

**BLACK FEMALE TEACHERS:
DIVERSIFYING THE
UNITED STATES' TEACHER
WORKFORCE**

ADVANCES IN RACE AND ETHNICITY IN EDUCATION

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VOLUME 6

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EDITED BY

ABIOLA FARINDE-WU

University of Massachusetts Boston, Boston, MA, USA

AYANA ALLEN-HANDY

Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA, USA

CHANCE W. LEWIS

University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, NC, USA



United Kingdom – North America – Japan
India – Malaysia – China

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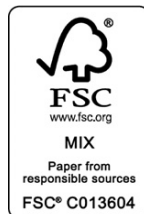
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LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

<i>Ayana Allen-Handy</i>	School of Education, Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA, USA
<i>Ashley Ballard</i>	School of Education, Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis, IN, USA
<i>Bettie Ray Butler</i>	Department of Middle, Secondary and K-12 Education, College of Education, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, NC, USA
<i>Ayana Kee Campoli</i>	Division of Educational Leadership, Center for Educational Research, University of South Dakota, Vermillion, SD, USA
<i>Desiree Carver-Thomas</i>	Learning Policy Institute, Palo Alto, CA, USA
<i>Linda Darling-Hammond</i>	Learning Policy Institute, Palo Alto, CA, USA
<i>Marena Drewery</i>	School of Education, Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis, IN, USA
<i>Maytal Eyal</i>	Department of Educational Psychology, University of Texas Austin, Austin, TX, USA
<i>Abiola Farinde-Wu</i>	College of Education and Human Development, University of Massachusetts Boston, Boston, MA, USA
<i>Paul G. Fitchett</i>	Department of Middle, Secondary and K-12 Education, College of Education, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, NC, USA
<i>Valerie Hill-Jackson</i>	Department of Teaching, Learning, and Culture Texas A&M University, College Station, TX, USA

- Eugenia B. Hopper* Department of Middle, Secondary and K-12 Education, College of Education, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, NC, USA
- Tambra O. Jackson* School of Education, Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis, IN, USA
- Karen A. Johnson* Department of Education, Culture and Society, Sorenson Arts and Education Complex, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT, USA
- Richard G. Lambert* Department of Educational Leadership, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, NC, USA
- Chance W. Lewis* Department of Middle, Secondary and K-12 Education, College of Education, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, NC, USA
- Christopher J. McCarthy* Department of Educational Psychology, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX, USA
- Brianna Membres* School of Education, Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis, IN, USA
- H. Richard Milner IV* Center for Urban Education, School of Education, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA, USA
- Laryn Morgan* School of Education, Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis, IN, USA
- Felicia J. Nicholson* School of Education, Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis, IN, USA
- Dyanis Conrad-Popova* Division of Curriculum and Instruction, School of Education, University of South Dakota, Vermillion, SD, USA

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I dedicate this book to my love, the one who stands next to me and never wavers. James, you calm me in this chaotic world. Thank you for your unconditional love and endless support.

– Abiola Farinde-Wu

My sincerest thanks to my husband Frederick for your unwavering love and support. I will never forget how you encouraged, inspired, and lifted me up throughout this book project, all the while pregnant and giving birth to our son Aiden. I dedicate this book to my son Aiden who was literally with Mommy every step of the way. I love you so much!

– Ayana Allen-Handy

This book is dedicated to my wife, Mechael Lewis, and my two beautiful daughters, Myra and Sydney Lewis, who have all given their time and space for me to complete this monumental project that was in my heart for years. I thank you for being so supportive. I could not do this without you. I love you.

– Chance W. Lewis

FOREWORD

This is an important, timely, and provocative book that places recruitment and retention of Black female teachers at the center. No questions are more important than those that address *who* teaches our children in schools. Authors in the book not only address the recruitment of Black female teachers but also discuss mechanism necessary to retain them. This book not only focuses on recruiting and retaining Black female teachers for the sake of having their racial and ethnic representation in schools; rather, authors consider some of the implicit (and overt) nuances that these teachers experience in schools across the United States. For instance, how do we recruit a more robust Black female teaching force and provide support systems that keep them there? What keeps Black female teachers in the teaching force and what factors cause them to leave? What roles do issues of race and place play in these teachers' decisions to teach and stay?

This is the book that sheds light on some of the aforementioned questions, and authors provide explicit recommendations for how to address some of the most pressing issues in education related to building a more racially diverse teacher workforce. Indeed, we cannot assume that recruiting more Black female teachers will be the panacea to solving pervasive issues in education that place particular groups of people at a disadvantage such as racism, sexism, discrimination, homophobia, and xenophobia. The authors in this book highlight the real issues in education that prevent and propel a more racially diverse teaching force but also point to other issues that too many other supporters of increasing the Black female teaching force do not. For instance, studying recruitment and retention of these teachers requires that we understand structural and systemic challenges that these teachers face that need to be addressed.

We cannot assume that Black female teachers or other teachers of color have the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities necessary for meeting the needs of their students. Too many assumptions abide that Black teachers or teachers of color will have the "answer" to teaching students whom the system has poorly served in education. What if these teachers do not have the knowledge or skills to support their students? What price do these teachers pay when they are not successful at navigating an educational system that not only poorly serves students but them (as educators), too? What are we willing to do to support Black female teachers who experience not only racism but also sexism and other forms of discrimination? Is the system willing to provide these teachers with financial incentives, time off to recharge, and other forms of support while

requiring them to take-on additional layers of work that the educational system has designed to ensure that particular groups of students are underserved.

Increased attention has been placed on the historic, landmark decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). The *Brown* decision was pivotal to the decline of Black female teachers. The demotion and firing of Black teachers have been cited as a result of desegregation efforts. We need book like this that center, history, policy, politics, and possibility in the current climate of educational injustice.

Grounded in rich data and robust experience, the collection of chapters in this book represents an audacious exemplar of the real issues that must be considered when discussing issues of recruitment and retention of Black female teachers. The authors call into question several issues that we must continue to explore as we develop an educational system designed to meet the needs of all students and all teachers! The book is a must read for any scholar, practitioner, or citizen interested in and concerned about increasing, recruiting, and retaining Black female teachers as well as for those interested in addressing the teacher of color pipeline more generally. The book not only shows us *what* the issues are but what can and should be done to address them. Indeed, the book will leave readers with a reassured sense of hope as we refuse to accept mediocrity for our teachers and students in education. Bravo to Farinde-Wu, Allen-Handy, and Lewis for the production of a major collection of scholarship that will enhance the conversation about the recruitment and retention of Black female teachers.

H. Richard Milner IV,
Helen Faison Professor of Urban Education,
University of Pittsburgh

REFLECTING BACK WHILE GAZING FORWARD: BLACK FEMALE TEACHERS AND THE DIVERSIFICATION OF THE UNITED STATES' TEACHER WORKFORCE

Ayana Allen-Handy and Abiola Farinde-Wu

ABSTRACT

This introductory chapter frames the discussion of Black female teachers, and centers their experiences as the sole site for discussion and analysis. In addition, this chapter provides an overview of the three sections of the book and the corresponding chapters. Within the pages of this volume, contributing authors discuss the historical and contemporary landscapes of Black female teachers, examine the underrepresentation of Black women in the US teacher workforce, as well as discuss innovative strategies to increase the recruitment and retention of Black female teachers in PK-12 classrooms. Ultimately, this chapter provides insight into the salience of Black female teachers in the diversification of the US teacher workforce. Moreover, highlighting implications and recommendations for a variety of educational stakeholders.

Keywords: Black female teachers; teacher retention; US teacher workforce

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Black Female Teachers: Diversifying the United States' Teacher Workforce illuminates the living legacies, unique experiences, and valued contributions of the Black female teacher; all the while reflecting back and gazing forward on her place and space in the US teacher workforce. Her story has thus been influenced by the tides of changing times and the social, political, and educational landscapes of reform. Often she can be found leveraging her social location as an educator to emancipate the Black race from the shackles of slavery, from the lies of inferiority under the guise of Jim Crow, and from present-day inequities in school policies and practices. It is for these reasons and many more that we explore the ways in which the Black female teacher represents a constant pillar of hope for the Black community and the glue that has kept and continues to keep a people and its culture empowered and uplifted. Notwithstanding the extant literature has extensively supported that the recruitment and retention of Black female teachers is directly related to improved academic, social, and cultural experiences for Black students (Milner, 2006) and historically marginalized students in general (Rich, 2015), the contemporary landscape of teacher demographics over the last several decades reveal that Black female teachers are disproportionately underrepresented in American classrooms (Farinde, Allen, & Lewis, 2016).

Despite Black women's historic role in US public school education and that teaching is a female-dominated profession, Black female teachers represent approximately 5% of the American teacher workforce (US Department of Education, 2013); in comparison, White female teachers comprise over 60% of the teacher workforce (Lewis & Toldson, 2013). Rizga (2016) notes that shockingly 26,000 Black teachers have disappeared from US public schools all together, even though the teaching profession as a whole has increased by 134,000. With students of color representing almost 49% of the total student enrollment (Kena et al., 2015), which is projected to rise to 55% by the year 2020 (Green, 2015), urgent attention must be given to the racial/ethnic gap between teachers and students (Rogers-Ard, Knaus, Epstein, & Mayfield, 2013). In seeking a teaching workforce more representative of the national population and current US student demographics, we pose the following questions: Why are Black female teachers disproportionately underrepresented in the US teacher workforce; and how can we strategically and successfully recruit and retain Black female teachers in PK-12 classrooms?

WHY BLACK FEMALE TEACHERS?

This volume strives to answer the aforementioned questions as well as one in its simplest form: "Why Black female teachers?" What many may cast as a question rhetorical in nature, contemporary realities of Black female teacher underrepresentation in American schools has awakened the need for a

volume such as this, which centers Black female teachers as the sole site of discussion and analysis. Thus, this volume accentuates the various reasons why it is essential to diversify the US teacher workforce with a mosaic of Black female teachers.

First we employ a “hindsight is 20/20” view of Black female teachers’ situated lived experiences within historical context. Through portraits of antioppressionist Black female teachers (Johnson) and by highlighting Black female teachers’ experiences across three key historical phases of American schooling and civil rights (Hill-Jackson), at best the volume demonstrates the social and political prowess of Black female teachers. We are critically aware that from this vantage point, the historical experiences of Black female teachers undoubtedly must inform their contemporary experiences. Contemporary perspectives pertaining to Black female teachers such as their commitment to teach in urban epicenters dominated by majority-minority student populations (Farinde-Wu et al.), their development as social justice educators (Jackson et al.), and the salience of their working conditions and interpersonal relationships (Campoli & Popova) are important platforms of discussion provided within this volume. Furthermore, a grave reality exists concerning the retention of Black female teachers within the teacher workforce. Thus, an examination of racial congruence, teacher stress, and professional commitment (Fitchett et al.), as well as critical policy interventions in support of Black female teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond) inform the existing literature, shedding light on newly constructed knowledge about Black female teacher attrition and strategies to support retention in today’s classrooms. In summary, this volume presents a comprehensive analysis of Black female teachers and offers emerging implications and recommendations for various stakeholders including policy-makers, district administrators, school leaders, teacher educators, as well as Black female teachers.

SHAPING THE DISCUSSION ON BLACK FEMALE TEACHERS

This book volume is organized into three distinct sections, which are inclusive of eight total chapters. A brief overview of each section and subsequent chapters is as follows:

Part I: Historical/Contemporary Landscape of Black Female Teachers

The first section of the book includes two chapters which paint both a historical and present-day picture of Black female teachers’ experiences including demographic data concerning their participation in the teaching force. In

Chapter 2, *And Then There Were None: Reversing the Exodus of Black Women from the Teaching Profession*, Valerie Hill-Jackson provides a poignant historical conceptualization of Black female teachers' participation in the U S teaching workforce across three key phases of American schooling and civil rights. Particularly, this discussion positions the decline of Black female teachers within important contextual underpinnings. This historical overture precedes a clear call and need to urgently increase the representation of Black female teachers. The chapter concludes with a comprehensive discussion of *special emphasis recruiting tactics* and critical retention efforts to reverse the exodus of Black female teachers from the field of teaching. In Chapter 3, *The Antioppressionist Thoughts and Pedagogies of Anna Julia Cooper and Septima Poinsette Clark*, Karen Johnson argues that Black female teachers' critiques of race and racism ultimately influence their teaching practice. By standing on the shoulders of Black female teacher giants Anna Julia Cooper and Septima Poinsette Clark, Johnson illuminates the ways in which Black female teachers support and uphold ideals and practices that nurture resiliency in their students. Her work brings to life the commitment and transformative influence of these two Black female educators as antioppressionist role models upon which today's teaching force, specifically Black female teachers can emulate.

Part II: Scholarly Examination of Black Female Teachers

The second section of the volume includes two chapters which employ qualitative research methods to investigate the experiences of Black female teachers. In Chapter 4, *The Urban Factor: Examining Why Black Female Educators Teach in Under-Resourced, Urban Schools*, Abiola Farinde-Wu, Ayana Allen-Handy, Bettie Ray Butler, and Chance Lewis explore the reasons why Black female teachers commit to teach in urban schools. Commencing with a historical overview of Black female teachers' representation and impact in US classrooms Pre/Post *Brown v. Board of Education*, their discussion of teacher recruitment and development sets the stage for deeper analysis of the "urban factor." Their conceptualization of the "urban factor" ultimately problematizes traditionally pejorative portrayals of urban schools and communities. Findings from this study of 12 Black female teachers offer plausible recommendations for both policy and practice. In Chapter 5, *Black Like Me: Preservice Teachers of Color on Learning to Teach for Social Justice with a Black Female Professor*, Tambra Jackson, Ashley Ballard, Marena Drewery, Brianna Membres, Laryn Morgan, and Felicia Nicholson utilize a co-autoethnographic process to investigate their individual and collective development of cultural competence as preservice teachers aspiring to teach with a social justice stance. An important contribution of

this chapter rests in the hypercentering of the voices of preservice female teachers of color as they grapple with their own identity development as future teachers while negotiating their experiences within a predominantly White teacher education program. Furthermore, bringing to bear the impact of developing culturally relevant praxis with a Black female professor offers impactful recommendations for the diversification of not only the teacher workforce but also the teacher education workforce.

Part III: Retention of Black Female Teachers

The final section of the volume includes three chapters, all quantitative in nature, which address critical questions concerning why Black female teacher pipelines may render themselves leaky, while efforts to retain Black female teachers in US classrooms remain a challenge. In Chapter 6, *Invisible Threads: Working Conditions, Interpersonal Relationships, and Turnover Among Black Female Teachers*, Ayana Campoli and Dyanis Popova examine Black female teachers' turnover at the intersection of working conditions and interpersonal relationships. Their statistical analysis and findings address critical entry and exit points for Black female teachers wherein strong interpersonal relationships with colleagues and highly-engaged students serve as threads that tie teachers to their respective school. In Chapter 7, *Racial Congruence, Teacher Stress, and Professional Commitment Among African American Female Teachers*, Paul Fitchett, Eugenia Hopper, Maytal Eyal, Christopher McCarthy, and Richard Lambert explore key variables pertaining to the retention of Black female teachers. Their study examines the intersections of risk for occupational stress, racial congruence, and professional commitment amongst Black female teachers. Their findings encourage continued discussion concerning the impact of stress and workplace environment for Black female teachers and the ways in which their professional commitment to majority-minority school contexts persists. Their research presents important implications for teachers, teacher educators, and school leaders. In Chapter 8, *Why Black Women Teachers Leave and What Can be Done About It*, Desiree Carver-Thomas and Linda Darling-Hammond examine Black teachers' attrition and turnover. Their findings support significantly higher turnover for Black female teachers as well as variation in their preparation, school characteristics and the reasons for leaving a particular school locale and/or the profession altogether. They provide a comprehensive set of policy interventions to ultimately support Black female teachers' presence in classrooms. Collectively, these chapters add to the existing literature and knowledge base about diverse teacher recruitment, teacher preparation, and teacher retention; all the while providing greater insight into the perspectives and experiences of Black female teachers in US public schools.

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