deficit thinking*,* and the normalization of this praxis within school cultures (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004; Lewis et al., 2008). Simply stated, *individual inopportunity* is caused by teachers, counselors and administrators adopting and acting upon the *problem-paradigm* institutionalized within school cultures, policies, and practices. This was confirmed by researchers Ogawa, Crain, Loomis, and Ball (2008) who note that organizational and school cultures once established inform the values and practices of individual educators.

This perspective yields the insight that *inopportunity* cannot be caused by an individual teacher acting upon personal biases that contradict the general mode of education. Rather, this type of *inopportunity* results from school cultures normalizing poor instruction, expectations tied to mediocrity, unfair discipline, disconnections between communities and schools, and general disregard for African American males in schools, to the point that the collective indifference of educators becomes invisible (Ogawa et al., 2008). Teachers, counselors, and administrators take part in jeopardizing the life chances of urban African American males through these seemingly invisible practices and processes as a byproduct of social conformity and conditioning, and many times in direct contradiction to their personal beliefs in social justice.

The results of this collective conformity has been measured by researchers (i.e., disproportioned representation of African American males in suspensions, special education, discipline referrals, underperformance, and school arrests), but these discriminatory practices often go unquestioned within the context of many schools because they are part of a normalized collective habit (Diamond et al., 2004; Noguera & Wing, 2006). These daily practices and the philosophies that inform them must be exposed to redress the effects of individual inopportunity. Yet, individual actors must find the moral courage to resist the pull of conformity and find agency to live out their core value in subversion to oppressive educational milieus. The next section considers in detail how educational, economic and legal systems integrate to produce *institutional inopportunities* particular to African American males.

Institutional Inopportunity

Social institutions (legal, economic, and educational systems) are structures that transform ideologies and widespread collective conformity into institutionalized practices, policies and processes that restrict educational access, quality and opportunity for urban African American males (Lewis et. al, 2008). The interaction between ideology, individual, and institutional practices and policies makes it inappropriate to consider the legal, educational, and economic inopportunities confronting urban African American males as separate and unrelated phenomena. To further clarify, two examples of institutional inopportunity will be developed here, (1) the interchange between *educational and legal system,* and (2) the interchange between the *educational and economic systems*.

Educational and legal interchange. The Children's Defense Fund (2007) and Edelman (2007) refer to the effects of *educational and legal Interchanges* as the "Cradle to Prison Pipeline" and the "school house to jail house pipeline", respectively. It is important to note that while all racial and gender groups are represented within this "pipeline" African American males born by 2001 had a 1 in 3 chance of imprisonment in their lifetime. Sadly, there are four major educational practices that create entry points into the "school house to jail house pipeline" for African American males in urban educational settings.

The first entry point is caused by the misapplication of "zero tolerance" policies by many school districts in their efforts to control school violence. These practices have tripled the number of students arrested in schools across the nation since 1999 with African males being disproportionately represented in school arrests (Edelman, 2007). To illustrate, in 1999 approximately 5,308 African Americans were arrested nationwide in schools, but by 2004 that number swelled to 13,077 with a staggering 10,200 African American males being arrested (Edelman, 2007). These figures are drastic underestimates of the problem, because until recently there was no uniform way for all districts to report school arrests to the government. Yet, the

Office of Civil Rights (2012) established a national dataset for equity in schools, and confirmed that while African Americans were only 18% of their sample of public schools they constituted 35% of all school-related arrests in large urban districts with males accounting for 74% of these cases.   Interestingly enough, most African American males do not have to be arrested in schools; rather, school districts routinely refer thousands of students to the juvenile court systems each year.

   Consequently, the second entry point into the "the school house to jail house pipeline" is the increased practice of referring African American males into the criminal justice system by schools. For instance, a recent study sponsored by the Florida NAACP illustrates this trend throughout school districts in Florida. The report notes that statewide during the 2004-2005 academic year 26,990 students were referred to the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (FDJJ; NAACP, 2006). In the 2004-2005 school year, 12,415 African Americans were referred to FDJJ, a figure that represented 46% of all referrals. The problem becomes more evident when considering that African Americans were only 21% of all students in Florida. Equally troubling is that 9,311 African American males were referred in the 2004-2005 school year, which represented 35% of all referrals by a subpopulation that constituted less than 11% of students in the state. Nationally, in 2012, 42% of all referrals to law enforcement were African Americans, which made them overrepresented when considering they were only 18% of students (Office of Civil Rights, 2012). Moreover, according to this NAACP (2006) report:

> Over three-quarters of school-based referrals (76 percent) were for misdemeanor offenses such as disorderly conduct, trespassing, or assault and/or battery, which is usually nothing more than a schoolyard fight (p. 6).

This type of student misconduct was handled by schools and parents before the implementation of "zero tolerance policies", but is now being outsourced to the Justice System in record numbers, disproportionately jeopardizing the educational futures of urban African American males (Edelman, 2007).

   A third related entry point to the prison pipeline is articulated by Costenbader and Markson's (1994) research based on district level suspensions from ten states. Their results indicate that urban African American males were suspended at higher rates compared to all other student groups (more than 3 times as much in some districts). More recently, Krezmien (2006) concluded that Maryland's high suspension rate can be attributed to the disproportionate suspension of African American students in large urban and poor school districts.

   Additionally, Florida NAACP (2006) found that for the same offenses in Palm Beach district elementary schools, African American students were seven times more likely to receive out-of-school suspensions compared to White students. In the Hillsborough district, African Americans represent only 21.3% of elementary school children but constituted 59.3% of out-of-school suspensions. Also, in Pinellas school district, African Americans represented only 19% of all students but received an alarming 45.5% of all out-of-school suspensions.   Nationally, the U. S. Civil Rights Office (2012) found that African Americans received 35% of single cases of in school suspensions, 46% of students with multiple out of school suspensions and 39% of expulsions.

   The root cause of disparities such as these was further explained Jung and Poole (2006) who concluded that the suspension gap between African Americans and White students nationally cannot be explained by differences in social class, school characteristics (violent

schools vs. safe schools), nor students' reported behavioral problems. In other words, African American are not suspended more because of how they behave, being poor or well-to-do, or problems associated with schooling in urban vs. suburban communities. The only factor that remained significantly linked to the disproportionate suspension of African Americans was their race, and for African American males their gender and race (Jung & Poole, 2006).

The final entry point into the pipeline is the high rates of dropouts among urban African American males, which have been directly related to school suspensions and arrests (Children's Defense Fund, 2007; Noguera & Wing, 2006). Specifically, Costenbader and Markson (1994) reported that 51-55% of school dropouts had been suspended at some point in their educational career. This supports the notion that the criminalizing of education over the last decade has disproportionately pushed African American students from academic trajectories to paths leading to prison. In fact, the Justice Policy Institute (2003) notes that 50% of African American male dropouts had prison records by age thirty, while only 10% of White male dropouts reported having prison records by age thirty. Undoubtedly, "the cradle to prison pipeline's" major entry points emanate from the systemic failure of urban schools. This *educational and legal Interchange* is just one example of *institutional inopportunity* resulting from racial discrimination operative between educational institutions and the criminal justice system.

Educational and economic interchange. A second form of *Institutional inopportunity* is associated with the economic condition of African American males in urban areas who dropped out of school, and those who graduated from urban high schools but did not pursue a higher education. Mincy, Lewis, and Han (2006) detailed the harsh economic realities of urban African American male high school graduates with no college coursework, and concluded that 46% of them reported no income in 2001. Furthermore, 82.9% of these African American males reported making less than the median wage of all other male workers with similar educational backgrounds, and within the same age groupings.

A similar report by Holzer and Offner (2006) concluded that urban African American males with no collegiate education reported higher unemployment rates than other similarly educated men from 1929 through 2001. This pattern of higher unemployment among high school educated African American urban males is most closely related to the decreasing availability of blue collar and manufacturing jobs in America (Holzer & Offner, 2006). The decrease in blue collar jobs typically available to males without a college education is further compounded by the continued shift to an economy based on White collar and technology driven jobs that require a college degree or at least some college. Also, consider that during the economic downturns in the 1980s, 1990s and the more recent 2008 recession, African American males were the last hired and the first fired, resulting in double the unemployment rate when compared to similarly educated White males living in urban America (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013; & Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Finally, Holzer and Offner also reported that the increased imprisonment among African American male youth during the decade of the 1990s also contributed to higher rates of unemployment.   In this changing economy, urban African American male high school graduates and dropouts are being left behind. Just receiving a high school education no longer provides economic or social stability for urban African American males. In fact, the studies referenced thus far indicate that earning an Associate's Degree seems to be the breaking point in the inopportunity structure for urban African American males (Holzer & Offner, 2006).

The complexity of *institutional inopportunity* necessitates a brief summary of its key elements. It results when *problem-paradigms* are actualized within the major social institutions

of America, such as educational, economic and legal institutions. School practices create key entry points into the "school house to jail house pipeline", which include the overrepresentation of urban African American males among high school dropouts, suspensions, referrals to juvenile courts, and school arrests. Also, African American males who do not at a minimum obtain an Associate's degree are disproportionately poor, imprisoned, unemployed, and underpaid when compared to other similarly educated urban males. Overall, complex interchanges between practices common in the educational, economic and legal systems of America characterize *institutional inopportunity*.

Kindling the Spark of Black Male Genius

While the economic and educational consequences of inopportunity are daunting, the essays in this special issue demonstrate that African American males can navigate through them to obtain a measure of academic and career success. This section details a synthesis of ideas, strategies, insights and experiences from contributors to this volume, and presents a tentative model for understanding the array of perils and possibilities set before African American males in education. In this volume, we theorized that *blackmaleness* or the multidimensional, shifting, and oftentimes contradictory reality of Black males has two extremes, and a void that must be traversed through contemplation, choice and chance to solidify a truer Black male identity. A synthesis of the collective insights' of contributors is illustrated in *Figure 1* – Kindling the Spark of Black Male Genius.

Overall, the *subtractive extreme* of *blackmaleness* is a nexus of social limitations, messaged and materialized as an inescapable but navigable system of ideological, institutional, and individual inopportunities with the absolute disenfranchisement of Black males as a chief end. On the other hand, the *productive extreme* is theorized as a transgenerational collective force, organized to contest, defy, resist, and persist despite the presence of social barriers particularly constructed to make war with the potential of Black males in American society and education. Lastly, throughout their lives all Black males experience shifting identities in the *void* between these two extremes. Contributors to this volume each theorized concerning this most-puzzling dimension by employing works spanning a century of Black male thought. These past and contemporary Black male thinkers were describing using different terminology, modes of expression and intellectual traditions, essentially the same phenomenon, the *void*. A synthesis of Dubois (1903), Woodson (1933/2011), Wright (1940), Ellison (1952/1995), Cross (1991) and Baldwin (1992) reveals that self-actualization is a transgenerational struggle, a quest through shapeless, boundless, and ever shifting social-psychological processes. There appears to be no exceptions to this process according to the life narratives shared in this volume. Traversing the *void* is a required and recursive experience over the course life and career development among Black males. Further insights into *blackmaleness* are featured in the forthcoming sections, and include details about how contributors described the impact of *difference makers*, the *void* and traversing the *void*.

Insights into Blackmaleness

Difference makers. First, each of the contributors spoke extensively about "difference makers", which initially were parents, family and community members, but starting in middle school, educators (specifically Black educators) played a critical role in their academic and

cultural development. It was not their race however that made them a difference maker. More specifically, their effectiveness was linked to how their race intersected with an authentic care-centered responsiveness to the needs of African American students. Their presence personified to many of the contributors a future state of maturation to which they could aspire. Difference makers also provided living examples of how to successfully resolve many of the pressing social-cultural dilemmas that were confronting Black males in the formative years of education. For instance, Figure 1 summarizes how contributors connected with mentors outside of their home because they provided an example of how to be cool and smart, expected students to do their best in school (when many other educators did not), and practiced a highly engaging method of teaching that featured critical issues and insights concerning current dilemmas facing Black males.

Secondly, these mentors tended to introduce Black males to "enabling texts" (Tatum, 2009), which allowed them to escape into texts in times of trouble and transitions in life. These texts provided relatable characters, circumstances, and content enabling the contributing scholars to develop critical consciousness about the perils and possibilities of Black males as early as middle school. Mentors also talked about real life issues providing advice and inspiration or correction when needed, and these relationships tended to be so transformational that contributors credited specific teachers for inspiring them to become k-12 educators. Practically, mentors offered help with homework, fielded life questions, and pushed students to take on leadership roles based many times upon the mentors' perceiving untapped potential within young scholars. Lastly, difference makers provided hope that a quality education would create life opportunities, and hedged students from low expectations that were widespread for Black males in their learning environments to prevent the internalization of these racialized limitations.

The void. The teaching, texts and talks of parents and mentors provided students alternative questions and answers to the conditions faced by Black males in America. These texts reportedly promoted the beginning stages of deeper exploration of their cultural, racial and academic identities. During these years the contributing authors reported struggling with questions like:

- Can Black men be trusted?
- Are Black men smart enough?
- Are Black men inferior to Whites?
- How can I be smart and cool?
- Who am I?
- Is school for me?

As mature professionals, the authors still reported struggling to reconcile the messages received from society, and the messages imparted by their mentors, life experiences and loved ones. They all theorized that identity development was an ongoing, recursive experience, and considered questions like:

- Am I the product of affirmative action?
- How best to serve my community?
- Should I confront racism in the academe?
- Am I a capable researcher?

Also, authors reported reoccurring moments of contemplation about life choices, such as:

- Should I continue to serve the Black community when the academe does not recognize the importance of the work?
- Should I confront racism in schools and the academe?
- Should I teach from the Euro-centric praxis gained through my preparation programs?
- Can I make a difference as a K-12 teacher or as a professor?

Despite their successes, these Black males affirm the reality that they are still searching for a truer image of themselves in a space between two social extremes, inopportunity and opportunity. As such, the *void* must be traversed over the course of Black males' lives, yet too many Black males lack sustained relations with difference makers to equip and support them as they blaze their own paths through the *void*.

Traversing the void. Persistent exposure to inopportunity in the form of microaggressions in school and work environments pushed the authors back into the void, in which they developed a deeper since of identity and commitment to educational excellence. Opportunities like Afro-centric texts and teachers, a commitment to academic excellence, and community servant-hood encouraged and enlightened them further while in the *void*. The challenge is the intellectual, spiritual and emotional taxation these continuous journeys require within the context of unyielding social, employment, and familial constricts and responsibilities.

Moreover, the identity development process for Black males tended to begin with challenges to the affirmative nurturing of parents and community members by actors within school settings. As youths, the contributing scholars recalled experiencing racial mircoaggressions in interracial peer relations and teacher interactions (Sue et al., 2007). In predominately Black school settings these mircoaggressions tended to occur during interactions with White educators or *miseducated* (Woodson, 1993/2011) Black educators, and/or were a part of the general school culture. Conversely, in racially diverse school settings both teachers and interracial peer interactions were problematic.

Additionally, in predominately Black schools, *invisibility* as academically inclined males was reported, where as *subtractive hyper-visibility* or standing out because of some stereotype associated with Black males was common in predominately White schools, colleges and career settings. Often times, the movement across these schooling and/or professional milieus produced questions about cultural identities, and presented new access to opportunities in the form of Afro-centric curricula and African American mentors for those who migrated from predominantly White or suburban schools to urban schools.

The byproducts of exposures to mircoaggressions regardless of setting or source were varying levels of disillusionment with education, and what it meant to be an African American. Resisting the internalization of mircoaggressions tended to prompt internal contemplation of these matters, and dependency upon *difference makers* to provide insights into how to resolve the disillusionment. We postulate that mentors are most pivotal during these "fork in the road" moments, but a trusting relationship with a mentor at least among our contributors was established prior to these critical junctures.

Lastly, contributors addressed how they progressed from a *miseducated* Black educator to a professional committed to understanding and meeting the specific needs of Black male learners. This was accomplished primarily though graduate education in urban or multicultural education or through integration of teaching praxis learned from the Black community, which

ran counter to the praxis provided during their certification experiences. Overcoming *miseducation* (Woodson, 1933/2011) was primarily progressive and less cyclical than the recursive movements through Cross (1991) Black identity development stages (Pre-encounter-Commitment), and the consistent negotiation between subtractive visibility-invisibility and additive visibility experiences. In short, the processes associated with becoming and maintaining excellence among Black males requires mastering an identity in perpetual cognitive, social and cultural flux. Unfortunately, far too many young Black males are unaware that such energy and effort is required, nor do they have the educational support structures in place to help them navigate the *void* between awareness of inopportunity and actualization of opportunity in education and society.

Recommendations

To support Black male genius educators and policy makers must first acknowledge that *blackmaleness* is an inescapable reality for Black male learners. Additionally, the best solutions should be informed by a careful empirical study of Black males who effectively transverse inopportunity, the *void*, and eventually enjoy a form of contested opportunity before beginning a more complex journey. Moreover, the forthcoming recommendations begin with a set of expectations drawn from the "excellence pathways" identified in this volume. P-12 schools should strive to prepare all Black males students to:

1. Attend the college of their choice eligible for academic and talent based scholarships;
2. Graduate college with honors from a major with positive employment trends;
3. Excel in membership and leadership in student and community organizations;
4. Organize and participate in community service projects and initiatives;
5. Exemplify social and academic excellence in various community, professional and school settings;
6. Develop, maintain and utilize personal and professional networks for mentoring
7. Participate in educational opportunities in other regions of the US, internationally and graduate studies.

Some may argue that these are impossible given the current conditions in communities and schools, but the present state of Black male education necessitates some progressive measures or the status quo will remain. These measures must be supported by additional policies and practical commitments including:
1. Making early contact with Black male educators and mentors a national priority.
2. Making the study of Black male identity development a national priority in teacher preparation programs and via professional development in PK-12 schools.
3. Infusing empirically-based teaching methods in teacher preparation programs that work for Black male students.
4. Establishing a national counsel for teaching, development and support of Black male youth in the U.S. Department of Education
5. Partnering with parents in local communities from the perspective that they are positive influencers on their child(ren).
6. Selecting texts, curriculum and learning experiences that positively promote academic achievement of Black male youth.

7. Speak explicitly about the importance of education to future goals and quality of life as an everyday practice in schools and communities.
8. Provide community based supports and mentoring that will prevent Black male students from lowering their self-image to match the wider society views' of them.
9. Establish mentoring programs locally in partnership with universities to ensure that mentoring structures will continue through students' post-secondary education.
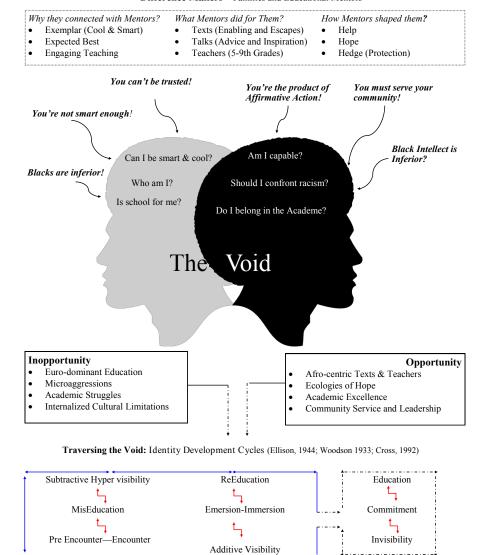
Conclusion

The guest editors postulated that a practical and assessable framework was warranted to promote responsiveness to Black male developmental needs, thus this concluding essay had two interrelated aims. First, we revisited in greater detail the inopportunity of *blackmaleness* by synthesizing contemporary research on the multifaceted and interlocking nature of inopportunity. Attention was given to ideological, institutional, and individual forces that cooperatively fashion a vortex, entrapping the hopes of far too many Black male youth. The second aim was to offer recommendations to proactively kindle the spark of genius in Black males through the power of education. These counsels emerged from a synthesis of insights gleaned from the collective narratives of contributors to this volume, and is illustrated in *Figure 1* – Kindling the Spark of Black Male Genius. It is our hope that this volume sparks conversation, contemplation and renew vigor for a responsive approach to support the unique genius in every Black male learner.

Figure 1 - The SPARK of Black Male Genius

Difference Makers—Families and Educational Mentors

Why they connected with Mentors?	*What Mentors did for Them?*	*How Mentors shaped them?*
• Exemplar (Cool & Smart)	• Texts (Enabling and Escapes)	• Help
• Expected Best	• Talks (Advice and Inspiration)	• Hope
• Engaging Teaching	• Teachers (5-9th Grades)	• Hedge (Protection)

You can't be trusted!

You're the product of Affirmative Action!

You must serve your community!

You're not smart enough!

Black Intellect is Inferior?

Can I be smart & cool?

Am I capable?

Blacks are inferior!

Who am I?

Should I confront racism?

Is school for me?

Do I belong in the Academe?

The Void

Inopportunity
• Euro-dominant Education
• Microaggressions
• Academic Struggles
• Internalized Cultural Limitations

Opportunity
• Afro-centric Texts & Teachers
• Ecologies of Hope
• Academic Excellence
• Community Service and Leadership

Traversing the Void: Identity Development Cycles (Ellison, 1944; Woodson 1933; Cross, 1992)

Subtractive Hyper visibility   ReEducation   Education

MisEducation   Emersion-Immersion   Commitment

Pre Encounter—Encounter   Additive Visibility   Invisibility

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