

**8 BLACK HANDS  
PRESENT**

# ON CODE

**A TOOLKIT TO NAVIGATE EDUCATION**

Raymond Ankrum, Sr. • Dr. Charles Cole III • Sharif El-Mekki • Christopher Stewart



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# HOW TO APPROACH THIS E-BOOK

Hey folks. Here's a quick message from the 8BH crew on how to use this e-book.

We have written this as a guide for the village to improve education for the 8 million Black children in public schools. As four Black men, from different parts of the country with different political ideologies that believe in the minds of Black and Brown students across America, we hope this helps you to unite around showing up and showing out for our kids. We often disagree but when it comes to believing in our people, we stand in complete solidarity.

And, when it comes to the education of our children, we stay on code.

This e-book is unique in that you will hear from each of the fellas from their area of expertise. Chris is an expert at parent power. Raymond is an accomplished administrator who educates Black children. Sharif comes from Black Panthers and is his mama's son. He's also really good at recruiting and supporting Black educators. Charles has put in some noteworthy work around building agency with Black folks and in pushing our community organizations to take on a larger role in this struggle.

We came together because we know that we are stronger together than solo. We each believe in the ability of our people. However, these are disjointed times and we, as a people, struggle with moving together. We need a code, a set of beliefs and actions we all subscribe to that keeps us focused. We need a code because it offers a roadmap when the pavement gets rocky. We humbly submit our suggestions for what that code can look like for us regardless of where you stand.

## HOW TO APPROACH THIS E-BOOK

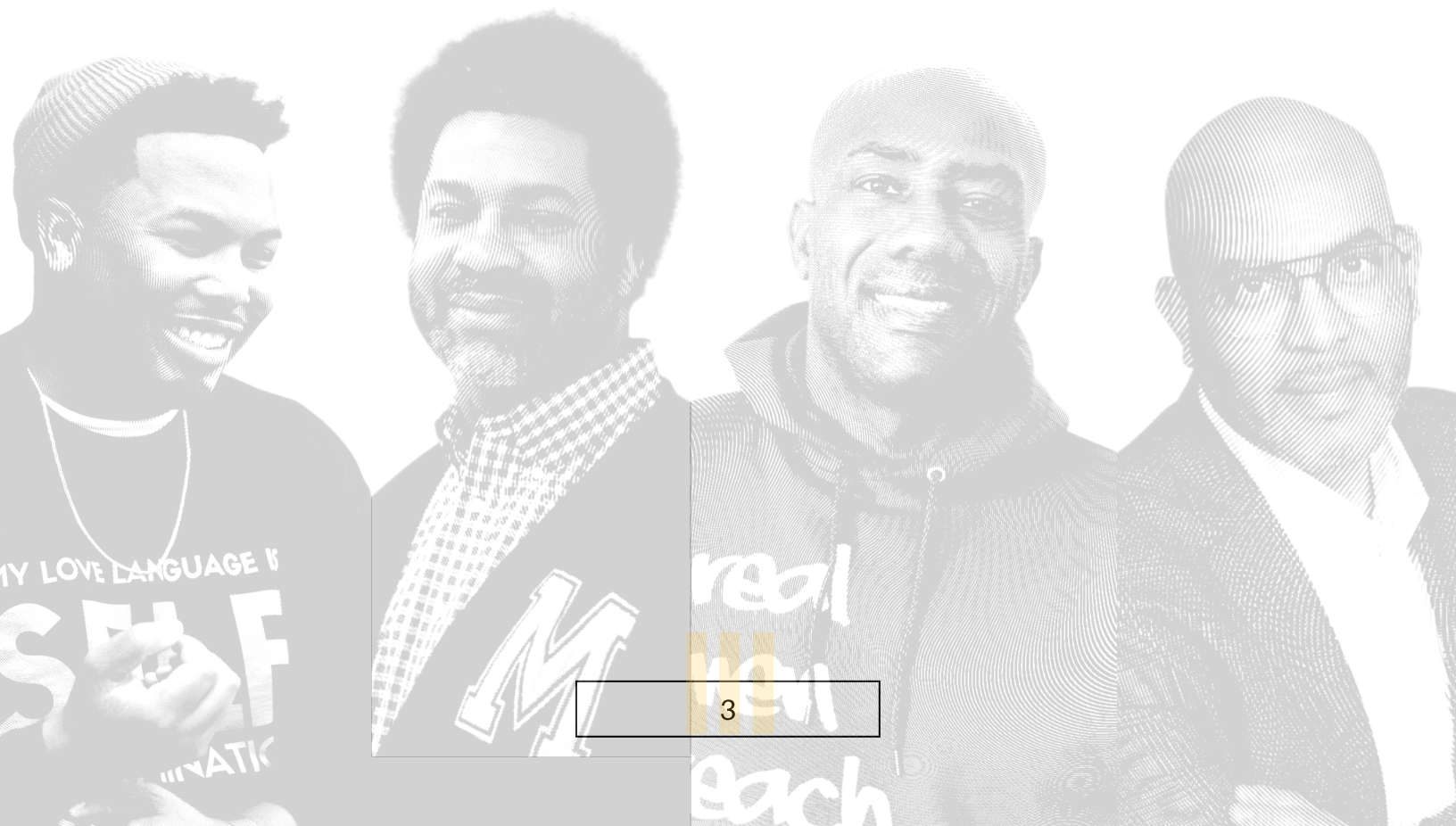
You will hear four different voices coming together. In this work, we speak directly to students, parents, educators, administrators, and community leaders and organizations. We hope that you find this labor of love useful. We may have different styles and deliveries, but we are walking in the same direction, the one that leads to our collective liberation. Regardless of what others may say, education is STILL pertinent in that journey.

In this society, whether it be education or any other system, we all need a toolkit that helps us improve it and navigate it in the interim. And this book is your toolkit. Take what works and leave the rest.

We may be on our own, but we are all we need. Let's get on code together.

Sincerely,

The **8BH** Crew



PARENTS

# ON CODE

WE ARE IN POWER

*Christopher Stewart*

The day you became a parent is the day you became one of the biggest contributors to civilization. As a fierce defender of your child's intellectual development, you are fighting for a better future for all of us.

So, why do many of us feel minimized by our interactions with schools? How is it that these encounters leave us feeling like the problem rather than the solution?

Over the period of 150 years of education history, the parent has been professionalized out of the classroom and the school. We have been infantilized and disrespected. Parents were once considered the sole power in the lives of their children, and the school was an extension of home learning, but over time the power shifted from the home to the school. This has left the parent enfeebled and a passive spectator of the school's staff, as if we're bystanders in our child's growth.

Parents of all backgrounds have valid complaints about the broken home-school relationships, but none have been more marginalized by this power imbalance than the Black parent.

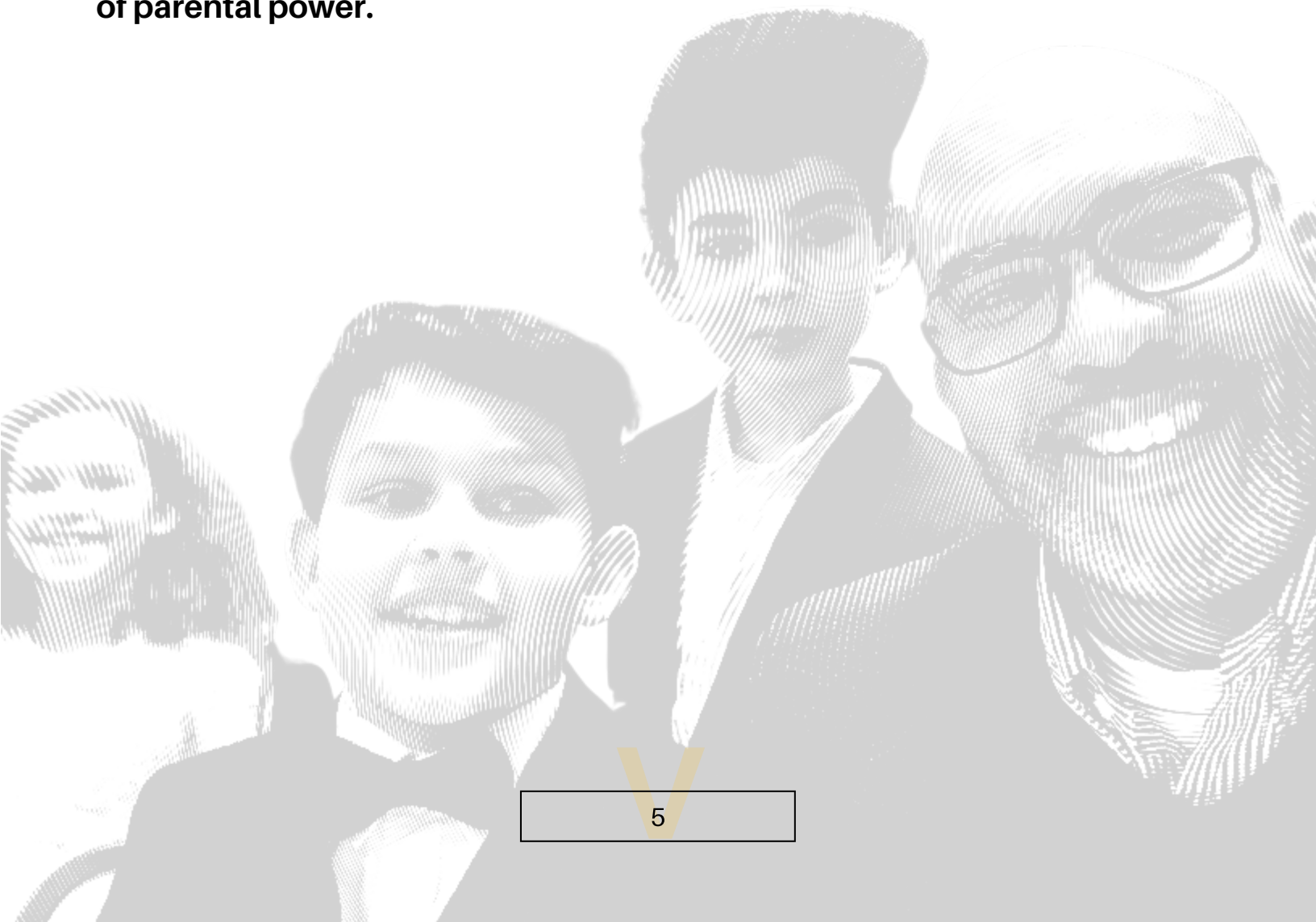
It's time to reassert ourselves and reclaim our role as the guardians of the young Black mind. There must be a full-scale reclamation of Black children, by Black parents — and Black parents must be respected by every system that intends to serve them.

We must remind educators of a simple fact of nature:

## **SCHOOLS DON'T HAVE CHILDREN, PARENTS DO.**

While research has consistently shown that parental influence in the lives of children is key to their successful outcomes, schools struggle with how to partner with parents. Educators have focused on parental involvement and empowerment as strategies for increasing student<sup>1</sup> achievement, with mixed results. Even if their efforts come from a good place, they unwittingly circumvent the role of parents by acting as if schools and school leaders hold the power and that they lend power to parents at their discretion. The truth is that parents don't need to be involved, they need their problems solved. They don't need to be engaged, they need to be outraged by the educational debt owed to their children.

**Parents don't need to be empowered, they need to be in power, which is a very different concept. Parents who are in-power are confident in the 5 R's of parental power.**



# THE 5 R'S FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

Acknowledging that children need informed, responsible, and capable defenders to reach their God-given potential, parents and guardians must commit to embracing the following 5 R's.

## *Role* **Role - You are the Ruthless defender of your child's future**

- As a parent or guardian, you are the president of their development. There is no higher power above you when it comes to ensuring your children have what they need to become fully actualized. No one gets to talk down to you as if they are the expert on your child. They aren't experts. You are. Even if they don't understand your power and your role, you have to.
- The parent role is broad, and it has biological, psychological, social and financial dimensions. In education, your role includes establishing a safe, clean environment for your child to grow intellectually and socially. To the greatest extent within your means, you help them explore their curiosity and have positive interactions with people, their community, and nature.<sup>2</sup>
- More than anything, your role as a parent is to plan, manage, and direct every aspect of a child's development. A major part of that work is to decide who, what, and where children will learn, and from whom.

## *Responsibilities* **Responsibilities - By law and custom, you are responsible for the care of your child**

- You are responsible for providing the basic necessities they need to thrive, including providing information-rich learning environments at home, and seizing all learning opportunities available to them in their local community.
- You are responsible for initiating and fostering productive relationships with the educators you entrust with your children.
- You are responsible for visiting your child's school when possible to ensure they are being supported and encouraged to reach their full potential.
- You are responsible for monitoring reports from their schools for progress or lack of progress.

## THE 5 R'S FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

### Rights

**Rights - You hold the majority of rights associated with your child**

- You have the right to make the critical decisions regarding your child.
- You have the right to access a free education for your child.
- You have the right to be protected against discrimination.
- You have the right to obtain information about your child's academic records, and to demand correction to inaccurate information.

### Rituals

**Rituals - You create the cultural context for what your child learns<sup>3</sup>**

- Teach Black history and culture. You can do this through family genealogy (including the use of photobooks and historic documents), oral interviews of community elders, and discussions of family values, social expectations, duties, and self-discipline. Create a home library of books, artifacts, and games.
- Establish rites of passage. These will foster responsibility to ancestors, family, and community, and institute habits of community service. They will also help to establish self-determination and the abilities of decision-making, goal-setting, and time management.

### Results

**Results - You are ultimately responsible for your child's results**

- The most important of all the 5 R's is parental monitoring of all the systems that serve your child, and keeping tabs on the results. Is schooling leading to proficiency in the most important areas of study? Is my child growing socially and emotionally? Are their needs being met?



# BLACK STUDENTS ON CODE

*Dr. Charles Cole. |||*

What I am about to say is not about to be fair. Young people should live in a system that both protects and nurtures their development. They should be able to partake in the joys and innocence that is adolescence. However, that is not the case for many Black youth. It definitely was not for me. Many Black youth live within a system that has failed us academically for so long that it is just ingrained in the culture.

I'll prove it.

Who do you think has the lowest graduation rates? Literacy rates? The highest youth incarceration rates? Most suspensions? Lowest GPAs?

Without any stats in front of you, you may have guessed Black and Brown youth. It doesn't even get the fake outrage it used to. That is the sign of a broken-down system that ain't fair. Not even a little bit. But who needs fair when you have favor?!

In this section, we discuss what it means to be on code as a student. When you know what you are up against, you are able to better prepare for it. I still believe that education and literacy are vital to ensuring that we are raising Black youth who will lead us to prosperity long after we are gone. I personally feel failed by what I had to endure, yet I am hopeful that the folks who come after us will have a much better experience than I had. In order to get there though, it will take us all being on code — having tenets that help guide us through the mark. Here's my humble wisdom.

To be a youth *on code* means:

- You understand that no one is coming to save us. We are on our own!
- You have to be a driver in your educational journey, not a passenger!
- You have discernment, meaning you judge well for yourself. You are learning how to both advocate for yourself while seeking out wisdom. We also call this AGENCY.
- You do not put your hope into any system that has historically failed us for centuries. At best, you are cautiously optimistic.
- You value the wisdom of your elders and community. Learn from the generation coming after you as much as you teach them. Always be learning and teaching, they go hand in hand.
- You are capable of many things. Set ambitious goals and push forward. Don't be a "[Finna Friend](#)" to yourself!
- In education, you have to want it for yourself. You can have everyone rooting you on and sending love but no one can want it enough for you. That's your work to take care of.

## NO ONE IS COMING TO SAVE US. WE ARE ON OUR OWN!

**What is agency?** Our agency is the ability to know what we need and the skills and will to go out and do those things. Agency is a term that's foreign to a lot of people, but I think that's changing.

You control your level of agency. If I have agency, then when I get assigned the wrong classes in school, I am aware because I already knew what was required. I then know to go to the counselor and get that schedule changed. If they don't change it, I know how to escalate it up to eventually get what I need. That's agency in action.

I also control how hard I work, right? That's fully under my control, fully under my purview. How hard do I go? Am I putting in the extra mile?

Knowing how to navigate is another piece that's pretty important. Not only am I working hard and doing everything I can, but I know the path that takes me to where I need to go. Do I know that I need to go to a counselor to change a grade? Or if that counselor doesn't want to change it, do I know how to escalate? With agency, I know how to make a school work for me. Even if the school isn't the best (let's say the school is terrible), somebody with a lot of agency might be able to get more out of that school than somebody who lacks agency.

There are the things that we control, but there are also things that we don't control, like racist systems and racism, like people's fears of Black people or Brown people. We don't control how much institutions spend on education, right? We don't control how much our state spends on education. We don't always control the curriculum.

And let me just kill the liberal-conservative beef. There's an argument of whether it is all systemic or all behavior. The answer is that for most people it's a bit of both. I think that this part is really important because I will always fight for justice AND control what I can control. That is a tenet of being on code — control what you can with an eye always towards justice.

**If my future depends on racist systems or racist people or rich people waking up one day and no longer being racist, if that's what my success is contingent on, then just take me out of the game, because I can't compete.**

Thinking like that takes away all of my agency. That takes away all of my power. I can't control what other people do, let alone what they feel.

Maybe you think agency comes from having money or fancy degrees or coming from a family that does. But agency comes from your own education.

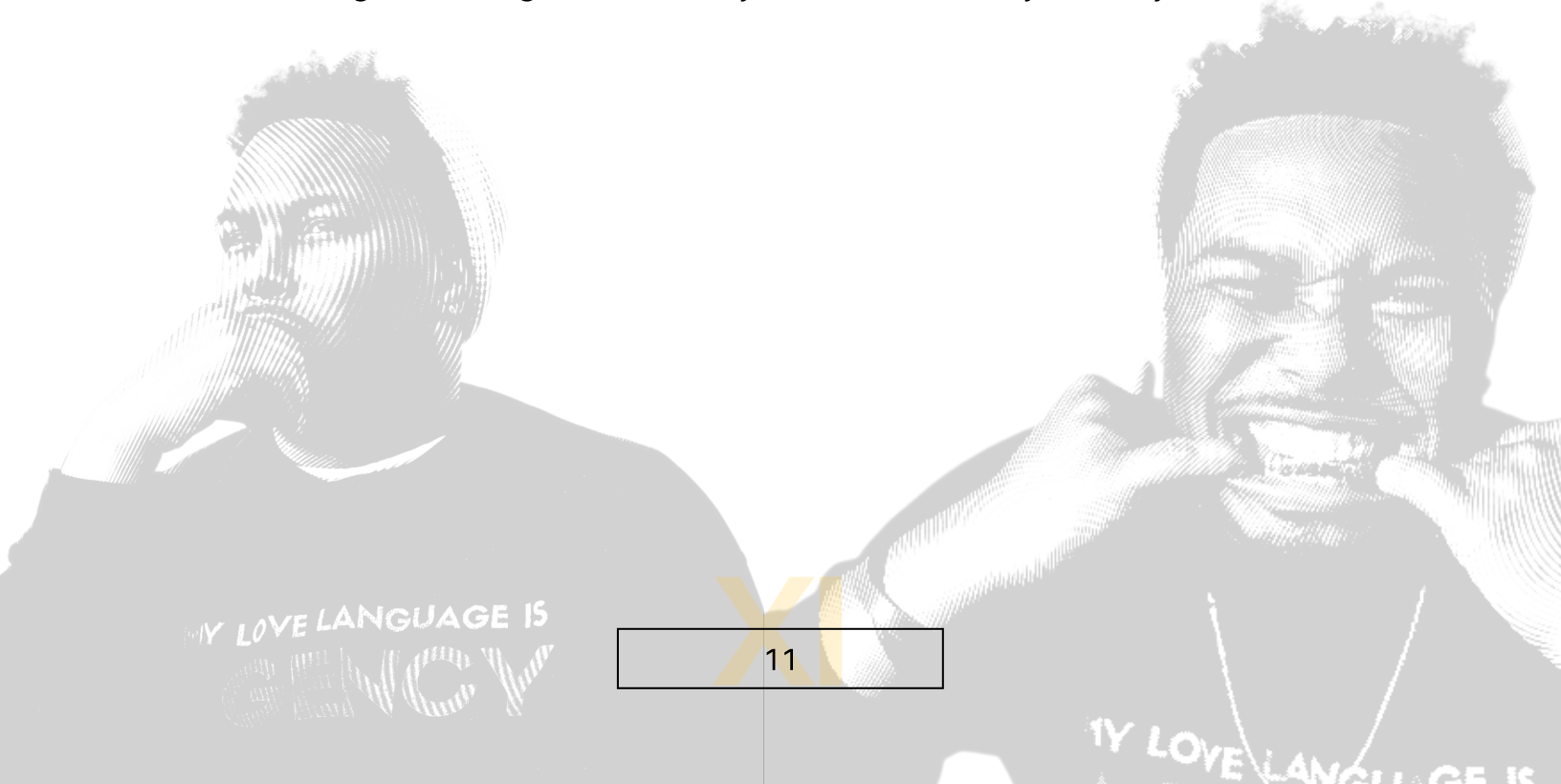
It's important that we distinguish education from schooling. Education is the knowledge that you have actually gained and learned about the things around you. This includes everything — especially knowledge of self.

*Schooling* is something different. Schooling is the apparatus by which we pass through an educational system. What that means is you can be great at school and never receive an education. You can also have terrible schooling and receive a ton of education.

When it comes to education, let's think about what you control versus what systems control. What's in your power versus what's not in your power.

**Here are five checkpoints Black youth can ask themselves to get on code:**

1. What do I ultimately want to be and do I have examples of navigation to pull from? Is there someone I can talk to? Do I know where to go?
2. Is my school providing me with everything I need to accomplish my life goals? If not, where are the ancillary resources to help me gain true knowledge (remember the difference between schooling and education)?
3. What do I like most about myself? Am I doing things that are adding to me liking myself?
4. Who or what is something I want to learn from? This is where the internet is your friend. Use it to look up interviews and talks by the person/people you look up to. If it is a certain event, research it. Learn what you can.
5. Am I learning something new about my culture and history monthly? Commit to it.



# BLACK MEN EDUCATORS ON CODE

Staying

Sharif El-Mekki

*An educator in a system of oppression is either a revolutionary or an oppressor. —[Lerone Bennett, Jr.](#)*

At the heart of flourishing Black communities are Black educators. Because of this critical role, Black educators have a duty to stay *on code*, and they can pose significant harm to the community when they fail to uphold this responsibility.

To honor this obligation, educators *on code* attend to mindset, community, and accountability.

## **Mindset Comes First**

The foundation for any work begins with the proper mindset. The source for actions, thoughts and impact begins with intentionality and reflection. Knowing, as [Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum](#) shares, that anti-Black messages are being taught, ingested, and internalized incessantly, a game plan of defense and excavation must be continually present.

When [Malcolm X](#) asks who taught you to hate yourself, we shouldn't assume it is only a myopic question for our Sisters. His words have special bearing on the work of a Black educator. As an educator, we have a premiere position in a Black child's life. Through our work, we can empower them, help shore up their tools, armor, and shields, or leave them to suffer the indignity of the daily flood of anti-Blackness.

My brother, son, and father helped me build a koi pond. It was one of my lifelong desires to have a little space to decompress, watch koi fish, dragonflies, and nature as I sipped my tea, reflecting on my day. No matter how challenging my day was, I found the tranquility to be both soothing and fueling. To maintain this space of serenity, there are some specific things I need to do, including cleaning the filter. While the filter pads start off operating at maximum efficiency, eventually, inevitably, these filters become clogged. The water entering the pond is not properly filtered. The water is fouled. The fish get sick.

Our mindsets, indeed, are filters of our social existence. They screen the coded and overt stench and stigma that anti-Black messages carry. Our mindsets can neutralize self-defeating messages and fuel our self-efficacy. Our mindsets can be contagious, uplifting our students and manifest in how we plan, build community, and ask questions. With the right mindset, we can build a community of learners, a collective mindset, and a culture of excellence. But, our mindsets, just like the koi pond filters, can also get overwhelmed if not functioning properly, if not well maintained. Our water can be fouled.

So, as Black educators, how do we clean and refresh our mindset and how do we reset when our filters are overburdened? The answer: with reflection, with study, with feedback and coaching.

But feedback doesn't have to always come from a colleague, nor should it only be self-critique. The most under-utilized sources of feedback are our students and their families. How are they experiencing your classroom and school leadership? How are they internalizing the messages our lessons, questions, assignments, and classroom send them? If we don't know, it doesn't take much to ask. Even something as simple as a short survey a few times a year to probe how our mindset affects our students and families.

Of course, trust needs to be built, and a community of learners needs a shared vision and commitment to collective accountability. Using our students' feedback is great counsel, fantastic modeling, and teaches them that their voice matters to us — that it informs our learning. After all, who other than ourselves is the chief learner in this community of learners we as Black educators are working so hard to build and nurture?

Assume that your filter gets clogged or will become overworked and it needs to recalibrate. By reflecting and digesting what may have slipped through, over, and under your filter, you set a tone of continuous improvement — a tone that the best leaders know must be created and protected.

Your mindset is everything and, ultimately, it cannot be masked.

### **Building Community**

We learn together. The stakes are too high to go it alone, to insulate ourselves from feedback and avoid accountability — accountability to ourselves and each other. While many teachers and principals complain about the isolation within schools and their roles, they often are the very masons of the walls that keep them isolated. Communities should be more than accidental and aspirational. As educators, we must be deliberate in building community — regardless of where we teach and lead.

How does one build a community with other educators despite nagging deadlines and long hours, while serving humanity? By prioritizing it and by being deliberate and strategic.

Connecting with other educators definitely takes time, but it can yield important insights. It doesn't have to be a burdensome exercise. It can be as simple as soliciting feedback about your lesson plans from another colleague, sharing materials and time with fellow educators, inviting others into your classroom to observe you and provide feedback, and/or returning the favor and observing a colleague. All of these can break down the walls that silo our teaching practice and, in so doing, create community.

We can do even more. That starts by resisting the assumption that your community is only within a building. As a new teacher, I was considered to be in a unique situation as a Black man, as there were only two or three other Black men — like Dr. Blackwell, Mr. Robert Gibbs, and Paul Jordan — who had leadership roles at John P. Turner Middle School in Philadelphia when I began teaching. So I began to find community with other Black men outside of Turner — Black men like Christopher Johnson, Miles Wilson, Aaron Starke, Keith Arrington, Dr. Salome Thomas-El, Hilderbrand Pelzer III, Leonard Heard, and more. Black men who were educating across the city of Philadelphia, creating informal support space as well as formal groups, like the Association of Black School Administrators, that I was fortunate enough to join.

We supported each other and challenged each other. We flourished by connecting with other Black men with common goals, aspirations, and beliefs about our students and the communities that send them to us.

### **Accountability Is Key**

You may have heard the proverb, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” Like-minded communities really do allow educators to go farther than they would if they went solo on the edu-journey. A community of learners can help and support each other. We learn, from our first breath, by watching others.

Why, then, do we isolate ourselves and try to hide our thinking and teaching away from the very peers who can give us critical feedback?

And, when I am talking about feedback, I am not referring to the weak, friendly kind — the type of feedback exchange that is devoid of accountability for the giver or the receiver. I am talking about a feedback loop with someone who knows instruction, understands human growth and development, who cares more about helping you than making you feel good in the moment. I am not referring to the rude, burn-everything-down type either. Trust, collective accountability, and commitment to improving student and educator outcomes can deliver that kind of balance.



In order for students (or teams) to learn quickly, the leader of the classroom or school has to learn quickly. That's the paradigm: How quickly can you learn your students' names and build relationships with them? How quickly can you build trust with them and collectively invest in a culture of learning? How quickly can they see evidence that you actually believe you are accountable to them and their families?

Including students in the calculus is often not the operating framework in classrooms and schools.

Black children's optimal success wasn't usually the driving force for the creation of the schools they attend. But suppose you chose to make their success the catalyst for your own learning and success?

You might ask, how is this done? Again, you should turn to the most observant and insightful human beings around: your students. How many times is it the students who point out your new bag or swag? A new haircut or glasses? Can they point out what you are working on? Can they tell you have cleaned the filters of your mindset, your pedagogical moves, your instructional insights? Allow them to be the ones who hold you accountable.

Consider this the next time you read a new book or attend a workshop: Is the only thing that changed that you have a new tote bag (that is still sitting in the trunk of your car or the back of your closet)? Did the workshop change your behaviors? Did it inform your mindset so profoundly that your students feel, see, and experience it?

As Black educators *on code*, we hold endless potential to connect and uplift our community, with the success of our young people serving as the shared focus of our collective mission. With **mindset**, **community**, and **accountability**, we can meet this profound obligation.

# SERVANT SCHOOL LEADERSHIP ON CODE

Raymond Arburn, Sr.

## The Importance of Selecting the Right Leader

The overall health and wellness of a school can be viewed through actively understanding the pulse of the school leader. Schools without successful school leadership usually underperform. As we look for sustaining models to educate our kids, particularly schools with high populations of minoritized students and families, settling on a servant school leader may be one of, if not the most important hire in a school. If the right school leader is selected, the overall wellness of the staff, as well as the behaviors of the staff will be impacted by the school leader.<sup>4</sup>

Everything begins and ends with the principal. All major decisions, regardless of the leadership team makeup, usually have some guidance and influence from the school leader. The school leader has **interconnectedness** to the school community while serving as a vessel to provide service to the wider society. In other words, the school leader becomes an extension of the community in which the school inhabits.

Because of this, it is utterly critical, to both the school and the entire community, for the school leader to be *on code*.

## **Servant Leadership**

The key to being on code for any principal is servant leadership. Leveraging the intentionality of one's leadership allows for the trajectory of leadership to transcend. Additionally, teachers follow leaders. In my own experiences as an 18-year educator, I gravitated more to school leaders who were willing to show and lead by example, as opposed to delegating and/or only leading by directives.

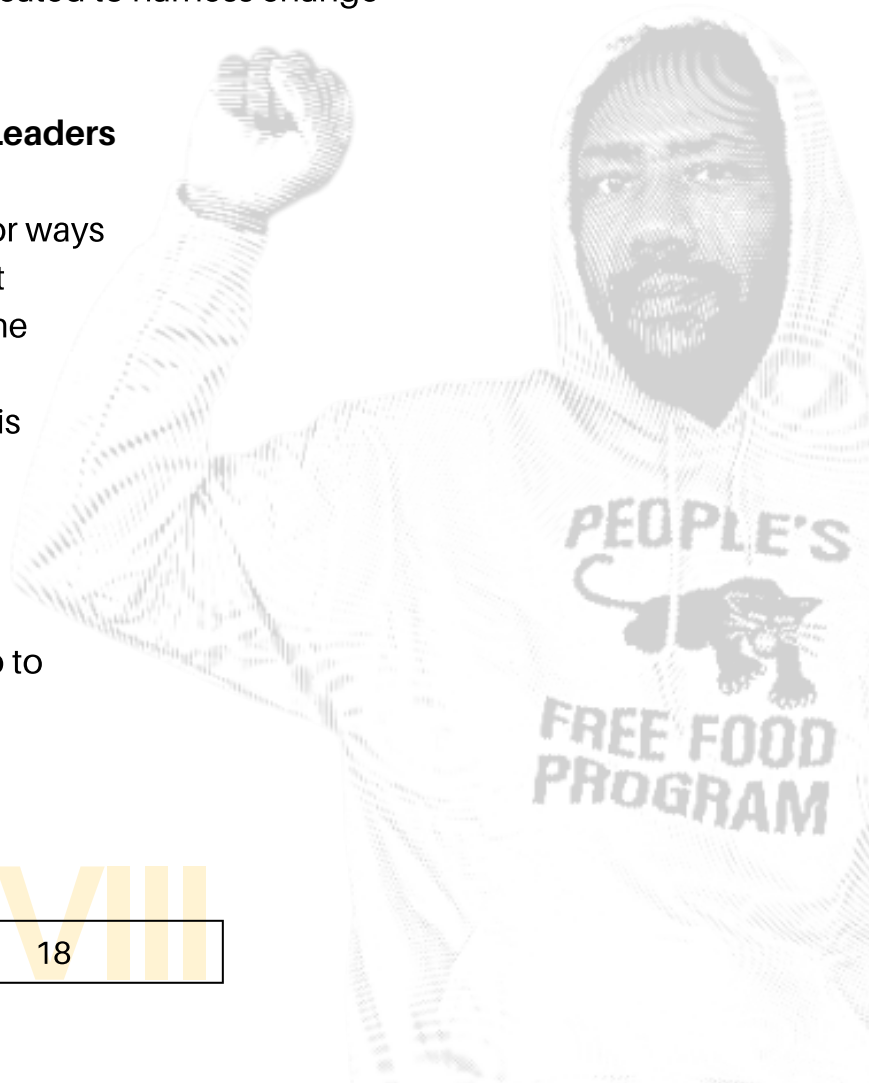
Servant leaders make sure everyone else on their team is good. The better, and more well situated the team, the greater the opportunity to build the capacity of the team to become servant leaders in their own ways of knowing.<sup>5</sup>

Done the right way, servant leadership is viewed as supportive. However, done the wrong way, it is viewed as oppressive. Finding the right balance can be helpful in ensuring leaders show up in ways that are meaningful and helpful to staff members. In analyzing the impact of servant leadership, we must be mindful that competing interests such as support and oppression must be openly communicated to harness change and bolster effective practitioners.<sup>6</sup>

## **Teacher Leaders as Emerging Servant Leaders**

Good school leaders are always looking for ways to be more impactful. One of the ways that success occurs in schools is by building the capacity of teachers, and having teachers explore their abilities to lead in a way that is meaningful to the school community.<sup>7</sup>

Teacher leaders are the type of educators who you know are thinking about taking on additional responsibilities that will help to improve the school community.



Here's how you spot a teacher leader. Look for educators who do the following:

- Take initiative among faculty members.
- Mobilize people for a common purpose.
- Monitor the progress of other teachers.
- Act as a liaison between faculty and administration.
- Share their knowledge and skill of the practice with others.

Teacher leaders are an untapped resource in schools. By distributing leadership, and empowering teachers to take ownership of the school, research shows this increases the scholastic aptitude of our students.

In fact, the title “teacher leader” does not have to exist for teachers to feel empowered. Teachers will do more if they are allowed to do more, and if teacher involvement is encouraged by school leadership.<sup>8</sup>

## **FIVE STEPS TO REMAIN “ON CODE” AS A SERVANT SCHOOL LEADER**

### 1. Hire with intentionality.

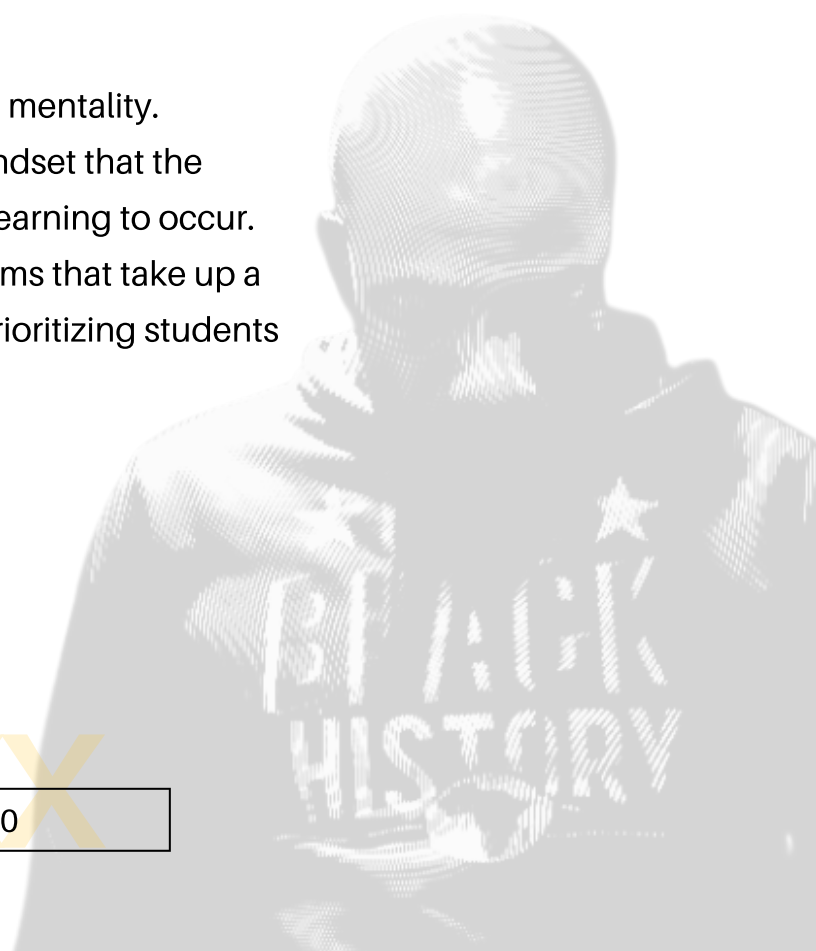
- The staff population should largely mimic the student population.
- Don't just say you're committed to hiring a diverse staff, overcommit, and circle back with action plans, and a way to self-check.

### 2. Build environments that are welcoming to all parents.

- Parent engagement is viewed through the eyes of the white middle class. As a school leader, you have the power to change how parents are perceived.
- Be intentional about building meaningful and sustainable relationships with parents.
- Meet parents where they are, while maintaining a high level of empathy for the historically marginalized students and families.

## FIVE STEPS TO REMAIN “ON CODE” AS A SERVANT SCHOOL LEADER

2. Build environments that are welcoming to all parents. [continued]
  - Do not assume.
3. Believe all students can learn at a high level.
  - It is important that everyone who meets students believes they can achieve at a high level. From the CEO to the custodial engineer, there must be a belief that all students are learners.
  - If there is any thought that a staff member does not share this belief in children, they should be far away from students.
4. The ability to “change” on a dime if things aren’t working.
  - Educators become married to things, i.e., lessons, curriculum choices, policies, etc., with no way out.
  - Be willing to stop and change things when it is in the best interest of students and families.
5. Operating with a student first, adult second mentality.
  - Servant leaders operate under the mindset that the environment to learn must be set for learning to occur.
  - Don’t get caught up with adult problems that take up a lot of your time, when you could be prioritizing students and what must be done for them.



# COMMUNITY ORGS ON CODE

RECLAIMING OUR INVISIBLE INSTITUTIONS

*Dr. Charles Cole. |||*

As Black folks, we put a lot of trust in school buildings and what they promise us: that education is the key to changing our world. I write this as a Black man who grew up in high poverty with not a lot of hope. I personally threw myself into my education and things have changed for me. My story isn't everyone's story, but I'm going to tell it as authentically as I can.

The schools I attended were not good schools. They are not where I learned my innate abilities. They did not feed my love of entrepreneurship. They did not teach me how to thrive at public speaking — although Mr. Davis and my debate team did add great value to some already developed skills. My schools did not uphold the promises made. However, each of them claimed my victories as their own.

In actuality, it was the community organizations and Black churches in my neighborhood that did most of the work. It has been the Invisible Institutions that have held us since slavery had our people by the proverbial and literal throats.

First, for those who are not familiar with the term, here's **how I define Invisible Institution**:

The Black community created codes and secret meeting places where they could go pray and worship together in what would be called the Invisible Institution (Croft, 2017). Invisible Institutions would eventually become Praise Houses, and then the very churches that housed civil rights revolutions and became the pillar in thousands of communities still to this day (Croft, 2017).

Blacks have a history of coming together and displaying intense creativity and fortitude when attacked by racist systems. In their darkest times, Blacks have presented agentic action or actions that are strategic and survival-dependent, since their collective American history began.<sup>9</sup>

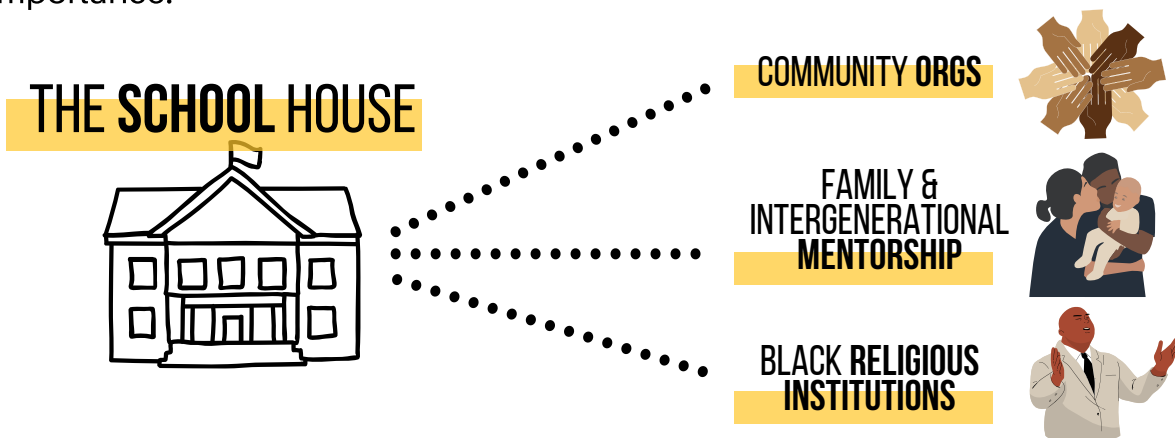
When I say communities on code, I am quite specific. We have examples. I think the term "Invisible Institution" is due for an upgrade. It doesn't just mean the Black Christian church anymore. It is expanded to all Black places of worship, to our Boys and Girls Clubs, our after-school programs, our book clubs, our social media communities, etc. It means building codes and support tailored to us and not worrying about bringing everybody else along. Those who get it will get it. For those who don't get it, it just means it wasn't meant for them in the first place.

The pressure we put on schools, I say it is time to spread it out. And by no means ease up on these schools, ever!

Organizations that get tax breaks to serve our community should be held to account. They tend to be more nimble, more representable to the community, they tend to be rawer and grassroots, and they often harbor the best of us.

Sometimes, as a people, we devalue OUR creations for the other. My grandmother might call this "thinking white ice is colder." It's a syndrome. This is how we often look at our resources.

I built this model in grad school. Look at the following picture with a size commensurate with importance.



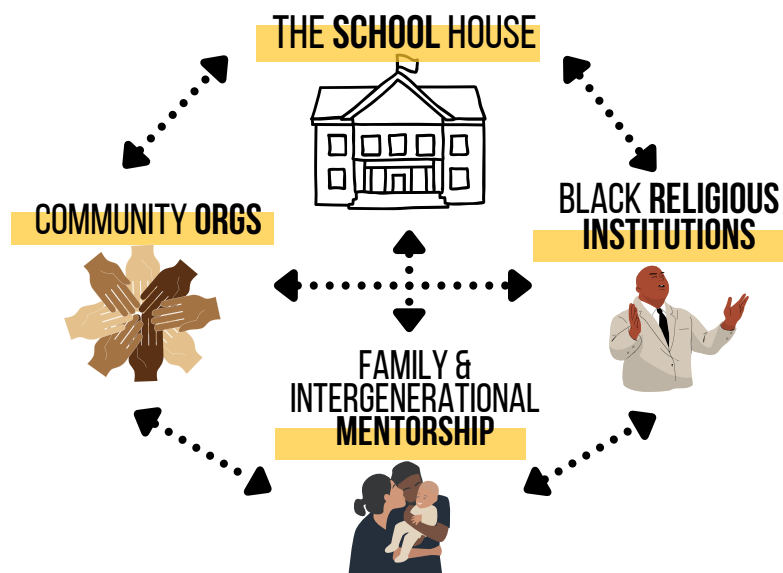
This is the order of importance that people view these things. From the start, we have undervalued the pillars of our collective community.

It is a mentality. The same mentality that had us sell grandmama's Victorian house in West Oakland for crumbs when it is now valued at over a million dollars. It is this mentality, where we give our stories away for free and then they get turned into billion-dollar blockbusters where few of us benefit.

And finally, it is this mentality that allows us to send out 8 million Black children across the country to public schools that the data shows do not and have not valued our brilliance for centuries. A free public system that would not exist had it not been for former slaves, Black churches, and pennies in donations that White planters at the time didn't even want us to have (read: Education of Blacks in the South).<sup>10</sup> A system that will put Black parents in jail if they try to send their kids elsewhere. This system is most consistent in failing Black kids but never has to be held to account.

Nah.

The next photo shows a different reality. A reality more on code with Black folks demanding what they need and going where they are loved. This picture offers equal importance to all of these very important entities and allows for you, the consumer, to make adjustments to what best serves you.





If you do have an amazing school then maybe it is OK that you don't have a super-strong community-based organization (CBO). Or maybe your school is crap, so you over-index to the CBO, the elders in your community, and continue your development in a Black religious institution. My dissertation chair and just all-around great scholar colleague speaks on this in a different way in what he calls Critical Social Capital in Black CBOs (that link should take you to the free PDF if you want to go deeper on your own).

That's the community code. You don't owe these school systems, they owe you! There is value around you, if you value it. If these other entities exist in your community and are not holding up their end of the bargain, then you have a duty to hold them to account.

Remember these three things when it comes to your well-being, your family, and your community: **Awareness. Navigation. Duty.**

Remain **aware** of what you deserve and how you are being served. We sell ourselves short before the systems even get to us.

You still have to **navigate**, even when the systems are detrimental. For instance, Black moms across this country get threatened, and some are sent to jail, for using a fake address just to get their kids into a better school. Know what you are dealing with. This system will not allow you to use ignorance as an excuse, and as a result, it traps so many of us.

Finally, **duty**. You have a duty to share knowledge. You have a duty to help your brother and sister navigate. You have a duty to strive for the best for your family. You have power. It only goes away when you deny it. You have a duty to discover your power and wield it. Here are some additional articles to help you in that journey.

And that's how you begin to build communities *on code*.

# NOTES

## PARENTS ON CODE

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## COMMUNITY ORGS: ON CODE

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