

Critical Reflection

By: Charlitta Hatch

As I conclude my matriculation of the Master's in Urban Education offered at University of North Carolina at Charlotte with a certificate in Anti-Racism I am reminded of how and why I began the journey. It started with the passion to change the perception of Black boys in America through positive images, expressive stories, and deliberate advocacy. This was birthed inside of me after the birth of my first born and only son.

Before my son was born, I read to him and spoke to him and sometimes I even sang to him. Now that he is here, we have full-fledged conversations, music time and a goal to read at least two books a day. We read all kinds of books. Some stories feature animals, shapes, kids, historical figures or just letters. Other books are just pictures, and we make up our own stories. In late 2017, I was prompted to take inventory of our home library to find a specific book featuring a young black boy. I have heard the stories told with a variety of other characters, but this was missing for me. I decided to look on-line to see if I could find a book to order because maybe we did not have it. To my surprise, I could not find it. Through my research I found that less than 10% of children's books featured people of color and less than 2% were authored or illustrated by a person of color. This statistic was baffling to me and motivated me to take matters into my own hands and I wrote our own story.

While writing "Black Boy Joy" I realized that there was more to it for me. In a world where raising a young black male can be difficult due to stereotypes placed on our sons, I want him to know he can be anything he wants to be. Further, I want anyone he encounters to see the sky is the limit for him as well. I want my son to have the chance to be a kid and do kid

things while remaining safe in his community. I want that for my son and for yours, but I didn't know how to do it in a credible way.

By entering the Urban Education program, I have been able to understand how to research, develop strategies, and apply theories to help change the narrative of Black boys in America. 2 years ago, I thought that I wanted to help educators infuse representation in their classrooms and curriculums, but now I want to stand in my own truth. I want to raise a liberated and joyful Black son and raise him out loud. Changing the perception of what it means to be a Black boy in America starts with me giving him space to be his authentic self at home and at school. I must unlearn things from my own upbringing to learn new things centering his needs. Additionally, I want to help change the face of being an engaged Black parent more broadly. By working with educators to develop culturally relevant and responsive engagement strategies for Black parents with Black sons, I am confident that will impact the way society engages and views Black boys to Black men.

This program has given me the confidence to call myself a thought leader in my community, as a mother, and in my professional career. I have been able to name my feelings, understand where they come from, and articulate difficult points of views with facts. I am forever grateful for this program, my professors, and my classmates for stretching and growing me as a Black female leader.