

BPI

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tem, the more their academic achievement declines. So the problem is systemic not genetic.”

Looking at education from the point of view of a Black boy who has not had enough support to be academically equal, Kunjufu said “It’s embarrassing.”

Once education has become a source of embarrassment and shame, instead of pride, mastery and accomplishment, boys quickly give up trying.

Dr. Kunjufu, pointed out that while 83 percent of teachers are White women, just 6 percent are African American and just 1 percent are Black men.

“The future of the Black race lies in the hands of single parent mothers and White female teachers,” he said. Clearly this absence of Black men in schools undermines Black students, who need role mod-

els who look like them, but he stressed that race and gender are not necessarily the most important characteristic of a teacher. What’s important is for a teacher to have high expectations for students, he said, along with very good classroom management skills.

“Just being Black is not enough,” he said. “Are you listening Clarence Thomas? How can you take advantage of programs and then deny them to others?”

Choosing a school for your child is not a simple equation, he said. A principal who is an instructional leader, high expectations, a positive peer group all are important considerations. Parents need to stay involved.

Yet the advantages of Afrocentric schools can clearly be seen in institutions such as the historically Black colleges and Universities, which take in just 12 percent

of undergraduate students, but graduate 30 percent of all Black graduates.

The contribution of middle-class African Americans is badly needed in impoverished Black communities, Kunjufu said. Yet success has often meant leaving behind your less fortunate neighbors and traditional Black values.

Values are crucial, he said, and often the values of the dominant White culture, do not match the values of a Black culture that has been forged in collective struggle. He told this story about his own experience in 4th Grade.

Kunjufu’s teacher asked him what his grade was and he said 100 percent. Then he asked about his best friend’s grade. He laughed and didn’t want to say but eventually said, 40. The teacher took a pen and crossed out the 100 replacing it with 40.

“From now on your grade will be whatever your friend gets.”

“Schools teach more than the three Rs,” he said. They teach values.

And schools teach ‘I’ not ‘WE’.

He urged successful Blacks not to leave behind traditional Black values that recognize that the fate of one is the fate of us all.

“What are you going to do to give back to your community,” he asked.

In a diverse talk that included dietary advice – he is a strong advocate for green smoothies and greens for health – as well as education and parenting wisdom, Kunjufu listed some of the strengths of African American families:

- A strong work ethic
- Flexible roles
- Extended family, and
- A strong orientation to spirituality



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