

The Warrior Method: A Parents' Guide to Rearing Healthy Black Boys

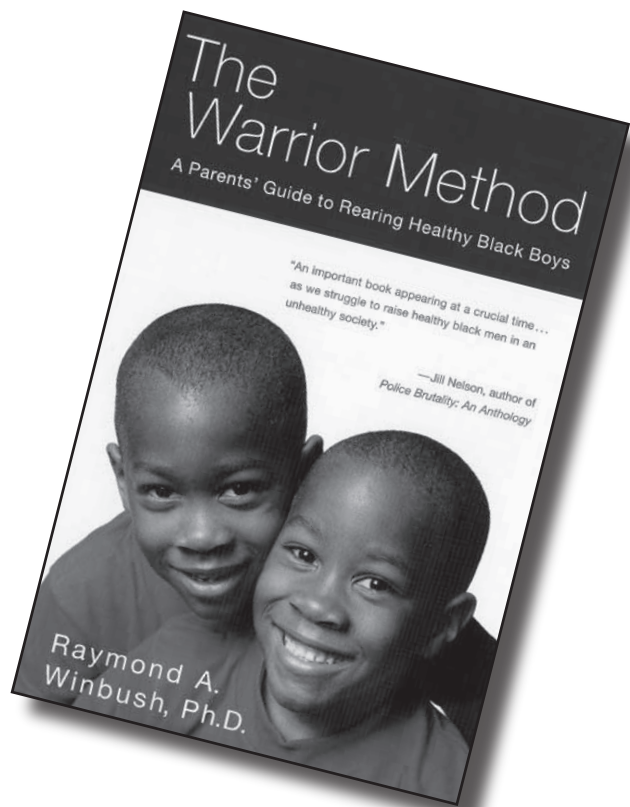
Book Review by Camilla Greene, Pennsylvania

My daughter, who became a mother in October, asked for books on raising black boys. I went to the local Barnes and Noble looking for and asking for books on raising black boys. There were no books to be found on the shelves. I Googled "raising African American boys" and a list of books appeared on the Amazon website. One title intrigued me- *The Warrior Method: A Parents' Guide to Rearing Healthy Black Boys* by Dr. Raymond A. Winbush. I purchased the book for my daughter and with her permission I read it before she did.

My work as a school change coach and as an NSRF National Facilitator is in school districts across the country, in high school classrooms mostly in urban areas, and with educators, mostly white. I hear a lot of moaning about black boys and their lack of motivation; I hear stories of their "gang involvement." I hear about and observe the black boys being disciplined and referred to as "unruly." Most of the classroom management problems brought to my attention involve getting black boys interested in education. I notice black boys and black girls with their heads down on desks when I pass classrooms. Too often I observe a lot of adult educators controlling, disciplining and I hear a lot of adult educators refer to the medication used or needed to "subdue" black boys. Seldom do I hear a request about ways to empower, or pull out the genius in each black boy, except when I am in the company of black men of all ages who do not question the innate abilities of black boys.

Most teenage black boys and younger black boys living in urban areas want to know how to "man up," to use a street term. Young black men listening to media-promoted hip-hop and most young boys who are involved with gangs learn a variety of ways to "man up." Many of the ways promoted by street gangs and media-sponsored hip-hop to "man up" are violent, misogynistic, homophobic, and dehumanizing. Dr. Winbush offers many practical and African-centered ways to raise black boys from infancy to adulthood. He offers a "warrior method" to black parents and to educators both black and white.

Dr. Winbush recounts the story of Sengbeh Pieh, renamed "Joseph Cinque" by his captors, who stole him and forced him to travel on the Amistad vessel. The story of Sengbeh is further developed in the story of Samuel Hingha Pieh, the great-grandson of Sengbeh Pieh. Dr. Winbush's premise is that African Americans in general and black boys in



particular are victims of interrupted and stolen history. It is through reconnecting with that history that young boys will be able to turn away from the murderous and suicidal effects of internalized and transferred racism and the negative effects of growing up black in racist America. Throughout the book, Dr. Winbush refers to the training young Sengbeh received in his African community, training provided by the family elders and community that demonstrated how to care for self; how to relate to others in a global sense; and taught him how, as a man, he could take responsibility for self, family and community. Dr. Winbush draws a direct link between Sengbeh's training as an African boy and his ability to survive the ordeal of captivity and successfully learn the language of his oppressors well enough to be able to defend himself in a foreign court of law.

In addition to offering a thoughtful plan for using African rites of passage to impart the wisdom of the ancestors to young black boys, Dr. Winbush differentiates among three prevalent styles of black parenting. He identifies these styles as black parents who opt to use "white parenting," "gray parenting," and "black parenting." White (continued on page 19)

was the question "What is equity?" I had to ask in our debrief- how is it that "equity" is placed at the end, remotely hanging away from the other questions, as an afterthought? Is it coincidence, or is it symbolic of how equity itself is usually attended to? After the other definitions were unpacked, equity was tacked on to the tail end of our days or added as a secondary or lesser component of our agendas. It is the topic we think we should discuss, but because we feel less competent addressing it, because of the messiness, difficulty, and lack of confidence that we sometimes feel when holding space for this volatile dialogue, it goes at the very end, sometimes in the hope that time will not allow us to get to it.

That needed to change, and so I changed it. Taking a strategic and more proactive approach, sometimes I will place it as the middle question, and at other times I reserve changing its location until later in the week to emphasize or punctuate the importance of equity as the missing puzzle piece that can move us from "too much schooling, too little education" (See *Too Much Schooling, Too Little Education: A Paradox of Black Life in White Societies* by Mwalimu J. Shujaa) to what is required to meet the needs of each student in order to improve academic achievement.

Therefore, the sequence of questioning toward the end of the seminar (and hopefully, participants arrive at this conclusion themselves) becomes: if we operate from the premise that schools are designed to "school" students (see *The Historic Timeline of Public Education*, www.arc.com), and if we truly embrace equity, then it is our responsibility and hopefully our passion to create the conditions and circumstances in our educational environments to give each student what he/she needs by providing the essential and crucial inputs...i.e equity in human, capital and financial resources needed to teach them well, empower them and liberate them so that they can achieve at high levels. If we choose to, we can truly educate them and enable them to make positive contributions to our local, national and global communities. In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks says that education is the practice of freedom. How else can we become a truly democratic society? ■

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parenting raises black boys the same way white boys are raised. Gray parenting challenges institutions regarding the treatment of black boys. Black parenting sees systems as inherently out of touch with black boys' life goals.

There are many useful and many far-too-familiar statistics on black boys throughout the book. The statistic that was new to me is that the only age at which a black male statistically outperforms a white male is after age 85. If a black male lives to be 85, he will statistically outlive his white counterpart.

Dr. Winbush challenges any adult wanting to nourish and successfully engage black boys to know and practice the 4 C's: Consciousness, Commitment, Cooperation, and Community. The book includes an annotated bibliography of books for black boys grades 1-6 and 7-12. I recommend *The Warrior Method* to anyone, whether he or she be a parent, grandparent, educator or concerned citizen, who wants to read a thoughtful guide to developing the fullest capacity of each black boy. ■

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Still Separate and Unequal (continued from page 7)

me more convinced than ever that this is critical work for us to do.

Second, after arguing so strongly that integrated schools are essential, Gold offers very little about how we should get there. He discusses a few possibilities, then asserts that "an approach that can succeed ... is small-scale voluntary integration of schools in working- and middle-class suburbs near cities." I wish I thought that were realistic, but I don't. So for me, the mandate of this book is to pick up where Gold leaves off. He's stated the problem well, but offers no easy answers. Where we go from there is up to us. ■

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