

PREFATORY

The Decision: Maximizing our Positions within the Academy to Improve Educational Outcomes of African American Males

Chance W. Lewis
Texas A&M University

“Everything starts with a decision”

On July 7, 2010, millions of sports fans watched the highly anticipated 1-hour special entitled *The Decision* that focused on which team LeBron James would pick to start the next phase of his NBA career. When LeBron James uttered the words, “I have decided to take my talents to South Beach [Miami],” the landscape of the NBA changed. After taking some time to reflect on this event, I was proud of his ability to ‘make a decision’ to join his colleagues/friends to pursue the ultimate prize – an NBA championship. While this scholarly venue is not the best space to debate whether he made the ‘right’ decision, the important point to consider is the fact that he did MAKE a decision.

As we, the producers and consumers of the *Journal of African American Males in Education* enter 2011, I’m honored to write the first prefatory of this New Year. This prefatory will challenge each of us to consider if and how we are going to maximize our positions within the Academy to improve the educational outcomes of African American males. For those of us who have found entry into the ‘ivory tower’, we must also make a ‘decision’ about what legacy we would like to leave once our careers are formally over. So, when we uttered the words, “I am taking my talents to the Academy to pursue a research agenda that will improve the educational outcomes for African American males,” we took on a great risk and task that had the potential to lead to monumental change. Given the fact that we have made this ‘decision,’ we must collectively make sure that we are not just focused on ‘being comfortable’ in the Academy. Although higher education is known for bestowing many of us with lofty titles and positions, we

must continue to seek new collaborative efforts to disseminate cutting-edge research to improve the educational outcomes of African American males.

A Reminder – African American Males Need Us

As we consider the ‘decision’ we have made or will make concerning our careers, I want to challenge each of us to walk through any major urban city in America to clearly get a sense why our work is needed more than ever before. Various scholars (Bonner, 2010; hooks, 2004; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Jackson & Moore, 2008) have reported that many in our society still view African American males as unintelligible, uneducable and dangerous. Additional research has reported that African American males are viewed as “dysfunctional, drug dealers, pimps, murderers, hyper-sexual, athletic but not intelligent, savages, absentee fathers, dead-beat dads, prisoners, substance abusers, welfare dependent, unemployable, underemployed and a detriment to the community” (Lewis, 2008, p. 2-3). Taken holistically, I have a question that I pose to all of us in the Academy. What type of ‘decision’ do we need to make to maximize our positions to make a difference in educational outcomes of African American males? I now offer what the hip-hop mogul Jay-Z refers to as the Blue Print for 2011 if we are going to make a positive change for this population.

The Blue Print 2011

Maximizing the Research Potential of JAAME

One critical area we must pursue if we are going to make positive change is to maximize the research potential of JAAME. As a scholarly refereed journal focused on improving educational outcomes for African American males, we must submit our highest quality empirical research for consideration in this scholarly outlet. If we send less than our best, this practice will illustrate to the scholarly community that we [producers and consumers of research in JAAME] do not take the issues this journal is seeking to improve seriously. Additionally, JAAME, even though it is a very young journal in terms of age, has a significant following because many individuals around the country and the world are starving to find high-quality research related to the improvement of African American males in education. For example, an article my colleagues and I published in the inaugural issue currently has 940 hits as of the writing of this prefatory. We must view JAAME as a clearinghouse of high-quality research pertaining to African American males in education and spread the word to our students and colleagues so the vision of this journal can be fulfilled.

Development of an Academic Press

As we continue to build JAAME into an elite academic journal, we [scholars focusing on African American male issues in education] should now seriously consider capitalizing on our momentum and develop an academic press with a sole focus of producing books and other scholarly products specifically on African American student issues in education. As I travel the country, educators ask me to direct them to resources where they can find cutting-edge research for curricular implementation in undergraduate and graduate courses, for book studies in school districts and seminal works for future research agendas. As we move forward, I think it would be powerful if we had an academic press where the sole focus was to seek to answer the questions

that relate to the improvement of educational outcomes for African American males. The time is now and we must begin to seriously consider this option to maximize our positions in the Academy to disseminate our work widely.

Conferences/Think Tanks

In 2011, I am amazed at how many organizations have gotten on the African American males in education ‘bandwagon’ and held different conferences/think tanks on this topic with no solid research base to inform their decisions. If we are the scholars producing the latest research on ‘what works’ for African American males in education, we should formulate our own organization(s) where we annually host the premier conference on “African American males in education.” The foundation of this conference can be the top-quality scholarship published in JAAME. We should be able to bring together educators from across the country to provide the latest research and effectively demonstrate how to bring this knowledge back to their respective educational organizations. By doing so, this is another avenue for us to maximize our potential in the Academy and to make sure our research has impact for African American males in education. However, the foundation for this Blue Print is our high-quality scholarship in the *Journal of African American Males in Education*.

Conclusion

In closing, I must say that I am excited about the possibilities that JAAME can provide via research on improving the educational outcomes of African American males. I must remind us that this scholarly journal will only be as great as we allow it to be. I commend all of the founders and visionaries for providing a pathway to achieve greatness with this important scholarly outlet. Now is the time for us to ‘carry the torch’ and build a legacy that will live on much longer than our individual lifetimes.

AUTHOR

CHANCE W. LEWIS is an Associate Professor and Endowed Chair of Urban Education in the College of Education at Texas A&M University. In addition, he is the Co-Director of the Center for Urban School Partnerships. Also, he is Co-Chair of the Urban Education graduate program. Dr. Lewis has over 100 publications including 50+ refereed journal articles in some of the leading academic journals in the field of urban education and teacher education. To date, Dr. Lewis has authored/co-authored/co-edited 7 books: *White Teachers/Diverse Classrooms: A Guide for Building Inclusive Schools, Eliminating Racism and Promoting High Expectations* (Stylus, 2006); *The Dilemmas of Being an African American Male in the New Millennium* (Infinity, 2008); *An Educator’s Guide to Working with African American Students: Strategies for Promoting Academic Success* (Infinity, 2009); *Transforming Teacher Education: What Went Wrong with Teacher Training and How We Can Fix It* (Stylus, 2010); *White Teachers/Diverse classrooms: Creating Inclusive schools, Building on Students’ Diversity and Providing True Educational Equity* [2nd Ed.] (Stylus, in-press); *African Americans in Urban Schools: Critical Issues and Solutions for Achievement* (Peter Lang, in press) and *Yes We Can!: Improving Urban Schools through Innovative Educational Reform* (Infinity, in press). Dr. Lewis can be reached by e-mail at chance.lewis@tamu.edu.

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